## Sequential morphology of agentive marker -PERSON in Sign Language of the Netherlands Door Spruijt, University of Amsterdam

Sign languages (SLs) primarily make use of simultaneous morphological processes and rarely exhibit sequential morphological behavior (e.g., Meir 2012), as opposed to spoken languages, where simultaneity (e.g., ablaut or tone) is far rarer than sequential morphology (e.g., affixation or cliticization) (e.g., Aronoff et al. 2005). This striking difference between spoken and signed languages is attributed to the nature of the visuo-spatial modality, and is not limited to the domain of morphology, but is displayed throughout all linguistic areas of SLs (e.g., Emmorey 2002).

Simultaneous morphology in SLs often entails a manual sign that is accompanied by non-manual markers (e.g., facial expressions, body or head movement), or modification of one of the signs parameters (handshape, location, movement or orientation) in a meaningful way (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Three forms of the sign LEARN (Israeli SL): (a) base form (b) iterative (c) durational (Meir, 2012:82).

Within sequential morphological processes, compounding can be found relatively frequently in SLs, but affixation is almost, though not entirely, non-existent (Meir 2012). In at least three different SLs an agentive marker derived from the independent sign glossed as PERSON is said to combine with another sign to agentivise it (Pfau & Steinbach 2013) (Figure 2) and a similar agentive marker can be found in Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT, *Nederlandse Gebarentaal*).



PREACH PREACHER
Figure 2 ASL signs PREACH and PREACHER (Fernald & Napoli, 2003:10).

Compounding and affixation share that they both often involve some phonological reduction of the source sign (Sandler & Lillo-Martin 2006) (Figure 3), and mouthings<sup>1</sup> can spread over both compounds and affixes (Crasborn et al. 2008a), but they differ in their degree of productivity. Compounds are generally relatively fixed in their combination, whereas affixes can be hosted by an array of different signs or even word classes.



PERSON

Agentive marker

Figure 3 <u>American SL</u> signs PERSON and the agentive marker -PERSON as part of a complex sign (Fernald & Napoli, 2003:9).

This study aimed to determine the status of this agentive use of the NGT sign PERSON (Figure 4) as an independent sign, one part of a compound, or an affix. For this, the formal properties (the parameters and possible mouthings) of the independent sign PERSON were compared to those of the instances of the semantically hosted -PERSON, and the diversity of hosts -PERSON can attach to was identified. 58 instances of (-)PERSON were extracted from the Corpus NGT (Crasborn et al. 2008b), of which half was independent, and half was semantically hosted.



Figure 4 NGT sign PERSON.

Although no visible phonological reduction in -PERSON was observed, mouthings almost always (87%) spread over semantically hosted -PERSON, while they never spread over signs adjacent to the independent signs adjacent to the independent sign PERSON. The hosts were of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Mouthings are articulations of a spoken word, related to the produced sign (Crasborn et al. 2008a).

three different word classes, adjectives, nouns and verbs, and therefore -PERSON can be said to be highly productive. Furthermore, some semantic erosion appears, going from 'person' or 'somebody' to 'human that is/does X'.

The phonological cohesion brought on by the spread of mouthings and high productivity lead to the conclusion that -PERSON is grammaticalizing into an agentive affix, and the lack of phonological reduction may be explained by the relatively young age of NGT (approximately 200 years), giving little opportunity for change (Aronoff et al. 2005).

## References

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