Forms of multimodal language contact: multimodal constructions across signed languages

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Contact phenomena emerge when language users exploit similarities in matter (e.g. words, sounds) and pattern (e.g. syntactic frames) between languages and combine them (Matras & Sakel 2007; Baptista 2020). This is traditionally studied from a unimodal perspective and in the auditory–vocal modality (cf. Azar et al. 2020), which emphasises sequential use of resources; however signed languages show simultaneous, cross-modal contact, e.g. *fingerspelling* and *mouthing* (e.g. Adam 2012). This paper investigates 4 kinds of mouthing constructions – *congruent*, *morpho-phonological*, *morpho-syntactic* and *free* – in 37 signed languages. Mouthing can be used to understand what motivates the combination of resources from different modalities. First, the number of modalities referenced varies: *free* references 1 modality (i.e. spoken), *congruent*, *polysemous* and *morpho-syntactic* 2 (signed+spoken), and *initialised* 3 (signed+spoken+written). When 2 modalities are referenced it is done to (i) supply the same content in different forms (*congruent*), (ii) identify a general meaning and specify it (*polysemous*) or (iii) identify a head and a dependent (*morpho-syntactic*). In all constructions, partial matter matching occurs as some lip and tongue articulations from spoken language words are incorporated, but not necessarily their acoustics. This matching occurs around lexical (*congruent*, *polysemous*) and phonetic/phonological (*initialised*) properties. The *initialised* case is novel as it matches signed language phonology (handshape), written representation of spoken phonology (letter), and spoken phonetics (oral articulation). *Morpho-syntactic* mouthing is best classed as a type of pattern matching as there seems to be sensitivity to grammatical categories in the tendency to map a head and its dependent to the hands and mouth respectively. These constructions represent cross-linguistically robust ways that resources referencing different modalities are combined in signed language use, broadening the picture of matter and pattern matching in language contact.

References: • Adam, R. 2012. Language contact and borrowing. In R. Pfau, M. Steinbach & B. Woll (eds.), *Sign Language: An International Handbook*, 841–861. De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110261325.• A., Zeynep, A. Backus & A. Özyürek. 2020. Language contact does not drive gesture transfer: Heritage speakers maintain language specific gesture patterns in each language. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 23(2). 414–428. https://doi.org/10.1017/S136672891900018X. • Baptista, M. 2020. Competition, selection, and the role of congruence in Creole genesis and development. *Language* 96(1). 160–199. https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2020.0005. • Matras, Y. & J. Sakel (eds.). 2007. *Grammatical borrowing in cross-linguistic perspective* (Empirical Approaches to Language Typology 38). New York: Mouton de Gruyter.