

# Visible Meaning:

## Sign Language and the Foundations of Semantics

Philippe Schlenker<sup>\*</sup>  
(Institut Jean-Nicod, CNRS; New York University)

Preliminary draft, April 3, 2015

**Abstract.** While it is now accepted that sign languages should inform and constrain theories of 'Universal Grammar', their role in 'Universal Semantics' has been under-studied. We argue that they have a crucial role to play in the foundations of semantics, for two reasons. First, in some cases *sign languages provide overt evidence on crucial aspects of the Logical Form of sentences*, ones that are only inferred indirectly in spoken language. For instance, sign language 'loci', which are positions in signing space that can arguably realize logical variables; they make it possible to revisit foundational debates about the syntactic reality of variables, mechanisms of temporal and modal anaphora, and the existence of dynamic binding. Another example pertains to mechanisms of 'context shift', which were postulated on the basis of indirect evidence in spoken language, but which are arguably realized overtly in sign language. Second, along one dimension *sign languages are strictly more expressive than spoken languages* because iconic phenomena can be found at their logical core. This applies to loci themselves, which may *simultaneously* be logical variables and simplified pictures of what they denote; and context shift comes with some iconic requirements as well. As a result, the semantic system of spoken languages can in some respects be seen as a 'degenerate' version of the richer semantics found in sign languages. Two conclusions could be drawn from this observation. One is that the full extent of Universal Semantics can only be studied in sign language. An alternative possibility is that spoken languages have comparable expressive mechanisms, but only when co-speech gestures are taken into account. Either way, sign languages have a crucial role to play in investigations of the foundations of semantics.

---

<sup>\*</sup> Institut Jean-Nicod (ENS - EHESS - CNRS), Département d'Etudes Cognitives, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris, France ; PSL Research University ; New York University, New York.

**Consultants:** this research summarizes research that appeared in various articles, and which owe much to the work of the following consultants:

ASL: Jonathan Lamberton

LSF: Yann Cantin, Ludovic Ducasse

Their work is gratefully acknowledged.

**Pictures:** pictures that are not cited from published work are stills from videos cited in the text; they are used with the consultants' explicit consent. Their consent is gratefully acknowledged.

**Grant acknowledgments:** The present work was supported by an Advanced Grant of the European Research Council ('New Frontiers of Formal Semantics'). The research reported in this piece also contributes to the COST Action IS1006. Three of the authors' home institution, Institut d'Études Cognitives (of which Institut Jean-Nicod is a member), is supported by grants ANR-10-LABX-0087 IEC and ANR-10-IDEX-0001-02 PSL\*.

**Prior work:** this paper explicitly borrows from earlier publications on sign language semantics (references are added at the beginning of the relevant sections). While the data and formalisms are mostly not new, the general perspective is.

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: Language Across Modalities</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	Goals	2
1.2	Sign Languages and Universal Grammar	3
1.3	Two hypotheses	4
1.4	Elicitation methods and transcription conventions	5
1.4.1	Elicitation methods	5
1.4.2	Transcription conventions	6
<b>2</b>	<b>Logical Visibility I: Visible Variables</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	Variable Visibility	6
2.2	Loci as variables	7
2.3	Individual, time and world variables	9
2.4	Dynamic variables	12
2.5	Variables or features - or both?	15
2.5.1	Kuhn's attack	15
2.5.2	Two problems	16
2.5.3	Two directions	17
<b>3</b>	<b>Logical Visibility II: Beyond Variables</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1	Role Shift as visible context shift	19
3.1.1	Basic data	19
3.1.2	Typology	20
3.1.3	Further complexities	22
3.2	Aspect: visible event decomposition	23
<b>4</b>	<b>Iconicity I: Iconic Variables</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1	Introduction	24
4.2	Iconic Effects	24
4.3	Embedded Loci: Plurals	26
4.4	High and low loci	27
4.4.1	Initial cases	27
4.4.2	Further developments	30
4.5	Locative Shift	32
<b>5</b>	<b>Iconicity II: Beyond Variables</b>	<b>34</b>
5.1	Classifier constructions	34
5.2	Event visibility or event iconicity?	35
5.3	Iconic effects in Role Shift	36
5.4	Metaphors (Meir 2010)	39
<b>6</b>	<b>Theoretical Directions</b>	<b>40</b>
6.1	Sign language vs. spoken language	40
6.2	One module or two modules?	43
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion: the Sign Language Perspective on Meaning</b>	<b>43</b>

## 1 Introduction: Language Across Modalities

### 1.1 Goals

While it is now accepted that sign languages should inform and constrain theories of 'Universal Grammar', their role in 'Universal Semantics' has been under-studied (but see Zucchi 2012 for an introduction). We argue that they have a crucial role to play in the foundations of semantics, for two reasons.

