

# The impact of modality and bimodal language contact on colexification: spatial lexemes in African and European sign languages Victoria Nyst

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Their visual-spatial modality allows sign languages (SLs) to represent spatial information in a direct, iconic way. Thus, most SLs use complex verbs of location and movement also known as classifier constructions'. In addition to these well-studied, productive classifier constructions, most sign languages also have lexicalized spatial signs. These inconspicuous lexicalized spatial terms have received relatively little attention, but shed light on fundamental ways in which language modality and contact with spoken languages jointly shape SL structure. In this talk, I will compare lexicalized spatial terms in a West African SL and in various Western European SLs.

In Adamorobe SL, used in Ghana, a closed set of directional lexemes is used. These lexemes are specified for transitivity in serial verb constructions. These serial verb constructions have corresponding structures in the surrounding spoken language Akan.

In Western SLs, lexicalized forms of classifier constructions typically come with a fixed mouthing and/or gloss, in the form of a prepositional term from the surrounding spoken language. An example is Dutch SL DOOR, which formally depicts an entity crossing another, and which comes with the mouthing [do:].

These 'preposition signs' are understood to have come about through language contact (Delaporte 2007) or to be part of sign supported speech. However, they may be highly frequent in some SLs; IN, TO, WITH, and FOR are among the 26 most frequent signs in ASL, with a higher frequency than common signs like WHY, SAY, WHERE and DON'T-KNOW (Morford & MacFarlane 2003). Such 'preposition signs' may also grammaticalize, e.g. OP in Dutch SL (Bos 1994) and AUF in German SL (Rathmann 2000) which function as auxiliaries. In some Western SLs, these 'preposition signs' have expanded their semantics to include those of corresponding phrasal verbs in which the prepositions participate in the surrounding spoken language. For example, DOOR can also mean 'to continue', reflecting the structure of the Dutch equivalent *doorgaan*. In some cases, the co-lexified meaning runs counter to the iconicity of the original classifier construction. Thus, Dutch SL MEE 'with' iconically depicts a transitive action, i.e. pulling someone along, but can be used to mean 'participate' in reference to Dutch *meedoen*.

In this talk, I compare colexification patterns in spatial lexemes in Adamorobe SL, Dutch SL, Danish SL and French SL to explore the influence of modality and language contact. To this end, I will use the literature on spatial lexemes, dictionaries, and the Dutch SL corpus.

## References

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