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11. Pronouns

1. Pronouns in spoken languages and sign languages
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Abstract

The term ‘pronoun’ has been used with spoken languages to refer not only to personal pronouns – i.e. those grammatical items that ‘stand for’ nouns or noun phrases – but also to ‘proforms’, including words such as demonstratives, indefinites, interrogative pronouns, relative pronouns, etc. In sign languages, pronominal systems have been identified at least as far back as the mid-1970s (e.g., Friedman 1975 for American Sign Language). Since then, the term ‘pronoun’ has been widely used to refer to signs in various sign languages which have the function of personal pronouns – that is, deictic/pointing signs which refer to signer, addressee, and non-addressed participants. As with spoken languages, the term has also been extended to refer to proforms such as indefinites, interrogatives, and relative pronouns. This chapter describes personal pronouns and proforms in sign languages, their relationships (or possible relationships) to each other, and how these relationships compare to pronouns/proforms in spoken languages.

1. Pronouns in spoken languages and sign languages

The traditional definition of a pronoun is that it ‘stands for’ or ‘takes the place of’ a noun (or more specifically, noun phrase) (Bhat 2004). However, the term ‘pronoun’

has been used traditionally to refer to various types of words in spoken languages, including not only personal pronouns but also words such as demonstratives, indefinites, interrogative pronouns, relative pronouns, etc. Some of these fit the traditional definition better than others. Interrogatives, demonstratives, indefinites, and relative pronouns for instance can stand for lexical categories other than nouns. Also, while these latter examples do have various deictic and/or anaphoric uses, they ‘stand for’ nouns/noun phrases much less clearly than personal pronouns do. For this reason, Bhat (2004) refers to non-personal pronouns such as demonstratives, indefinites, reflexives, and interrogatives collectively as ‘proforms’.

Various types of personal pronouns and proforms are related to each other in different ways. Some types of proforms are phonologically identical to other types (e.g. relative pronouns and demonstrative pronouns in some languages; indefinite pronouns and interrogative pronouns in others), and the affinities vary across languages (Bhat 2004).

Pronominal systems have been identified in sign languages such as American Sign Language (ASL) at least as far back as the mid-1970s (Friedman 1975). Since then, the term ‘pronoun’ has been widely used to refer to signs in various sign languages which have the function of personal pronouns – that is, deictic/pointing signs which refer to signer, addressee, and non-addressed participants. As with spoken languages, the term has also been extended to refer to other categories such as indefinites, interrogatives, and relative pronouns. Here, I follow the terminology used by Bhat (2004) in distinguishing personal pronouns referring to speech act participants from proforms (including indefinites, interrogatives, and relative pronouns), with the term ‘pronoun’ as a superordinate category subsuming both personal pronouns and proforms. Thus in this chapter, the term proform is used to refer to pronouns other than personal pronouns, including reflexive pronouns, relative pronouns, reciprocal pronouns, indefinites, interrogatives, and demonstratives.

As with spoken languages, affinities can be found with pronouns and proforms in sign languages as well. In particular, in many sign languages, the singular non-first person personal pronoun (a pointing sign) is phonologically identical to many proforms (e.g. demonstratives and relative pronouns). Additionally, it is also possible for pointing signs to have other non-pronominal functions, such as determiners and adverbials (Edge/Herrmann 1977; Zimmer/Patschke 1990). Thus one characteristic that pointing signs tend to share within and across sign languages is a general deictic, not just pronominal, function.

This chapter begins with personal pronouns then moves on to proforms such as indefinites, demonstratives, interrogative pronouns, and relative pronouns. Examples in this chapter (which include productions of fluent native and non-native British Sign Language (BSL) signers from elicited narrative descriptions of cartoons/animations) will focus largely on two sign languages for which pronouns have been fairly well described: BSL and ASL. Data from some other sign languages is included where information from the literature is available.

2. Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns in sign languages generally take the form of pointing signs, which are then directed towards present referents or locations in the signing space associated

Fig. 11.1: INDEX_{3a} 'she'Fig. 11.2: INDEX₂ 'you'Fig. 11.3: INDEX₁ 'me'

with absent referents, as shown in Figures 11.1 and 11.2, or towards the signer him/herself, as in Figure 11.3. First person pronouns in sign languages are directed inwards, usually towards the signer's chest. However, there are exceptions to this, e.g. first person pronouns in Japanese Sign Language (NS) and Plains Indian Sign Language can be directed towards the signer's nose (Farnell 1995; McBurney 2002).

