Asymmetric Coordination in Sign Language of the Netherlands

Prof. Roland PFAU
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Date: January 15, 2019 (Tuesday)
Time: 4:30 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Venue: Swire Hall 1, Fung King Hey Building
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Research on spoken languages shows that the structure of coordination is typically determined by the parallel architecture of the conjuncts involved, a constraint that we refer to as the “Parallel Structure Constraint” (PSC). Apart from syntactic parallelism, the PSC requires that the conjuncts exhibit the same information structure (IS). We address the structure of coordination and the working of the PSC in Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT), using corpus data. Data extracted from the Corpus NGT reveal that the PSC may be violated in this language in that the order of predicate and argument may vary across conjuncts. We claim that this asymmetry results from IS-related syntactic movement, in particular, fronting of a contrastively focused constituent in the second conjunct. It appears that in NGT, movement is at times preferred over prosodic marking in situ, as it is a more salient foregrounding strategy in such complex (bi-clausal) constructions.

Speaker

Roland Pfau got interested in sign language linguistics while doing his PhD at the University of Frankfurt. Right after completing his dissertation (which investigates grammatical properties of slips of the tongue) in 2001, he accepted a position at the University of Amsterdam, where he now is Associate Professor in the sign linguistics program. His research focuses mostly on the syntax and morphosyntax of sign languages (e.g. negation, agreement, classifiers), sign language typology, and grammaticalization. At present, he is involved in a project (funded by the Dutch Science Foundation) on argument structure in three sign languages, as well as a European project on descriptive sign language grammars, assessment, and cultural heritage of elderly Deaf signers. Together with Josep Quer, he is the editor of Sign Language & Linguistics.

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