- First, in some cases *sign languages provide overt evidence on crucial aspects of the Logical Form of sentences* that are only inferred indirectly in spoken language. One example pertains to sign language 'loci', which are positions in signing space that can arguably realize logical variables; they make it possible to revisit foundational debates about the syntactic reality of variables, mechanisms of temporal and modal anaphora, and the existence of dynamic binding. Another example pertains to mechanisms of 'context shift', which were postulated on the basis of indirect evidence in some spoken languages, but which are arguably realized overtly in sign language.

- Second, along one dimension *sign languages are strictly more expressive than spoken languages* because iconic phenomena can be found at their logical core. This applies to loci themselves, which

may *simultaneously* be logical variables and simplified pictures of what they denote; and context shift comes with some iconic requirements as well. As a result, the semantic system usually described for spoken languages can in some respects be seen as a 'degenerate' version of the richer semantics found in sign languages. Two possible conclusions could be drawn from this observation. One is that the full extent of Universal Semantics can only be studied in sign languages. An alternative possibility is that spoken languages have comparable expressive mechanisms, but only when co-speech gestures are taken into account. Either way, sign languages have a crucial role to play in investigations of the foundations of semantics.

## 1.2 *Sign Languages and Universal Grammar*

As Sandler and Lillo-Martin write to introduce their ground-breaking survey (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006 p. xv),

sign languages are conventional communication systems that arise spontaneously in all deaf communities. They are acquired during childhood through normal exposure without instruction. Sign languages effectively fulfill the same social and mental functions as spoken languages, and they can even be simultaneously interpreted into and from spoken languages in real time.

While our understanding of their history is often quite incomplete (but see Delaporte 2007 on the history of LSF, and Delaporte and Shaw 2009, 2010, to appear on the history of ASL), the natural development of several recent sign languages has been documented in great detail by linguists and psycholinguists (Brentari and Coppola 2012; Meir et al. 2010). For our purposes, what matters is that sign languages have come to play an important role in studies of universals in phonology, morphology and syntax, for linguistic and neurological reasons.

Starting from the least linguistic approach first, a major finding of neurological studies is that,

“overwhelmingly, lesion and neuroimaging studies indicate that the neural systems supporting signed and spoken language are very similar: both involve a predominantly left-lateralised perisylvian network. Recent studies have also highlighted processing differences between languages in these different modalities.” (MacSweeney et al. 2008)

To give an example, the core method in neuroimaging studies of language perception consists in identifying (i) areas that are activated by spoken language but not by a comparable non-linguistic auditory control, and (ii) areas that are activated by sign language but not by a comparable non-linguistic visual control. The areas identified by (i) and (ii) turn out to be the classic language centers in both modalities (Broca's area and Wernicke's areas). Similarly, brain lesions have comparable effects in the two domains. As mentioned by MacSweeney et al. 2008 and much recent research, these results certainly don't entail that there are no differences in the neural underpinnings of spoken and sign language, but they strongly suggest that such differences are found in the background of considerable similarities.

From a linguistic perspective, the spoken/sign language comparison is easiest to perform within syntax. Sander and Lillo-Martin 2006 discuss pervasive typological similarities between signed and spoken language in this domain. While the sign language of a given Deaf community may be influenced by the spoken language of the surrounding hearing community (for instance by the device of fingerspelling, which makes it possible to borrow words from written languages), it is always a safe bet that its grammar is entirely distinct. One reason is that natural sign languages usually make heavy use of devices that have no direct counterpart in spoken words, for instance positions in signing space or 'loci' used to realize pronominal meanings, but with many more distinctions than are afforded by spoken language pronouns, as is discussed below. Even when some rules of the surrounding spoken language *could* be borrowed, this need not at all be the case, due to the independent history and development of sign languages. For instance, both American and Italian Sign Languages (ASL and LIS – among quite a few others) are descended from Old French Sign Language, and thus share some properties of contemporary French Sign Language (LSF); English influence on ASL can certainly happen, but the two languages have very different histories. Italian Sign Language has an underlying

word order of the type SOV (Subject Object Verb), whereas Italian has an underlying SVO order (Cecchetto et al. 2006). Examples could easily be multiplied.

More surprising perhaps, even sign language phonology (and morphology) has been argued to form a natural class with their spoken language counterparts. Without going into details, the general picture is in fact more intuitive than it might initially appear. A crucial insight of contemporary phonology is that the atomic elements of sound are not phonemes but features, many of which can be seen as *articulatory instructions* to the production system (as a second approximation, one must take into account perceptual features as well). Thus *b*, *d* and *g* share some articulatory properties (e.g. all three involve vibrating vocal folds), but they differ in one crucial respect: *b* is produced with the lips (it is a *labial* consonant), *d* is produced with the tongue blade (it is a *coronal* consonant), and *g* is produced with the tongue body (it is a *dorsal* consonant; see e.g. Halle 1978). In effect, these properties encode *articulatory gestures*, a notion that has immediate counterparts in sign language, though the articulators are of course different. As a result, it is natural to ask whether the organization and behavior of these features is similar across modalities. For instance, in both domains phonologists have argued that features have a tree-like organization whereby some features are dependent on others, and are subject to rules of assimilation in which some features of a phoneme can spread to a neighboring phoneme (see Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006 pp. 10-11). Thus some aspects of phonological organization appear to be common to spoken and to sign language.