In general in most sign languages, the space around the signer is used for establishment and maintenance of pronominal (as well as other types of) reference throughout a discourse. However, there is evidence that the use of the signing space for pronominal reference may not be universal amongst sign languages. Marsaja (2008) notes that Kata Kolok, a village sign language used in Bali, Indonesia, prefers use of pointing to fingers on the non-dominant hand – i.e. 'list buoys' (Liddell 2003) – rather than to locations in space for reference. Also, Cambodian Sign Language appears to prefer full noun phrases over pronouns, an influence from politeness strategies in Khmer (Schembri, personal communication).

In addition to pronouns, other means of establishing and maintaining spatial loci in a discourse include agreement/indicating verbs (see chapter 7 on verb agreement) and in some sign languages, agreement auxiliaries (see chapter 10 on agreement auxiliaries). Both of these devices have been considered to be grammaticised forms of pronominalisation or spatial loci (Pfau/Steinbach 2006).

If the referent is present, the signer uses a pronoun or other agreement/indicating device to point to the location of the referent. If the referent is not present, the signer may establish a point in space for the referent, which could be motivated in some way (e.g. pointing towards a chair where a person usually sits) or could be arbitrary. Once a location in space for a referent has been established, that same location can be referred to again and again unambiguously with any of these devices, as in an example from BSL in (1) below, until they are actively changed. For more on the use of signing space in sign languages, see chapter 19.

- (3) SISTER INDEX_{3a} UPSET. INDEX₁ IASK_{3a} WHAT. INDEX_{3a} LOSE BAG. [BSL]
 sister there upset. I I-ask-her what She lost bag.
 'My sister was upset. I asked her what was wrong. She had lost her bag.'

2.1. Person

The issue of person in sign languages is controversial. Traditionally sign language researchers assumed the spatial modification of personal pronouns to be part of a three-

person system analogous to those found in spoken languages (Friedman 1975; Klima/Bellugi 1979; Padden 1983). According to these analyses, pronouns which point to the signer are first person forms, those which point to the addressee(s) are second person forms, and those which point to non-addressed participant(s) are third person forms. A three-person system for sign languages could be considered problematic, however, because there is no listable set of location values in the signing space to which a non-first person pronoun may point, for addressee or non-addressed participants. To address this issue, some researchers such as Lillo-Martin and Klima (1990) and McBurney (2002) proposed that sign languages like ASL have no person distinctions at all. Liddell (2003) has taken this idea a step further by claiming that sign language pronouns simply point to their referents gesturally. For Liddell, sign language pronouns are the result of a fusion of linguistic elements (phonologically specified parameters such as hand-shape and movement) and gestural elements (specifically the directionality of these signs). However, a gestural account of directionality alone does not explain first person behaviours, particularly with first person plurals, which do not necessarily point to their referents. This is part of the basis for Meier's (1990) argument for a distinct first person category in ASL.

Meier (1990) has argued for a two-person system for ASL – specifically, first person vs. non-first person. Meier claims that the use of space to refer to addressee and non-addressed participants is fully gradient rather than categorical, i.e. that loci towards which these pronouns point are not listable morphemes, similarly to Lillo-Martin and Klima (1990), McBurney (2002), and Liddell (2003). But the situation with first person pronouns, Meier argues, is different. There is a single location associated with first person (in BSL and ASL, the centre of the signer's chest). Furthermore, this location is not restricted to purely indexical reference, i.e. a point to the first person locus does not necessarily only refer to the signer. First person plurals in BSL and ASL, as shown in Figures 11.4 and 11.5, point primarily towards the chest area although they necessarily include referents other than just the signer. Furthermore, during constructed dialogue (a discourse strategy used for direct quotation – see Earis (2008) and chapter 17 on utterance reports and constructed action), a point toward the first person locus refers to the person whose role the signer is assuming, not the signer him/herself. Similarly, Nilsson (2004) found that in Swedish Sign Language, a point to the chest can be used to refer to the referent not only in representation of utterances but also of thoughts and actions. It is unclear whether or to what extent these patterns differ from gestural uses of pointing to the self in non-signers.



