

ISCH COST Action IS1006 SignGram



Work plan for STSM to Institut Jean Nicod (Paris, France)

Sign action number: IS 1006

Title of the action: Unraveling the grammars of European sign languages: pathways to full citizenship of deaf signers and to the protection of their linguistic heritage

Action short name: SignGram COST Action

Applicant's Name: Carlo Cecchetto

Affiliation: Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, Dipartimento di Psicologia

Host Institution:

École Normale Supérieure (Institut Jean Nicod)

Period of stay: May 13, 2013 – May 18, 2013

STSM Title: Ellipsis and variable binding

My research work within the frame of the SignGram Action up to now has focused on the syntax of LIS in a comparative perspective. In particular, I focused on three main topics: questions, imperatives and constituency tests, with a particular stress on ellipsis and proform. This short STSM starts from an observation that emerged during data collection on ellipsis, namely the finding that there seems to be a difference in meaning between (1) and (2). English sentence (2) admits both a strict and a sloppy reading. However, LIS sentence (1) admits only the strict reading.

(1) GIANNI SAY IX-3Gianni MARIA KISS. PIERO SAME

(2) Gianni said that he kissed Maria and Piero did, too

Strict reading: Gianni said that Gianni kissed Maria and Piero said that Gianni kissed Maria

Sloppy reading: Gianni said that Gianni kissed Maria and Piero said that Piero kissed Maria



COST is supported
by the EU Framework Programme



ESF provides the COST Office
through a European Commission contract

The contrast is interesting since my previous research on LIS suggests that the sign SAME is an adverbial expression, akin to 'as well/too', which occurs in the context of VP ellipsis. So, the difference in the distribution of the sloppy reading between (1) and (2) is not due to any obvious difference in the structure of the two sentences.

One hypothesis that I am considering is that this difference might be ultimately due to the fact that anaphora is determined spatially in sign languages. It is well-known that a pronoun and its antecedent must be articulated in the same position in the neutral space (the same *locus*). So GIANNI and IX-3 in (1) are articulated in the same locus.

A possible explanation emerges if one assumes a PF deletion approach for VP ellipsis, according to which a full-fledged VP is generated in the SAME clause in (1), although it goes unuttered. I assume that the antecedent and the elided VP must be (near) identical, as discussed in much previous work on VP ellipsis. I also assume that loci of pronouns are specified in the syntactic representation of the sentence, since they enter syntactic phenomena like agreement, binding etc. Given the identity requirement between antecedent and elided VP, the locus of the unuttered pronoun in the elided VP must be the same as the locus of the pronoun in the antecedent VP. But this locus is the position where GIANNI is uttered, so the strict reading is forced. This is shown in (1').

(1') GIANNI SAY IX-3Gianni MARIA KISS. PIERO SAY IX-3Gianni MARIA KISS SAME

As this type of explanation builds on a modality specific property, the distribution of the sloppy/strict reading is expected to be relatively constant across sign languages. However, ongoing work by Philippe Schlenker and colleagues seems to show that LSF allows the sloppy reading much more freely than LIS. It remains to be seen if this difference between LIS and LSF is due to the methodology for data collection or is a genuine cross-linguistic difference that questions the analysis proposed above. To disentangle this issue, I will work with Carlo Geraci, Mirko Santoro and Philippe Schlenker.

Since my STSM will take place shortly before the SignGram workshop on imperatives (Istanbul, May 29), in which the Italian research team will report on LIS imperatives, I plan to finish collecting and discussing data on this topic as well.

Carlo Cecchetto



COST is supported
by the EU Framework Programme



ESF provides the COST Office
through a European Commission contract