Sign or gesture?
Two discourse markers in Norwegian Sign Language (NSL)
Klikk for å redigere undertittelstil i malen

Guri Amundsen
Rolf Piene Halvorsen

11.03.11 DGfS2011 Göttingen
Discourse markers

Schiffrin (1987/2001)

- Sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk

- Multifunctional, operate at both local and global levels, operate on different planes (i.e., a participation framework, information state, ideational structure, action structure, exchange structure)

- Schiffrin suggests that they have clause initial position – we would like to propose that some discourse markers can be found in other positions
Outline of our talk:

• Show and briefly discuss examples of the lexicalized sign DONE (FERDIG) in different contexts with somewhat varied discourse functions

• Show and discuss observations of PALM-UP signed by different signers in similar contexts

• Suggest – and hopefully discuss with you – possible interpretations of our findings
Data – three different types of monologues

• A published non-fiction expository text about F14 Tomcat fighter planes (as part of the web-based teaching materials in the Norwegian Sign Language curriculum in upper secondary school)

• Elicited narratives
  - The Frog Story
  - September 11th 2001 narratives (personal impressions and reminiscences of the media coverage)

• Levels of text:
  - Clause
  - Sequence
  - Text
DONE

Frog story (02:02.29)

- Text final position

- Mouthing – resembles the Norwegian word “ferdig” (in English “done”)
ONLY-THAT

F14 (01:01.12)

· Sentence-final, sequence- and sub-topic final position
· Delimiting function
PALM-UP

Frog story 2 (04:17.05 – 04:17.72)

- Text final position
- Oral component: ‘ferdig’
- Meaning: “and that was all I had to say”
· Intra-textual position

· Signals exemplification or elaboration of a topic or theme
PALM-UP

F14 (00:55.85)

- Intra-textual position
- Indicates exemplification

11.03.11

DGfS2011 Göttingen
PALM-UP

Intra-textual position
Role shift
Oral component closed with the corner of the mouth drawn down
Gesture and sign

  palm-up among hearing speakers:
  - The ultimate nothing
  - Pointing

- "Idea unit" (Kendon) or "Growth Point" (McNeill)
Sign and gesture

Erlenkamp (2009: § 71)

“The difference between gestures and depicting verbs and other signs is – besides the degree of grammaticalization – mainly based on the complexity in the use of the different mapping types.” (Echoes of Liddell 2003, Fauconnier & Turner 2002)
Discourse markers – sign or gesture

Back to our examples of discourse markers in the twilight zone:

- They resemble gestures in that their meaning is by and large determined by the context in which they appear

- They resemble signs in that they have some grammaticalized properties
  - modified for direction and intensity
Working hypothesis 1:

PALM-UP in text-final position with mouthing and eye contact:
- highly lexicalized
  - semantically related to DONE (through the oral component and text position)
  - a different sign than DONE (different manual form and different connotations)
  - conceptually different origins reflected in the transparency of the iconic properties of these signs:
    - cutting off or limiting (DONE) compared to
    - spreading out (PALM-UP)
Working hypothesis 2

PALM-UP in an intra-textual position:
- more gesture-like, less lexicalized
- global, synthetic reading of meaning
- dependent on context

- some linguistic properties
  - direction, some aspectual modification
- text-structuring functions as a discourse marker
  - connective function
  - indexical function
Working hypothesis 3

PALM-UP within a role shift:
- a quoted gesture like any other gesture
- reflects emotions
- reflects reactions
- reflects attitudes
- an organic part of sign language communication

But is this a discourse marker? The role shift and quoted gesture together may be used as a discourse marker in the text, but the quoted gesture is not a discourse marker by itself.
Conclusion

We find it useful to distinguish between the terms signs and gestures when developing categories of different types of communication signals in a sign language discourse.

Gesture verbs and/or gestures can function as discourse markers. This challenges both the categorization of discourse markers in general, and the need in signed language linguistics for developing categories and sub-categories of discourse markers depending on both form, place in text and function.
References

http://cignitextes.revues.org/index250.html