Fig. 11.4: BSL we



Fig. 11.5: ASL we

Meier's (1990) analysis recognises the 'listability problem' (Rathmann/Mathur 2002; see also chapter 7 on verb agreement) of multiple second/third person location values while at the same time recognising the special status of first person, for which there is only one specified location within a given sign language (e.g. the signer's chest). The first person locus is so stable that it can carry first person information virtually alone, i.e. even when the -handshape is lost through phonological processes. Studies on handshape variation in ASL (Lucas/Bayley 2005) and BSL (Schembri/Fenlon/Rentelis 2009) have found that the -handshape is used significantly less often (e.g. due to assimilation) with first person pronouns than with non-first person pronouns. Other evidence for a distinct grammatical category for first person comes from first person plural forms. Non-first person pronouns point to the location(s) of each of their referent(s), while first person plurals generally only point, if anywhere, to the location of the signer (Cormier 2005, 2007; Meier 1990). Two-person systems have been assumed by other researchers for ASL and other sign languages (e.g., Emmorey 2002; Engberg-Pedersen 1993; Farris 1998; Lillo-Martin 2002; Padden 1990; Rathmann/Mathur 2002; Todd 2009), including Liddell (2003) who presumably sees a two-person (first vs. non-first) system as compatible with the notion that non-first person pronouns point to their referents gesturally.

However, not all researchers subscribe to a two-person system. Berenz (2002) and Alibasic Ciciliani and Wilbur (2006) support the notion of a three-person system for Brazilian Sign Language (LSB) and Croatian Sign Language (HZJ), respectively, as well as ASL. They argue that, while the spatial locations to which addressee-directed and non-addressee-directed pronouns are directed may be exactly the same, there are other cues that do reliably distinguish second from third person. These cues include the relationship between the direction of the signer's eye gaze and the orientation of the head, chest, and hand. For second person reference, these four articulators typically align (assuming the signer and addressee are directly facing each other); for third person reference, the direction in which the hand points is misaligned with the other three articulators.

Based on their analyses of LSB and HZJ, Berenz (2002) and Alibasic Ciciliani and Wilbur (2006) argue for a three-person system for these sign languages, and for ASL, based on a systematic distinction between reference to second versus third persons. However, in an eye-tracking study Thompson (2006) found no systematic difference in eye gaze between reference to addressees and reference to non-addressed participants in ASL. Even if eye gaze behaviours are more systematic in LSB and HZJ than in ASL, it is not clear what would make this distinction grammatical, as similar patterns of alignment and misalignment of eye gaze, torso orientation, and pointing are found in hearing non-signers when they gesture (Kita 2003). More research on pronominal systems of other sign languages and deictic gestures as used by non-signers, particularly reference in plural contexts, would help further clarify the role of person in sign languages (Johnston, *in press*).

2.2. Number

Number marking on pronouns is somewhat more straightforward than person. Sign languages generally distinguish singular, dual, and plural forms. Singular and dual pronouns index (point to) their referent(s) more or less directly, singular pronouns with a simple



