Use of signing space in simultaneous sign language interpretation:
Marking discourse structure with the body

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A fundamental difference between signed and spoken languages is that in signed languages the signer uses the three dimensional space in front of him/her (signing space) and his/her own body for reference and cohesion. According to recent studies of signed languages (e.g. Liddell, 2003; Liddell, Vogt-Svendsen & Bergman, 2007; Nilsson, 2010; Dudis, 2011) such linguistic tools make use of the conceptual blending process (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

Optimal use of signing space is dependent on the signer’s knowledge of what s/he is going to talk about. In a simultaneous interpreting situation, both the content and the structure of the discourse become known to the interpreter only gradually. Thus, it is difficult for an interpreter working simultaneously into a signed language to know how to best structure the discourse, as there is no way s/he can know exactly what the speaker will say next. To date, there are only a few studies regarding use of signing space in simultaneously interpreted signed language.

In the present study, Swedish Sign Language (SSL) interpreters have been filmed when interpreting from spoken Swedish into SSL. Both interpreters whose first language is SSL (L1 interpreters) and those who are second language learners of SSL (L2 interpreters) have been recorded. Their signed language production is studied using a model based in Conceptual Blending Theory, and mainly analyzing use of Real Space Blending (Liddell, 2003), focusing on how they use signing space and their body to mark the discourse structure. Does the interpreting situation make interpreters use fewer of the linguistic tools available, or use them differently than in spontaneously produced SSL (as described in e.g. Nilsson, 2010)?

The unexpected findings of a preliminary analysis indicate striking differences both in how and how much the recorded L1 and L2 interpreters use their body, especially regarding the use of movements of the upper body. In this presentation, I will show how the L1 interpreters structure the discourse content using buoys and tokens (Liddell, 2003) in a highly visual interplay with body movements. Buoys and tokens are combined with e.g. sideways movements and rotations of the upper body, thereby marking the structure of the discourse. The L1 interpreters move their upper body in a manner that gives a relaxed and natural impression, frequently e.g. raising their shoulders as part of sign production. Despite finding out the discourse content only gradually, and while already rendering their interpretation of what has been said so far, they manage to produce signed discourse that is strikingly similar to spontaneously produced SSL discourse. In comparison, as we will see, the L2 interpreters generally move their upper body less, and they use fewer buoys and tokens. Their use of directions in signing space to indicate e.g. contrast and/or comparisons is more stereotypical, and their body movements do not reflect the structure of the discourse to the same extent.

References
The uses and practices of sign languages are strongly related to scientific research on sign languages and vice versa. Conversely, sign linguistics cannot be separated from Deaf community practices, including practices in education and interpretation. Therefore, the current volume brings together work on sign language interpreting, the use of spoken and sign language with deaf children with cochlear implants and early language development in children exposed to both a spoken and sign language, and reports on recent research on aspects of sign language structure. Simultaneous interpretation helps to break down language barriers around the world. No matter which language a delegate communicates in, he or she can easily follow the speaker in real-time now with the help of simultaneous interpretation. Reasons, why simultaneous interpretation is so important, are given below: it provides efficient communication simultaneously offering all delegates an equal opportunity to speak their mind and listen in their own language. This is genuinely called interactive communication where no one gets left behind due to a communication barrier.

First, for signed language discourse, space is both semantically and phonologically loaded. Signers’ semantic and phonological choices for Place symbolic structures are motivated by embodied experience and the abstraction of usage events. We examine the conceptualization of space in signed language discourse within the theory of cognitive grammar. Adopting a Places view, we define Place as a symbolic structure that associates a schematic semantic pole and a schematic phonological pole. Signs were originally described as incorporating locations on or near the body and those that are produced in an unmarked three-dimensional signing space in front of the signer’s head and torso, extending from a little above the head to a little below the waist. In sign languages of the deaf some signs can meaningfully point toward things or can be meaningfully placed in the space ahead of the signer. This obligatory part of fluent grammatical signing has no parallel in vocally produced languages. This book focuses on American Sign Language to examine the grammatical and conceptual purposes served by these directional signs. Paper presented at conference, Conceptual Structures in Discourse and Language 5, University of California, Santa Barbara, May 11â€“14, 2000 Google Scholar. Duncan, Susan. 1993. Space in Danish Sign Language: the Semantics and Morphosyntax of the Use of Space in a Visual Language. Hamburg: Signum Press Google Scholar. Fauconnier, Gilles.