

The non-dominant hand as delimitation between inner element and outer element

In previous studies, Liddell (2003), Liddell, Vogt-Svendsen & Bergman (2004), Vogt-Svendsen & Bergman (2007) and Nilsson (2007) described buoys in American, Norwegian and Swedish sign languages, as in the list buoy, THEME buoy, POINTER buoy and point buoy. Common to all of these is that they are realized with the non-dominant hand or weak hand, which “are held in a stationary configuration as the strong hand continues producing signs” (Liddell, 2003:223).

In this paper, we present an additional sign (usually consisting of all fingers relaxed gathered and slightly bent at both distal knuckles with the thumb in opposition, or lateral), which, with respect to performance, matches the description of other buoys but differs in function/content from previously described buoys with the partial exception of POINT-B (Vogt-Svendsen & Bergman, 2007). In the Swedish Sign Language Corpus, we have tentatively annotated this sign as DELIMIT (translated from the Swedish AVGRÄNS) because, in our initial analysis (of 84 preliminary tokens on 45 annotated texts (of dialogue) with 26 informants of different ages and genders), the sign seems to represent a form of delimitation between an “inner” element – represented by the space in front of the hand’s palmar side – and an “outer” element – represented by the space in front of the hand’s dorsal side – as if someone is inside and another is outside, or there is an island surrounded by sea.

A typical example using DELIMIT is shown in the series of pictures below (see figure 1). The (left-handed) informant is initially describing a comic strip about a lonely man on an island with a palm tree in the middle of the sea. The first photograph shows the dominant hand performing the sign of the island (O-hand is moved up) with the non-dominant hand initiating the execution of DELIMIT, which is completed in the second photograph, while the dominant index hand is making a circular motion in the space in front of palmar side of DELIMIT, which now represents the inner elements, or the island. After the third photograph, in which the dominant hand is performing the sign of the sea, the following three photographs show the informant describing the sea as an outer element by using the dominant hand to make a sweeping motion forward past DELIMIT's dorsal side – further in front of DELIMIT – and ending on the contralateral side of the space.

DELIMIT is typically carried out in the space in front of the body. However, one example in our data uses the neck as the location for DELIMIT by representing the space beneath the non-dominant hand with the palmar side down for the chest and downwards, and the dorsal side of the space above the hand for the head.

Together the buoys described in this presentation show how the use of the non-dominant hand can be regarded as more important at the discourse level than the dominant hand in individual signs, and thus, is not particularly “weak” at all.



Figure 1.

References:

Bergman, B. & Vogt-Svendsen, M. 2007. Point buoys. The weak hand as a point of reference for time and space. In Vermeerbergen, M., Leeson, L. & Crasborn, O. (eds.), *Simultaneity in Signed Languages: Form and Function*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Liddell, S. K. 2003. *Grammar, Gesture and Meaning in American Sign Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Liddell, S. K., Vogt-Svendsen, M. & Bergman, B. 2007. A crosslinguistic comparison of buoys. Evidence from American, Norwegian, and Swedish Sign Language. In Vermeerbergen, M., Leeson, L. & Crasborn, O. (eds.), *Simultaneity in Signed Languages: Form and Function*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Nilsson, A-L. 2007. The non-dominant hand in a Swedish Sign Language discourse. In Vermeerbergen, M., Leeson, L. & Crasborn, O. (eds.), *Simultaneity in Signed Languages: Form and Function*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Mesch, J., Wallin, L., Nilsson, A-L. & Bergman, B. 2012. Datamängd. Projektet Korpus för det svenska teckenspråket 2009-2011 (version 1). Avdelningen för teckenspråk, Institutionen för lingvistik, Stockholms universitet. (<http://www.ling.su.se/teckensprakskorpus>)