Fig. 11.6: BSL TWO-OF-US

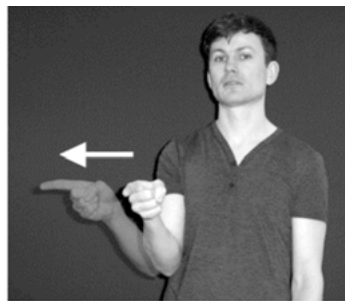


Fig. 11.7: BSL THEY

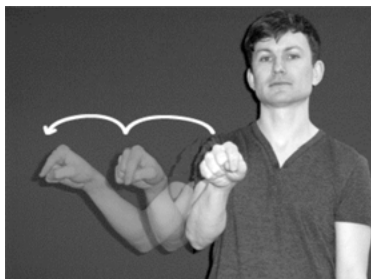


Fig. 11.8: BSL THEY-COMP

point to a location and dual forms with -handshape (or some variant with the index and ring finger extended) which oscillates back and forth between the two locations being indexed (see Figure 11.6 for first person plural dual pronoun TWO-OF-US in BSL). Many sign languages additionally have so-called ‘number-incorporated pronouns’. BSL and ASL have pronouns which incorporate numerals and indicate three, four and (for some signers in BSL) five referents (McBurney 2002; Sutton-Spence/Woll 1999). For ASL, some signers accept up to nine. This limit appears to be due to phonological constraints; most versions of the numbers 10 and above in ASL include a particular phonological movement which blocks number incorporation (McBurney 2002). Plural pronouns and number-incorporated pronouns index their referents more generally than singular or dual forms (Cormier 2007). Plural forms usually take the form of a -handshape with a sweeping movement across the locations associated with the referents (as shown in Figure 11.7 THEY below) or with a distributed pointing motion towards multiple locations (see Figure 11.8 above for THEY-COMP, a non-first person composite plural form). These forms have been identified in various sign languages (McBurney 2002; Zeshan 2000). Number-incorporated pronouns typically have a handshape of the numeral within that sign language and a small circular movement in the general location associated with the group of referents. Number-incorporated plurals have been identified in many sign languages, although some (such as Indopakistani Sign Language, IPSL) appear not to have them (McBurney 2002).

McBurney (2002) argues that ASL grammatically marks number for dual but not in the number-incorporated pronouns. She points out that number marking for dual is obligatory while the use of number-incorporation appears to be an optional alternative to plural marking. For more on number and plural marking in sign languages, see chapter 6.

2.3. Exclusive pronouns

Further evidence for a distinction between singulars/duals which index their referents directly and plurals/number-incorporated forms which index their referents less (or not at all) comes from exclusive pronouns in BSL and ASL (Cormier 2005, 2007). These studies aimed to investigate whether BSL and ASL have an inclusive/exclusive distinction in the first person plural, similar to the inclusive/exclusive distinction common in many spoken languages (particularly indigenous languages of the Americas, Australia and Oceania, cf. Nichols 1992), whereby first person plurals can either include the addressee ('inclusive') or exclude the addressee ('exclusive'). In languages which lack an inclusive/exclusive distinction, first person plurals are neutral with regard to whether or not the addressee is included (e.g. 'we/us' in English). Both BSL and ASL were found to have first person plurals (specifically plurals and number-incorporated pronouns) that are neutral with respect to clusivity, just as English. These forms are produced at the centre of the signer's chest, as shown above in Figures 11.4 and 11.5. However, these forms can be made exclusive by changing the location of the pronoun from the centre of the signer's chest to the signer's left or right side. These exclusive forms are different from exclusive pronouns in spoken languages because they may exclude any referent salient in the discourse, not only the addressee.

Wilbur and Patchke (1998) and Alibasic Ciciliani and Wilbur (2006) discuss what they refer to as 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' pronouns in ASL and HZJ. However, based on the descriptions, these forms seem to actually be first person and non-first person plurals, respectively – i.e. inclusive/exclusive of the signer – rather than inclusive/exclusive of the addressee or other salient referent as in spoken languages and as identified in BSL and ASL (Cormier 2005, 2007).

2.4. Possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns in sign languages described to date are directional in the same way that non-possessive personal pronouns are. They usually have a handshape distinct from the pointing -handshape used in other personal pronouns – e.g. a -handshape with palm directed toward the referent in sign languages such as ASL, HZJ, and Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS), Finnish Sign Language (FinSL), Danish Sign Language (DSL), and Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL) (Alibasic Ciciliani/Wilbur 2006; Pichler et al. 2008; Tang/Sze 2002), and a -handshape in the British, Australian, and New Zealand Sign Language family (BANZSL) (Cormier/Fenlon 2009; Sutton-Spence/Woll 1999). Although BSL does use the -handshape in most cases, the -handshape may also be used for inalienable possession (Cormier/Fenlon 2009; Sutton-Spence/Woll 1999). In HKSL, the -handshape for possession is restricted to predicative possession. Nominal possession (with or without overt possessor) is expressed via a -handshape instead (Tang/Sze 2002). Possessive pronouns, in BSL and ASL at least, are marked for person and number in the same way that non-possessive personal pronouns are (Cormier/Fenlon 2009).

2.5. Gender and case

It is not common for sign language pronouns to be marked for gender, but examples have been described in the literature. Fischer (1996) and Smith (1990) note gender marking for pronouns and on classifier constructions in NS and Taiwan Sign Language (TSL). They claim that pronouns and some classifiers are marked for masculine and feminine via a change in handshape. However, there are some questions about to what degree gender marking is obligatory (or even to what degree it occurs with pronouns at all) within the pronominal systems of these languages; McBurney (2002) suggests that this marking may be a productive (optional) morphological process in the pronominal systems of these languages rather than obligatory grammatical gender marking.