In what follows, we will take for granted the conclusions of recent linguistic research on the role of sign languages in studies of Universal Grammar, i.e. of the shared properties and of the parameters of variation found in the phonology, morphology and especially syntax of human languages. Universal Semantics can be similarly defined as the comparative study of interpretive processes in language, with the goal of determining which interpretive properties are universal and which are open to variation (and if possible, why). Given the other similarities found between spoken and sign languages, it should go without saying that the latter have a role to play in studies of Universal Semantics. But we will argue that some properties of sign languages should give them a central role in foundational studies of semantics. In Sections 2-3, we consider various cases in which sign languages provide overt evidence on crucial aspects of the Logical Form of sentences; these particularly pertain to the role and properties of variables, which are arguably overt in sign languages (Section 2); but context shift and aspect display interesting cases of 'visibility' as well (Section 3). In Sections 4-5, we consider a dimension along which sign languages are strictly more expressive than spoken languages because they can make use of much richer iconic resources. Importantly, these iconic phenomena are found at the logical core of sign language, an in particular at the level of loci, which can simultaneously be logical variables and simplified pictures of what they denote (Section 4); iconicity also interacts in interesting ways with constructions that have been the object of active discussions in semantics, such as context shift (Section 5). Finally, in Section 6 we discuss two possible views of the role of sign languages in studies of Universal Semantics. One view is that, along dimension at least, sign languages provide information that is intrinsically lacking from spoken languages due to the poverty of iconic resources in the latter. An alternative view is that rich iconic phenomena can be obtained in spoken languages as well, but only when co-speech gestures are fully integrated to semantic studies.

### 1.3 Two hypotheses

Since we will be repeatedly referring to the ways in which sign languages can bring *special* insights into the foundations of semantics, we will state our main hypotheses at the outset. The first hypothesis pertains to the ability of sign languages to provide overt evidence on key aspects the logical structure of language, ones that one can only infer indirect in spoken languages.

#### (1) Hypothesis 1: Logical Visibility<sup>2</sup>

Sign languages can make overt some mechanisms which (i) have been posited in the analysis of the Logical Form of spoken language sentences, but (ii) are not morphologically realized in spoken languages.

---

<sup>2</sup> We use the term 'logical' loosely, to refer to primitive distinctions that play a key role in a semantic analysis. Some of our examples are logical categories in the strict sense (e.g. logical variables), but others are not (e.g. the representation of aspectual classes). We avoid the term 'LF visibility' because it might be associated with a

Examples will involve in particular (a) covert variables that have been posited to disambiguate relations of binding in spoken language, and are realized as loci in sign languages; and (b) covert operations of context shift, which have been argued to be useful to analyze the behavior of indexicals in some spoken languages, and are realized as Role Shift in sign languages.

The second hypothesis concerns the possibility that, along some dimensions, the semantics of sign language is strictly more expressive than that of spoken language.

(2) **Hypothesis 2: Iconicity**

Sign languages make use of expressions that simultaneously fulfill a logical/grammatical and fulfill have iconic semantics, defined as a semantics in which some geometric properties of signs must be preserved by the interpretation function.

Examples will primarily involve sign language loci, which can simultaneously fulfill the role of variable *and* display pictorial/diagrammatic properties.

A note might be in order about the history of these hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 1* has an old instantiation in Lillo-Martin and Klima 1990, who suggested that sign language loci can be analyzed as logical indices. This hypothesis is commonly accepted in sign language research (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006), although we will discuss many semantic consequences which are less standard, as well as some problems for it raised by Kuhn, to appear. In the verbal domain, Wilbur postulated an 'Event Visibility Hypothesis' according to which crucial aspects of the event structure of verbal predicates is visible in the phonological form of the predicate sign.

*Hypothesis 2* combines two strands of research which are often separated. While several researchers have noted the role iconic considerations in the analysis of sign language anaphora (Liddell 2003 and Kegl 2004), few have attempted to construct a framework that incorporates iconicity within the logical frameworks used in contemporary formal semantics. Researchers of the 'iconic camp' put much emphasis on iconic phenomena, often with interesting empirical insights, but with little connection to formal syntax and usually none to model-theoretic semantics (e.g. Cuxac 1999, Cuxac and Salandre 2007, Taub 2001, Liddell 2003). Researchers from the 'formalist camp' often develop their theories within contemporary generative grammar, but even in cases in which iconic phenomena play a prominent role (as in direction verbs, discussed below), they can only incorporate iconic phenomena as a separate system, without combining its semantics with the grammatical spine of the language (e.g. Lillo-Martin and Klima 1990, Neidle et al. 2000, Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006). Following Schlenker et al. 2013, we motivate the development of a formal semantics with iconicity to address this challenge.

