The marking and interpretation of contrast in Catalan Sign Language

Alexandra Navarrete-González
(Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona)

Keywords: contrast, selection, correction, expectations, exhaustivity

In Catalan Sign Language (LSC) foci and topics seem to display the same marking in order to express contrast (Barberà 2012, Navarrete-González 2016 and Zorzi 2018). In this research we aim at describing the different syntactic and prosodic non-manual markers (NMMs) involved in the expression of contrast in LSC. Moreover, we offer an analysis of the expression of contrast from a semantic-pragmatic perspective following Vallduví & Vilkuna (1998).

The data for this research have been collected from two deaf native signers of LSC through different elicitation tasks: question-answer pairs, dialogues, translations, and felicity judgments. Moreover, the LSC corpus from the Institut d’Estudis Catalans has been consulted in order to contrast the elicited data with natural discourse data.

Contrast in LSC is mainly expressed through a combination of prosodic NMMs: left and right body leans (bl), and head tilts (ht), and morphophonological marking: the use of the opposite sides of the signing space. These markers are always present when there are salient contextually contrasted alternatives and can spread across different types of constituents (1).

(1) \[
\text{left}_\text{bl} \quad \text{right}_\text{bl}
\]

‘Giorgia is a linguist and Raquel is an interpreter.’

When the context requires selecting one alternative and excluding the other, a repeated head nod (hn) is commonly added, which is directed towards the selected alternative (2).

(2) \[
\text{right}_\text{bl+ht+hn}
\]
[BIKE RIDE]_x,

‘Riding a bike.’

In order to express a correction, body leans and head tilts are again displayed, but, in addition, a strong head thrust (hthr) is found in the correction (3).

(3) \[
\text{left}_\text{bl+ht} \quad \text{hthr} \quad \text{right}_\text{bl+ht}
\]
[MARY PIZZA-EAT NOTHING]_x, [OTHER BURGER]_y.

Mary didn’t eat a pizza, but a burger.’

In LSC forward-backward body leans can be found in combination to left-right body leans, especially in corrections. If the correction includes more than one element, a left-right body lean expresses the contrast between those elements, and the contrast between the correction and the corrected element is expressed with a forward-backward body lean — similar findings for Sign Language of the Netherlands (Crasborn & van der Kooij 2013)—.
Following Umbach (2004) and inspired by the classification used in Kimmelman (2014), we argue that in LSC three different types of contrast can be distinguished: i) parallel contrast (1), which involves contrast due to similarity plus dissimilarity; ii) selective contrast (2), which involves contrast due to similarity plus dissimilarity, plus contrast due to exclusion; and iii) corrective contrast (3), which involves contrast due to similarity plus dissimilarity, due to exclusion, and a violation of expectations (Destruel & Velleman 2014). All these types of contrast are expressed through the combination of markers mentioned before. However, in ii) an additional head nod is found towards the selection, and in iii) a head thrust is added to mark the correction. Our analysis proposes that the types of contrast identified before correlate with different interpretations in terms of exhaustivity, related to the selection of an alternative, and expectations, related to the correction of an alternative.

This research is possible thanks to the SIGN-HUB project, which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 693349. Thanks also to the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness and FEDER Funds (FFI2012-36238 “ClauseCombi2 “GramRefLSC FFI2015-68594-P, BES2013062848) and the Generalitat de Catalunya (2017 SGR 1478).

References