Empirical Research on Mouth Patterns considering Sociolinguistic Factors: A Comparison between the Use of Mouth Patterns of Deaf L1- and Hearing L2-Users of German Sign Language (DGS)

Lisa Monschein, University of Hamburg, Institute of German Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf

Theory

Mouth Patterns:
- mouth gestures
- mouthings
- genuine part of sign language
- originating from speech contact;
- part of the system of sign languages only to a certain extent (cf. Lucas/Vallü 1992)

Continuum of Language Modes:

Sociolinguistic Factors have an Effect on:
- the sociolinguistic variation in one language
- the occurrence of language contact phenomena (nonce borrowing, codeswitching (cf. Boys Brah 2001))
- different variation and language contact phenomena have an effect on the occurrence of mouth patterns.

- Contact between sign and spoken language leads to different phenomena than known for unimodal language contact.

- A visual-gestural means of communication offers combinatory possibilities that a spoken language does not allow for.

Hypotheses:
(cf. Erbery et al. 2008)

Sociolinguistic Factors having an Impact on Language Use:
- speaker, addressee, audience
- (region, gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, hearing status, age of acquisition)
- setting
- (style, content, and purpose of the conversation; in research: research question, elicitation material)

Sign Language Interpreters:
- often said to use a different kind of sign language than deaf sign language users
- one possible reason: sociolinguistic factors – hearing status and (typically) sign language as L2

Hypotheses:
1. The occurrences of mouthings and mouth gestures in the sign language productions of deaf natives and hearing L2-users differ both in quality and quantity.
2. Other factors such as the addressee’s hearing status and the kind of text produced will also have an effect on the use of mouth patterns.
3. The stronger the influence of the spoken language in a setting, the higher the frequency of mouthings and the more codeswitches will occur.

Selected Results

Quantitatively

- There are combinations of signed and spoken components – both in the productions of hearing L2- and deaf L1-users – which are not (yet) part of DGS and must be considered as codeswitches or nonce borrowings.
- Phrases or sentences need to be considered in addition to combinations of only one sign and one spoken component as some expressions might seem like pure sign language on the lexical level, but not on a syntactical level.
- Difficult to judge: Often it is not possible to draw a distinct line between what still is DGS and what is not.
- There are combinations of signed and spoken components – all of which is not DGS and must be considered as codeswitches or nonce borrowings.

Qualitatively

- More factors which are potentially crucial have to be identified by further research.
- Hypothesis: The education factor outweighs the other factors.
- Need for deaf native judges (cf. Lucas/Vallü 1992)
- Hearing L2-users seem to use mouthings to specify the meaning of a sign or give supplementary meaning the sign does not include.

Conclusions

- Socio-linguistic factors (e.g. hearing status, age of acquisition, addressee, type of test) do have an effect on sign language production and mouth patterns in particular and have to be considered with regard to the elicitation of data.
- More factors which are potentially crucial have to be identified by further research.
- Hypothesis: The education factor outweighs the other factors.

References:


Mey, Karen (2004): “Sign Language as a Multilingual Communication. Why move from dichotomy between signed and spoken to a three-dimension model?” In: Boves, Brahm, Sidorova-Sponer, Rachel ed.: The Hands are the Mouth of the Mind, Hamburg, Sigmund, 123-151.


Mey, Karen (2004): “Sign Language as a Multilingual Communication. Why move from dichotomy between signed and spoken to a three-dimension model?” In: Boves, Brahm, Sidorova-Sponer, Rachel ed.: The Hands are the Mouth of the Mind, Hamburg, Sigmund, 123-151.