#### **1.4 Elicitation methods and transcription conventions**

Two remarks are in order about elicitation methods and transcription conventions.

##### *1.4.1 Elicitation methods*

Most of the data discussed below are cited from recent articles published in linguistics journals. In many cases, data were elicited using the 'playback method', with repeated quantitative acceptability judgments (1-7, with 7 = best) and repeated inferential judgments (on separate days) on videos involving minimal pairs (see e.g. Schlenker et al. 2013, Schlenker 2014); we have kept quantitative judgments when these appeared in earlier publications. In a nutshell, this method involves two steps. First, a sign language consultant signs sentences of interest on a video, as part of a paradigm (e.g. often with 2 to 5 sentences) signed as minimal pairs. Second, the consultant provides quantitative

---

different idea, namely that a particular level of representation posited in some generative approaches, called 'LF', might be more transparently visible in some languages than in others. It has sometimes been claimed, for instance, that the 'LF position of quantifiers' is relatively transparently represented in Hungarian (e.g. Brody and Szabolcsi 2003); this syntactic claim is of course an unrelated claim to the hypothesis discussed here.

acceptability ratings, as well as inferential judgments, and enters them in a computer, and redundantly signs them a video. This step can be repeated on other days, usually with the same consultant – although it can be performed with further consultants if feasible and necessary. The advantage of this method is to allow for the precise assessment of minimal pairs (signed on the same video), in a quantitative, replicable way. Even when the judgments are obtained from a very small number of consultants (often one or two), the repetition of the task makes it possible to assess the stability of the judgments; and the method could be turned into an experimental if necessary in the future. Note that when judgments were obtained with a more traditional categorization of sentences as 'acceptable'/unacceptable' (rather than a quantitative scale), we kept the convention of having sentences preceded by \* if unacceptable, and by nothing if acceptable.

### 1.4.2 *Transcription conventions*

In the following, sign language sentences are glossed in capital letters. Indices of the form *WORD*<sub>*i*</sub> and *WORD*<sub>*i*</sub> indicate that the relevant word is associated with the locus (= position in signing space) *i*. Locus names are assigned from right to left from the signer's perspective; thus when loci *a*, *b*, *c* are mentioned, *a* appears on the signer's right, *c* on the left, and *b* somewhere in between. Pronouns, glossed as *IX* (for 'index'), can point back towards previously established loci. In such cases, the locus is suffixed to the pronoun, so that *IX-a* is a pronoun that points towards (or 'indexes') locus *a*; the numbers 1 and 2 correspond to the position of the signer and addressee respectively. Importantly, indexes can also be used to *establish* a locus (see fn. 5). An expression signed in locus *a* is transcribed with *a* as a subscript; this is in particular the case of classifiers, e.g. *CL<sub>a</sub>* stands for a classifier signed in locus *a*. *IX-arc-a* refers to a plural pronoun indexing locus *a*. When an expression indexes a default locus, it is usually written without a letter index (e.g. *IX* rather than *IX-a*). Specifications are sometimes added to distinguish different classifiers – e.g. *CL-hang* stands for a classifier denoting a person in hanging position. Finally, *rep* is used when an expression is repeated.

In most cases we omit non-manuals and manual modulations, except in our discussion of Role Shift in Section 3.1, where they are crucial. *RS<sub>a</sub>* encodes Role Shift, typically realized with at least body shift and eyegaze shift, and corresponding to the perspective of a character associated with locus *a*. When non-manual modulations are encoded, they appear on a line above the signs they modify, and ^ encodes raised eyebrows.

## 2 Logical Visibility I: Visible Variables

We start with our discussion of Logical Visibility with sign language loci, which were analyzed by several researchers (starting with Lillo-Martin and Klima 1990) as the overt manifestation of logical variables.

### 2.1 *Variable Visibility*

Sentences such as (3)a and (4)b can be understood in three ways, depending on whether the embedded pronoun is understood to depend on the subject, on the object, or to be deictic.

- (3) a. Sarkozy<sub>*i*</sub> told Obama<sub>*k*</sub> that he<sub>*i/k/m*</sub> would be re-elected.  
 b. Sarkozy λ<sub>*i*</sub> Obama λ<sub>*k*</sub> t<sub>*i*</sub> told t<sub>*k*</sub> that he<sub>*i/k/m*</sub> would be re-elected.
- (4) a. [A representative]<sub>*i*</sub> told [a senator]<sub>*k*</sub> that he<sub>*i/k/m*</sub> would be re-elected.  
 b. [a representative]<sub>*i*</sub> λ<sub>*i*</sub> [a senator]<sub>*k*</sub> λ<sub>*k*</sub> t<sub>*i*</sub> told t<sub>*k*</sub> that he<sub>*i/k/m*</sub> be re-elected

These ambiguities have been analyzed in great detail in frameworks that posit that pronouns have the semantics of variables, which may be bound by a quantifier, or which may be free and received their value from an assignment function provided by the context. For instance, in the textbook analysis of Heim and Kratzer 1998, one way to represent the ambiguity for (3)a is through the Logical Form in (3)b (although because the subject and object are referring expressions, there are several alternative ways to represent the ambiguity). And (4)b is the Logical Form of (4)a in the same framework. Sometimes these representations can get quite complex, for instance to capture the fact that plural pronouns may be simultaneously bound by several quantifiers, as in (the relevant reading of) (5)a, represented as in (5)b.

