

Skipping the lexical form

Grammaticalization of gestures in sign languages

Elisabeth Volk
elisabeth.volk@phil.uni-goettingen.de
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

Research on diachronic change in sign languages has shown that most attested instances of grammaticalization follow prototypical developmental pathways identified for spoken languages (cf. Pfau and Steinbach 2006, 2011). However, as sign languages also offer the possibility to integrate gestures produced by the hands, upper body, head, and face into the linguistic system, specific pathways can be observed, which are argued to be unique to sign languages. According to Wilcox (2004, 2007), the grammaticalization of gestures in sign languages may follow two different routes:

- (1) Route I: gesture → lexical sign → grammatical marker
Route II: gesture → grammatical marker

Route I may be illustrated by the example of the modal verb *CAN* in American Sign Language. Here, the gesture meaning ‘strong’ is argued to serve as the source of the lexical sign *STRONG* which grammaticalized into the modal verb *CAN* (Wilcox and Wilcox 1995). While the first step (lexicalization) is specific to the visual-gestural modality of sign languages, the second step (grammaticalization) parallels similar developments of modal verbs in spoken languages and can be categorized as modality-independent.

In my talk, I will present two case studies of grammaticalized gestures in German Sign Language, which relate to route II and therefore lack a lexical form. First, I will report on the manual gesture *palm-up*, which fulfills various functions in sign language discourse from turn-taking and affective marker to elaborative, discourse, and epistemic marker, among others (cf. Engberg-Pedersen 2002; van Loon, Pfau, and Steinbach 2014). Second, I will elaborate on nonmanual gestures, i.e. movements of the upper body, head, and face, which may be analyzed as prosodic cues for speech act perception (Brentari et al. 2017). Finally, I will address the question in how far the grammaticalization of gestures and more specifically, grammaticalization paths of route II are indeed unique to sign languages or may also be applied to phenomena relating to spoken languages.

Brentari, D., J. Falk, A. Giannakiou, A. Herrmann, E. Volk, and M. Steinbach. 2017. Production and Comprehension of Non-manual Markers in American Sign Language Imperatives. Manuscript University of Chicago, University of Hamburg and University of Goöttingen. **Engberg-Pedersen, E. 2002.** Gestures in Signing: The Presentation Gesture in Danish Sign Language. In: R. Schulmeister and H. Reinitzer (eds.), *Progress in Sign Language Research: In Honor of Siegmund Prillwitz*, 143-162. Hamburg: Signum. **Loon, E. van, R. Pfau, and M. Steinbach, M. 2014.** The Grammaticalization of Gestures in Sign Languages. In: C. Müller et al. (eds.), *Body-language-communication*, 2131-2147. Berlin: de Gruyter. **Pfau, R. and M. Steinbach. 2006.** Modality-independent and Modality-specific Aspects of Grammaticalization in Sign Languages. (*Linguistics in Potsdam 24.*) Potsdam: Universitäts-Verlag. **Pfau, R. and M. Steinbach. 2011.** Grammaticalization in Sign Languages. In: H. Narrog and B. Heine (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Grammaticalization*, 683-695. Oxford: Oxford University Press. **Wilcox, S. 2004.** Gesture and Language. Cross-linguistic and Historical Data from Signed Languages. *Gesture* 4(1): 43-73. **Wilcox, S. 2007.** Routes from Gesture to Language. In: E. Pizzuto, P. Pietrandrea, and R. Simone (eds.), *Verbal and Signed Languages. Comparing Structures, Constructs, and Methodologies*, 107-131. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. **Wilcox, S. and P. Wilcox 1995.** The Gestural Expression of Modality in ASL. In: J. Bybee and S. Fleischman (eds.), *Modality in Grammar and Discourse*, 135-162. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.