

The Danish Sign Language sign ÆGTE ('genuine') and its functions as a marker of intensification, epistemic modality and subjective emphasis

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In recent years sign linguists have become increasingly interested in the origins of grammatical elements in signed languages. Most signed languages have a short history, at most a couple of hundred years, and the data from earlier stages of the languages are sparse, mostly dictionaries or word lists with drawings of signs (see, however, Wilcox 2009). An alternative to tracing the origins in earlier stages of the languages is internal reconstruction, i.e., hypotheses about pathways based on analyses of polysemy of the current forms of the languages (e.g., Xavier & Wilcox 2014, Pfau & Steinbach 2011). In this study, the focus is on the polysemy of the sign ÆGTE 'genuine' in Danish Sign Language (DTS) as it appears primarily from corpus data from the DTS dictionary (<https://tegnsprog.dk>), supplemented with discussions with native signers.

ÆGTE is derived from the sign of the letter Æ in the DTS hand alphabet. In spoken Danish the word meaning 'genuine', starts with the letter æ in its written form, which leaves no doubt about the origin of the sign form. However, the sign has functions that are excluded for *ægte* in spoken Danish. Thus, the polysemy of ÆGTE appears to have developed independently of the majority language.

ÆGTE may be used as a noun meaning 'reality' in contrast to 'phantasy':

- (1) topicalized enumeration
MANY CHILDREN / PHANTASY ÆGTE UNCLEAR /
'For many children the difference between phantasy and reality is unclear.'

As a predicate or a lexical modifier ÆGTE may mean 'genuine' and 'true':

- (2) reference check negated
ALL JEWELLERY SHINY / MY MOTHER POSS_h / ÆGTE / FALSE /
'All my mother's diamond jewellery is genuine, it's not fake.'

- (3) topicalized
ÆGTE STORY / ONE ADDICT / THROW OFF BUS MOTOR WAY BY PEDAGOGUE /
'It's a true story. An addict was thrown off a bus on the freeway by a pedagogue.'

In (4) ÆGTE is used as an intensifier, modifying a predicate:

- (4) topicalized
YESTERDAY / I SEE AMUSING MOVIE / ÆGTE AMUSING /
'Yesterday, I saw a funny movie, it was really funny.'

ÆGTE with an epistemic meaning ('really, in reality') may have scope over the proposition when there is a contrast with some other situation.

- (5) HOW-FUNNY WEATHER MOUNTAIN / BE-CALLED WEATHER MOUNTAIN /
'Imagine, it is called Sky Mountain!

ÆGTE ONLY HILL / PALM-UP /
'It's really only a hill.'

In dialogues ÆGTE is used to elicit verification of a proposition ('Really?') and to support the proposition in the response ('Indeed!').

Finally, ÆGTE can be used subjectively to emphasize speaker meaning (cf. Paradis 2003).

- (6) ÆGTE I STRONGLY-DISAPPROVE_{mr} GRANDMOTHER PT_{mr} SELL WARM HOUSE /
'Indeed, I strongly disapprove of grandmother having sold the cottage.'

Somewhat similar polysemy of words meaning 'genuine' or 'true' has been found in English (*real, really*, Paradis 2003; *very*, Breban & Davidse 2016) and German (*echt*, Ørsnes 202). In my talk I shall present the hypothesized diachronic path of ÆGTE and interpret it within Langacker's (1991) and Traugott's (1995) notions of subjectification.

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