- (5) a. [A representative]<sub>i</sub> told [a senator]<sub>k</sub> that they<sub>i,k</sub> would be re-elected.  
 b. [a representative]<sub>i</sub> λ<sub>i</sub> [a senator]<sub>k</sub> λ<sub>k</sub> t<sub>i</sub> told t<sub>k</sub> that they<sub>i+k</sub> be re-elected

While it is clear that, say, the sentence in (4)a is ambiguous, it is not at all uncontroversial that one should capture its readings by positing invisible indices that are nonetheless supposed to be cognitively and semantically real. In fact, following in the footsteps of Quine 1960, a movement of 'variable-free semantics' has proposed to analyze such ambiguities without recourse to variables to begin with (e.g. Jacobson 1999).

In this section, we survey recent results that suggest that sign language displays an overt version of something close to the indices of (3)-(5), and that this fact can be used to revisit some foundational questions in semantics. It will prove useful to distinguish between two versions of this 'hypothesis of variable visibility'. According to the Weak Version, it is possible to associate to both a pronoun and to its antecedent a symbol (namely a locus) that marks their dependency, and to associate to different pronouns different symbols if they denote different objects. According to the Strong version, the symbols in question – loci – really do display the behavior of variables – which as we will see below is a strictly stronger claim (in Section 2.5, we will discuss the possibility, raised by Kuhn, to appear, that loci should be viewed as agreement markers rather than as a variables; while such agreement markers will have the ability to disambiguate the relevant readings, they will not share other properties that one expects to find in logical variables).

## (6) Variable Visibility

### a. Weak Version

In sign language, a given locus in signing space can be associated both to a pronoun and to its antecedent to mark their dependency. Furthermore, deictic pronouns that refer to different objects may be associated to different loci.

### b. Strong Version.

In sign language, some uses of loci display the behavior of logical variables, both in their bound and in their free uses.

We will establish the plausibility of Variable Visibility (Section 2.2), and then we use it to revisit two foundational debates in semantics: first, are there time and world variables? (Section 2.3) second, can variables be dynamically bound? (Section 2.4) We will sketch a positive answer to both questions: first, the various versions of the pointing sign can have temporal and modal in addition to nominal uses; second, the dependency between pronouns and their antecedents made visible by loci behaves very much like dynamic binding, including in some cases in which (some) E-type approaches and dynamic approaches make different predictions. We will then revisit the choice between the Weak and the Strong version of Variable visibility by discussing data due to Kuhn to appear, according to which loci display some properties which are unexpected of *bona fide* variables (Section 2.5).

## 2.2 Loci as variables<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned, Lillo-Martin and Klima 1990 argued that logical variables or 'indices', which are usually covert in spoken languages, can be overtly realized in sign language by positions in signing space or 'loci'. In case a pronoun is used deictically or indexically, its locus usually corresponds to the actual position of its denotation, be it the speaker, the addressee, or some third person (e.g. Meier, to appear). If the pronoun is used anaphorically, the antecedent typically establishes a locus, which is then 'indexed' (= pointed at) by the pronoun. In (7)a (ASL), the sign names *Bush* and *Obama* establish loci by being signed in different positions; in (7)b, the antecedent DPs are accompanied with pointing signs that establish the relevant loci. In quantificational examples, indexing disambiguates among readings, as in (8) (LSF).

- (7) a. IX-1 KNOW BUSH<sub>a</sub> IX-1 KNOW OBAMA<sub>b</sub>. IX-b SMART BUT IX-a NOT SMART.  
 'I know Bush and I know Obama. He [= Obama] is smart but he [= Bush] is not smart.'

<sup>3</sup> This section borrows from Schlenker et al. 2013 and Schlenker 2014a, 2014b.

b. IX-1 KNOW PAST PRESIDENT IX-a IX-1 KNOW NOW PRESIDENT IX-b. IX-b SMART BUT IX-a NOT SMART.

'I know the former President and I know the current President. He [= the current President] is smart but he [=the former President] is not smart.'

(ASL; 4, 179; Schlenker 2011)

(8) DEPUTY<sub>b</sub> SENATOR<sub>a</sub> CL<sub>b</sub>-CL<sub>a</sub> IX-b a-TELL-b IX-a / IX-b WIN ELECTION

'An MP<sub>b</sub> told a senator<sub>a</sub> that he<sub>a</sub> / he<sub>b</sub> (= the deputy) would win the election.' (LSF; 4, 233)

The cases we just discussed involved singular loci. But when a pronoun denotes a plurality, it can be realized by an 'arc' pointing sign, which thus indexes a semi-circular area; and there are also dual and even trial pronouns when the pronoun denotes two or three individuals. Strikingly, these pronouns can simultaneously index several loci in cases corresponding to the 'split antecedents' discussed in (5). Thus in (9), the dual pronouns *THE-TWO-a,b* is realized as a horizontal 2 that goes back and forth between the two loci (and it can be checked that this is no accident: if the position of the loci is modified, the movement that realizes *THE-TWO* changes accordingly). More complex cases can easily be constructed, with trial or plural pronouns indexing more than two loci.