Case marking on nouns or pronouns in sign languages is also not very common. Grammatical relations between arguments tend to be marked either by the verb, by word order, or are not marked and only recoverable via pragmatic context. However, Meir (2003) describes the emergence of a case-marked pronoun in Israeli Sign Language (Israeli SL). This pronoun, she argues, has been grammaticised from the noun PERSON and currently functions as an object-marked pronoun. This pronoun exists alongside the more typical pointing sign used as a pronoun unmarked for case and is used in a variety of grammatical relations (subject, object, etc.), just as in other sign languages.

3. Proforms

Somewhat confusingly, the term ‘proform’ or ‘pro-form’ has been used to refer to a variety of different features and constructions in sign languages, including the location to which a personal pronoun or other directional sign points (Edge/Herrmann 1977; Friedman 1975); the (personal) pronominal pointing sign itself (Hoffmeister 1978); a pointing sign distinct from a personal pronoun, usually made with the non-dominant hand, which is used to express spatial information (Engberg-Pedersen 1993); an alternative label for handshapes in classifier constructions (Engberg-Pedersen/Pedersen 1985); and finally as a superordinate term to cover both personal pronouns and classifier constructions which refer to or stand for something previously identified (Chang/Su/Tai 2005; Sutton-Spence/Woll 1999). As noted above, following Bhat (2004), the term proform is used here to refer to pronouns other than personal pronouns, including reflexive pronouns, relative pronouns, reciprocal pronouns, indefinites, interrogatives, and demonstratives.

3.1. Reflexive and emphatic pronouns

There is a class of sign language proforms that has been labelled as reflexive and is often glossed in its singular form as SELF. This pronoun can be marked for person (first and non-first) and number (singular and plural) in BSL and ASL and is directional in the same way that other personal pronouns are, as shown in Figures 11.9 and 11.10. These pronouns function primarily as emphatic pronouns in ASL (Lee et al. 1997; Liddell 2003), and seem to function the same way in BSL. Examples from BSL and ASL (Padden 1983, 134) are given in (2) and (3).

Fig. 11.9: BSL SELF_{3a}Fig. 11.10: ASL SELF_{3a}

- (2) GROMIT_{3a} PLAY POSS_{3a} TOY DRILL. DRILL++. STUCK. SELF_{3a} SPIN-AROUND [BSL]
 ‘Gromit was playing with a toy drill. He was drilling. The drill got stuck, and he himself spun around.’
- (3) SISTER_iSELF TELEPHONE C-O [ASL]
 ‘My sister will call the company herself.’

3.2. Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns in some spoken languages appear to have been grammaticalised from generic nouns such as ‘person’ or ‘thing’, and/or from the numeral ‘one’ (Haspel-math 1997). This pattern is also found in some sign languages.

The indefinite animate pronoun SOMEONE in BSL has the same handshape and orientation as the BSL numeral ONE and the BSL classifier for person or animate entity, with an additional slight tremoring movement, as in Figure 11.11 and in (4) below. (The sign SOMEONE is also identical in form with the interrogative pronoun WHO, as noted in section 3.4 below). Inanimate indefinites in BSL may be the same as the sign SOME as in Figure 11.12 and in (5), or the sign THING (Brien 1992).

Fig. 11.11: BSL SOMEONE/
ASL SOMETHING/ONE

Fig. 11.12: BSL SOMETHING(=SOME)

- (4) ROAD BICYCLE SOMEONE CL:SIT-ON-BICYCLE NOTHING. [BSL]
 ‘On a road there is a bicycle with nobody sitting on it.’
- (5) SOMETHING(=SOME) ROAD, SOMETHING(=SOME) LOW
 ‘There is something on the road, something low down close to the road.’

Neidle et al. (2000) describe the ASL indefinite pronoun SOMETHING/ONE, which is the same as the indefinite animate pronoun in BSL, as in Figure 11.11 above and in (6). As in BSL, the ASL indefinite pronoun shares the same handshape and orientation as the ASL numeral ONE and the ASL classifier for person or animate entity (Neidle et al. 2000, 91).

- (6) SOMETHING/ONE ARRIVE [ASL]
 ‘Someone/something arrived.’

