

Complex sentences in the visual-gestural modality

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The syntactic, semantic and prosodic mechanisms at work in the integration of clauses into complex sentences constitutes an understudied domain in the field of sign Linguistics. In this talk I address the open question of the proper characterization of a core non-manual domain marker in a case study of brow raise in Catalan Sign Language (LSC). Like in several other sign languages, brow raise surfaces as marker of conditional antecedents, temporal clauses, relative clauses, pseudo-clefts and clausal arguments appearing in the left periphery of the sentence. The results suggest that brow raise is a portmanteau marker of syntactic (and prosodic) integration of a dependent clause into the matrix one. It can be layered with other non-manuals and be partially overridden by other grammatical or affective articulations, as long as the prosodic constituency is preserved. At the same time, whenever the dependent clause can appear after the matrix one, brow raise occurs only on the alleged complementizer (GOAL, BECAUSE/REASON, etc.), clearly pointing to a different syntactic structure. For several cases of adjunct clauses, I argue that preverbal cases are instances of complex NP constituents (DP+CP) that are recruited (and eventually grammaticalized) for the composition of complex sentences. Comparative data from some other sign and spoken languages is shown to support the pre- vs. post-matrix asymmetries.