(9) IX-1 HAVE TWO TICKET. IF 1-GIVE JOHN<sub>a</sub> BILL<sub>b</sub>, THE-TWO-a,b HAPPY.

'I have two tickets. If I give them to John and Bill, they will be happy.' (ASL; 2, 180)

Since there appears to be an arbitrary number of possible loci, it was suggested that these do not spell out morpho-syntactic features, but rather are the overt realization of formal indices (Lillo-Martin and Klima 1990, Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006; we revisit this point in Section 2.5). While pointing can have a variety of uses in sign language (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006, Schlenker 2011a), we will restrict our attention to pronominal uses. Importantly, there are some striking similarities between sign language pronouns and their spoken counterparts, which makes it desirable to offer a unified theory:

- Sign language pronouns obey at least some of the syntactic constraints on binding studied in syntax. For instance, versions of the following rules have been described for ASL (Lillo-Martin 1991, Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006, Koulidobrova 2011): Condition A, which mandates that a reflexive pronoun such as *himself* corefer with a local antecedent (e.g. *He<sub>i</sub> admires himself<sub>i</sub>*); Condition B, which prohibits a non-reflexive pronoun from overlapping in reference with a local antecedent (hence the deviance of *#He<sub>i</sub> admires him<sub>i</sub>*, understood with coreference); and Strong Crossover, which prohibits a quantificational expression from moving to the left of a coindexed pronoun that c-commands its base position (hence the deviance of *#[Which man]<sub>i</sub> does he<sub>i</sub> think I will hire t<sub>i</sub>*, where *t<sub>i</sub>* is the base position of the interrogative expression, and *he<sub>i</sub>* is coindexed with it).

- In simple cases, the same ambiguity between strict and bound variable readings is found in both modalities (see Lillo-Martin and Sandler 2006; further cases will be discussed below):<sup>4</sup>

(10) IX-1 POSS-1 MOTHER LIKE. IX-a SAME-1,a.

*Ambiguous*: I like my mother. He does too [= like my / like his mother] (ASL; 1, 108)

- In addition, the same cases of 'donkey anaphora', or apparent binding without c-command, are found in sign and in spoken language (Schlenker 2011b) – a point we will explore in Section 2.4.

It is thus a reasonable hypothesis that the pronominal systems of sign and spoken language share at least a common core. We will now explore cases in which sign language loci arguably provide evidence for some positions in some foundational debates in semantics.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In order to provide a formal treatment of (10), we would need to posit a rule of 'locus erasure' – a point we will return to in Section 2.5.

<sup>5</sup> While we focus on pronominal uses of pointing towards a locus, it is important to note that there are at least four additional uses that have been discussed in the literature.

(i) As was indicated above in our glossing conventions, pointing can be used to *establish* a locus (e.g. Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006 p. 297).

(ii) Bahan et al. 1995 argue that in some cases an index plays the role of a definite determiner.

### 2.3 *Individual, time and world variables*<sup>6</sup>

We turn to the debate concerning the existence of an abstract anaphoric mechanism that applies in similar fashion to the nominal, temporal and modal domains. In a nutshell, we argue that ASL loci have all three types uses, and thus provide an argument in favor of the existence of such an abstract system. In what follows, it will be a good rule of thumb to take temporal and modal uses of loci to have roughly the same meaning as the English word *then*, which has both temporal and modal uses; the crucial difference is that in ASL the very same word can have nominal, temporal and modal uses (and locative uses as well, as we will see shortly); and that it 'wears its indices on its sleeves' because of the variable-like uses of loci.

The point is by no means trivial. In the tradition of modal and tense logic, it was thought that expressions are only *implicitly* evaluated with respect to times and possible worlds: language was thought to be endowed with variables denoting individuals, but no variables denoting times or possible worlds. By contrast, several researchers have argued after Partee 1973 and Stone 1997 that natural language has time- and world-denoting variables – albeit ones that are sometimes realized as affixes (tense, mood) rather than as full-fledged pronominal forms. In other cases (e.g. the word *then* in its temporal and modal uses), it is reasonable to posit that spoken language indeed has an overt temporal/pronoun, but that it happens to be pronounced differently from individual-denoting pronouns. Now if a single abstract anaphoric system is indeed at work across nominal, temporal and modal uses, one might expect that some languages have a single pronoun that can be used across ontological categories in this way. It has been argued before that there are indeed morphological or syntactic similarities across these categories (Bittner 2001, Bhatt and Pancheva 2001). Here we make the simple suggestion that in ASL a single pronoun can have nominal, temporal, modal and also locative uses.