Pfau and Steinbach (2006) describe the indefinite pronoun in German Sign Language (DGS) and Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT) as a grammaticised combination of the numeral ONE and sign PERSON, as in (7) and (8). Pfau and Steinbach point out that what distinguishes this indefinite form from the phrase ONE PERSON ‘one person’ is that the indefinite does not necessarily refer to only one person. Therefore it could be one or more people that is seen in (7), or one or more people who are expected to do the dishes in (8) (Pfau/Steinbach 2006, 31).

- (7) INDEX₁ ONE^PERSON SEE [DGS]
 ‘I’ve seen someone.’
- (8) ONE^PERSON WASH-DISH DO MUST [NGT]
 ‘Someone has to wash the dishes.’

3.3. Reciprocal pronouns

Pronouns expressing reciprocal meaning in spoken languages have an interesting relationship with reflexives and indefinites. Bhat (2004) notes that reciprocal meanings (such as ‘each other’ in English) tend to be expressed in spoken languages by indefinite expressions or the numeral ‘one’ (which used in a pronominal context would also have indefinite characteristics). English for example does not derive reciprocals from personal pronouns but instead from indefinite expressions such as ‘each’, ‘other’, ‘one’, and ‘another’, as in (9) below. Such affinities between reciprocals and indefinites are common amongst spoken languages. Reflexives, on the other hand, are inherently anaphoric and definite and are therefore semantically quite different from reciprocals (Bhat 2004). Thus we might expect to see more affinities between reciprocals and indefinites than between reciprocals and reflexives.

- (9) a. The children are helping each other.
 b. The girls looked at one another.

However, reciprocal pronouns in BSL and ASL seem to be more closely related to reflexives than to indefinites. The reciprocal and reflexive pronouns in BSL and ASL



Fig. 11.13: BSL EACH-OTHER



Fig. 11.14: ASL EACH-OTHER

share more formational features than the reciprocal and indefinite pronouns. Thus for BSL, Figure 11.13 EACH-OTHER is more similar to Figure 11.9 SELF than it is to Figures 11.11 SOMEONE or 11.12 SOMETHING. For ASL, Figure 11.14 EACH-OTHER is (much) more similar to Figure 11.10 SELF than to Figure 11.11 SOMETHING/ONE.

It is interesting that reciprocals seem to align themselves more with indefinites in spoken languages but with reflexives in BSL and ASL; however, the reason for this apparent difference is unclear. We do not know enough about reciprocal forms in other sign languages to know whether or to what extent this affinity between reciprocals and reflexives holds or varies across sign languages.

Reciprocal pronouns are not the only way of expressing reciprocal relationships in sign languages. Agreement verbs in several sign languages allow reciprocal marking directly (Fischer/Gough 1980; Klima/Bellugi 1979; Pfau/Steinbach 2003). Pfau and Steinbach (2003) claim that DGS does not have reciprocal pronouns at all but expresses reciprocity in other ways, including via reciprocal marking on agreement verbs or on person agreement markers. It may be that sign languages that have person agreement markers (see chapter 10) such as DGS have less need for a reciprocal pronoun than sign languages which do not have person agreement markers such as ASL and BSL.

3.4. Interrogative pronouns

Most sign languages have some pronouns which have an interrogative function, e.g. signs meaning ‘what’ or ‘who’. However, the number of interrogative pronouns across sign languages and the extent to which they differ from non-interrogative signs within each language varies greatly. For example sign languages such as ASL and BSL have at least one interrogative pronoun for each of the following concepts: ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘how’ and ‘why’. IPSL, on the other hand, has only one general interrogative sign (Zeshan 2004). The syntactic use of interrogatives and wh-questions in sign languages is covered in detail in chapter 14 on sentence types.

One issue regarding interrogatives that is relevant for this chapter on pronouns is the relationship between interrogatives and indefinites. Zeshan (2004) notes that the same signs which are used for interrogatives in many sign languages have other non-interrogative functions as well, especially as indefinites. Specifically, NS, FinSL, LSB, and BANZSL all have interrogatives signs which are also used for indefinites. For

instance, in BSL, the same sign shown above in Figure 11.11 is used to mean both ‘someone’ and ‘who’. This is consistent with Bhat’s (2004) observation for spoken languages that interrogatives and indefinites are strongly linked. If this affinity between interrogatives and indefinites holds for other sign languages, this would provide evidence that the link between interrogatives and indefinites is modality independent. More research is needed to determine whether this is the case.

