
Cross-modal contact and its impact on sign language typology.

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Signed and spoken languages both have elaborate means to encode spatial information. As sign languages (SLs) use a visual-spatial modality, this allows them to represent spatial information in a direct, iconic way. This results in strikingly similar constructions across SLs in the form of complex depictive or classifier constructions. These constructions participate in Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs) in various SLs, incl. Adamorobe SL in Ghana (Nyst 2007), and Dutch SL (Couvee & Pfau 2018). Research on Nicaraguan SL shows that serialization is a first step in the formation of these constructions, preceding the systematic inclusion of classifier handshapes in them (Kegl et al. 1999). In Adamorobe SL SVCs predominantly make use of a closed set of directional verbs that are neutral with respect to transitivity (Nyst 2007). Transitivity is expressed by a preceding manner verb (cf. TAKE GO ‘send’ and RUN GO ‘run off’). Similar to the dominant spoken language Akan surrounding it, AdaSL use two dedicated light verbs to mark transitivity in SVCs. This suggests that not only modality, but also contact with SVCs in a spoken language influences the nature of SVCs in SLs.

To shed light on the role of modality, contact, and age on the typology of SVCs in SLs, I present new data on the emerging SL of Bouakako, Côte d’Ivoire (Tano 2016). This SL and its surrounding spoken language both use (pseudo-) SVCs (cf. Vogler 1987). Using the methodology of Couvee & Pfau (2018), a corpus-based comparison is made with Dutch SL and Adamorobe SL. I will add to this an observation on the influence of separable verbs and verb particles on the lexicalization of spatial verbs in Dutch SL and other SLs in contact with West Germanic languages.

I conclude with a summary of the implications of the observations on Adamorobe SL, Bouakako SL, Dutch SL, and Danish SL for our understanding of the impact of language contact on the typology of spatial language in SLs.

References: • Couvee, S., & Pfau, R. (2018). Structure and grammaticalization of serial verb constructions in Sign Language of the Netherlands—A corpus-based study. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 993. • Kegl, J., Senghas, A., & Coppola, M. (1999). Creation through contact: Sign language emergence and sign language change in Nicaragua. *Language creation and language change: Creolization, diachrony, and development*, 179-237. • Nyst, V. (2007). *A descriptive analysis of Adamorobe sign language (Ghana)*. Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics. LOT: Utrecht. • Tano, A. (2016) *Etude d'une langue des signes émergente de Côte d'Ivoire : l'exemple de la langue des signes de Bouakako (LaSiBo)*. Utrecht: LOT