The full argument has three steps:

1. As we discussed above, nominal anaphora in sign language usually involves (i) the establishment of positions in signing space, called 'loci', for antecedents; (ii) pointing towards these loci to express anaphora. Both properties are also found in the temporal and modal domains.
2. This observation doesn't just hold of the singular index; temporal uses of dual, trial and plural pronouns can be found. The phenomenon is thus general and it is not very plausible to posit that it is an accident that all these morphologically distinct pronouns simultaneously have nominal, temporal and modal uses.
3. Temporal and modal anaphora in ASL can give rise to patterns of inference that are characteristic of so-called 'donkey' pronouns (i.e. pronouns that depend on existential antecedents without being in their syntactic scope).

Here we will be content to just illustrate the first step of the argument, and refer the reader to Schlenker 2013a for further details.

- *Temporal indexing*: It can be seen in (11) that the same possibilities are open for temporal anaphora as were displayed for nominal anaphora in (7)-(8): antecedents establish loci; pronominal forms retrieve them by way of pointing.

(11) a. [YESTERDAY RAIN]<sub>a</sub> [DAY-BEFORE-YESTERDAY SNOW]<sub>b</sub>,       $\overset{\wedge}{\text{IX-b}}$  IX-1 HAPPY.       $\overset{\wedge}{\text{IX-a}}$

---

(iii) It has sometimes been claimed that pointing can be used solely for purposes of 'comparing' two situations (e.g. in Winston 1995). It is currently unclear what this amounts to in terms of contemporary semantic theory (for instance, it cannot be excluded that some of these uses involve propositional anaphora, but the situation is currently unclear); but this possibility will have to be kept in mind in our discussion.

(iv) Pointing signs can also have locative uses, with a meaning akin to *there*, as is for instance discussed in Bahan et al. 1995 (who note some phonological differences between locative and determiner uses). We come back to this issue in Section 2.3.

<sup>6</sup> This section borrows from Schlenker 2013a, b.

IX-1 NOT HAPPY.

‘Yesterday it rained and the day before yesterday it snowed. Then [= the day before yesterday] I was happy but then [= yesterday] I wasn’t happy.’

b.

[WHILE RAIN]<sub>a</sub> TEND WARM. [WHILE SNOW]<sub>b</sub> TEND COLD.  $\overset{\wedge}{IX}$ -b IX-1 HAPPY.  $\overset{\wedge}{IX}$ -a

IX-1 NOT HAPPY.

‘When it rains it is warm but when it snows it is cold. Then [= when it snows] I am happy but then [= when it rains] I am not happy.’

c. *Context*: I went skiing during the holidays.

[SOMETIMES RAIN]<sub>a</sub> [SOMETIMES SNOW]<sub>b</sub>.  $\overset{\wedge}{IX}$ -b IX-1 HAPPY.  $\overset{\wedge}{IX}$ -a IX-1 NOT HAPPY.

‘Sometimes it rained and sometimes it snowed. Then [= when it snowed] I was happy but then [= when it rained] I wasn’t happy.’

(Schlenker 2013a)

As can be seen, temporal indexicals, *when*-clauses (which are semantically similar to definite descriptions of times), and existential time quantifiers (*sometimes*) can all give rise to patterns of anaphora involving the same pronoun *IX* as in the nominal case (the existential cases involves a case of ‘dynamic binding’ whose nominal counterpart is discussed at greater length in Section 2.4). Importantly, loci appear in the *usual* signing space, which is in front of the signer. Although the words for *tomorrow* and *yesterday* are signed on the ‘time line’, which is on a sagittal plane (*tomorrow* is signed in the front, *yesterday* towards the back), no pointing occurs towards it, at least in this case (but see Emmorey 2002 for discussion).

• *Modal Indexing*: While there are no clear world indexicals or world proper names, modals such as *can* are standardly analyzed as existential quantifiers over possible worlds; and *if*-clauses have occasionally been treated as definite descriptions of possible worlds (e.g. Bittner 2001, Schlenker 2004, Bhatt and Pancheva 2005). Both cases can give rise to locus indexing in ASL:

(12) a. TOMORROW [POSSIBLE RAIN]<sub>a</sub> [POSSIBLE SNOW]<sub>b</sub>.  $\overset{\wedge}{IX}$ -b IX-1 HAPPY.  $\overset{\wedge}{IX}$ -a IX-1

NOT HAPPY.

‘Tomorrow it might rain and it might snow. Then [= if it snows] I’ll be happy. Then [= if it rains] I won’t be happy.’

b.

[IF RAIN TOMORROW]<sub>a</sub> WILL WARM. [IF SNOW TOMORROW]<sub>b</sub> WILL COLD.  $\overset{\wedge}{IX}$ -b IX-1

HAPPY.  $\overset{\wedge}{IX}$ -a IX-1 NOT HAPPY.