3.5. Demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns in spoken languages often distinguish between spatial location, e.g. proximate/remote, or proximate/medial/remote. English for instance makes only a two-way distinction (‘this’ vs. ‘that’). Sign language personal pronouns certainly can express spatial distinctions, both for animate referents (where the pointing sign would best be interpreted as ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘you’, ‘they’, etc.) and inanimate referents (where the pointing sign would best be interpreted as ‘it’, ‘this’, ‘that’, etc.). However, they do so gradiently and do not appear to have distinct categorical markings for notions such as proximate or remote. Many sign languages have been noted as having such an affinity between personal pronouns and demonstratives, including DGS (Pfau/Steinbach 2005) and Italian Sign Language (LIS) (Branchini 2006).

Although it is very common for demonstrative pronouns in sign languages to be phonologically identical to personal pronouns, ASL at least has a distinct demonstrative pronoun *THAT* (Liddell 1980), as shown in Figure 11.15. (Liddell (1980) actually describes four variants of the sign shown in Figure 11.15 which differ slightly in form and function. The version in Figure 11.15 can be used either as a demonstrative or as a relative pronoun; see also section 3.6, below).



Fig. 11.15: ASL *THAT*

3.6. Relative pronouns

Relative clauses have been identified in many sign languages, including ASL (Coulter 1983; Liddell 1980), LIS (Branchini 2006; Cecchetto/Geraci/Zucchi 2006), and DGS (Pfau/Steinbach 2005) – see also chapter 16 for a detailed discussion of relative clauses. Relative clauses are relevant to this chapter in that they often include relative pronouns.

ASL uses a sign glossed as *THAT* as a relative pronoun (Coulter 1983; Fischer 1990; Liddell 1980; Petronio 1993), as in (10), cf. Liddell (1980, 148). Pfau and Steinbach (2005) note that DGS has two different relative pronouns, one for human referents as in (11) and Figure 11.16a and one for non-human referents as in (12) and Figure 11.16b, cf. Pfau and Steinbach (2005, 512). A sign similar to the DGS non-human relative pronoun has been noted for LIS (Branchini 2006; Cecchetto/Geraci/Zucchi 2006). Other sign languages such as LSB and BSL do not appear to have manual relative pronouns or complementisers at all but instead use word order and prosodic cues such as non-manual features (Nunes/de Quadros 2004, cited in Pfau/Steinbach 2005).

- (10)
$$\overbrace{[[\text{RECENTLY DOG THAT}_a \text{ CHASE CAT}]_{S1}]}^{\text{rc}} \text{]}_{NP} \text{ COME HOME} \quad [\text{ASL}]$$

 ‘The dog which recently chased the cat came home.’

- (11)
$$[\text{MAN (IX}_3\text{)} \overbrace{[\text{RPRO-H}_3 \text{ CAT STROKE}]_{CP}}^{\text{re}}]_{DP} \quad [\text{DGS}]$$

 ‘the man who is stroking the cat’

- (12)
$$[\text{BOOK} \overbrace{[\text{RPRO-NH}_3 \text{ POSS}_1 \text{ FATHER READ}]_{CP}}^{\text{re}}]_{DP}$$

 ‘the book which my father is reading’



Fig. 11.16a: DGS RPRO-H



Fig. 11.16b: DGS RPRO-NH

Bhat (2004) notes a common affinity between relative pronouns and demonstratives in many spoken languages, including English. This also appears to hold for some sign languages as well. ASL *THAT* (as shown above in Figure 11.15) is used both as a demonstrative and as a relative pronoun (Liddell 1980). Pfau and Steinbach (2005) note that the DGS relative pronoun used for non-human referents (shown in Figure 11.16b) is identical in form to the DGS personal and demonstrative pronoun, which is also identical to the BSL personal pronoun as shown in Figure 11.1. The LIS relative pronoun is not identical to the LIS personal/demonstrative pronoun, although it does share the same -handshape (Branchini 2006; Cecchetto/Geraci/Zucchi 2006)

4. Conclusion

Like spoken languages, sign languages have many different types of pronoun, including personal pronouns as well as indefinites, reciprocals, interrogatives, demonstratives,

and relative pronouns. Affinities between different types of pronouns (including both personal pronouns and proforms) seem to be similar to those found within and across spoken languages. A major modality effect when it comes to personal pronouns is due to the use of the signing space for reference, leading to controversies surrounding person systems and person agreement in sign languages.

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