‘If it rains tomorrow it will be warm, but if it snows tomorrow it will be cold. Then [= if it snows] I’ll be happy. Then [= if it rains] I won’t be happy.’

(Schlenker 2013a)

We conclude that explicit anaphoric reference to times and possible worlds is possible in ASL – though our analysis leaves it entirely open whether these should be primitive categories or should be thought as different varieties of a more elementary category of *situations*.

While the argument could stop here, the sign language data argue for a further conclusion, namely that *temporal and modal reference might be more similar to locative reference than to individual anaphora*. The argument hinges on a peculiarity which we will revisit in greater detail below. When an individual has been associated with a location in previous discourse, one can refer to him by pointing towards the locus *associated with that location* (though pointing to the original locus of the individual is often possible too). Consider first the locative example in (13). The loci *a* and *b* are respectively associated with *FRENCH CITY* and *AMERICAN CITY* in the first sentence. But in the second sentence, the pronouns in bold, which index these loci, refer to John rather than to these

locations. Intuitively, they can be thought of as referring to *John-in-the-French-city* vs. *John-in-the-American-city* (a point to which we return below).

(13) **Locative Shift**

JOHN [WORK IX-a FRENCH CITY]<sub>a</sub> SAME [WORK IX-c AMERICA CITY]<sub>c</sub>.

<sup>^</sup>  
IX-a IX-1a<sup>7</sup> HELP **IX-a+**<sup>8</sup>, <sup>^</sup>  
IX-c IX-1c NOT HELP **IX-c+**.

'John does business in a French city and he does business in an American city.

There [= in the French city] I help him. There [= in the American city] I don't help him.'

(ASL, 4, 66; Schlenker 2013a)

Strikingly, similar facts hold in the temporal domain. In the first sentence of (14), the loci *a* and *b* are respectively associated with times at which John was a college student and a college professor. In the second sentence, however, the pronouns in bold index the same loci but refer to John rather than to time periods.

(14) **Temporal Shift**

*Context:* John is retired.

JOHN IX-b [FORMER COLLEGE STUDENT]<sub>a</sub> [FORMER COLLEGE PROFESSOR PERSON]<sub>c</sub>.

<sup>^</sup>  
IX-a IX-1a HELP **IX-a+**, <sup>^</sup>  
IX-c IX-1c NOT HELP **IX-c+**

'At some point John was a college student and at some point he was a university professor.

Then [=when he was a student] I helped him. Then [= when he was a professor] I didn't help him.'

(ASL, 4, 68; Schlenker 2013a)

The same pattern is found in the modal domain:

(15) **Modal Shift**

*Context:* I don't know who John is.

JOHN IX-b [POSSIBLE COLLEGE STUDENT]<sub>a</sub> [POSSIBLE COLLEGE PROFESSOR PERSON]<sub>c</sub>.

<sup>^</sup>  
IX-a IX-1a HELP **IX-a+**, <sup>^</sup>  
IX-c IX-1c NOT HELP **IX-c+**

'It's possible that John is a college student and it's possible that he is a university professor.

Then [= if he is a student] I will help him. Then [= if he is a professor] I won't help him.'

(Inf 1, 4, 72; Schlenker 2013a)

The loci *a* and *c*, which are initially associated with possible situations in which John is a college student and a college professor respectively, are used in the second sentence to refer to John himself.

There are two broad conclusions that one could draw from these observations. One possibility is that locative, temporal and modal anaphora form a natural class which is somewhat different from individual anaphora. One reason this might be the case is that the 'primitive elements' of natural language ontology include individuals on the one hand, and a broad class of 'situations' on the other – with locative, temporal and nominal anaphora as subspecies of situation anaphora. An alternative possibility is that it is just because individuals can naturally be taken to be situated *at* locations, times and worlds that individual loci undergo locative shift. This analysis might make sense within the broad iconic analysis we will sketch in Section 4.

Irrespective of the issues raised by locative shift, our main conclusion is that a single anaphoric system, locus indexing, makes it possible to realize nominal, temporal and modal anaphora – as well as locative anaphora, as we just saw. Importantly, it is not clear whether the signed modality

<sup>7</sup> *Ia* and *Ic* are positions close to the signer, but to his right and to his left respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Following a suggestion by Jonathan Lambertson (p.c.), we write *a+* and *c+* to indicate that pointing is towards a position slightly higher than loci *a* and *c*. Jonathan Lambertson suggests that this serves to distinguish between the person who is at the location – namely John – and the location itself. Note that this raises the possibility that there might be a small phonetic difference between nominal and locative uses of the index. It is for this reason that it was important in Schlenker 2013 to show that not just the (singular) pointing sign has all three kinds of uses, but that dual, trial and plural pronouns equally have all of these uses.

is intrinsically related to this argument. One possibility is that it is an accident that the pointing sign can have all these uses together. In fact, there is no reason to think that a spoken language couldn't equally have a pronoun which is underspecified in exactly the same way – in essence, such a pronoun would fulfill both the functions of *he/she/it* and of *then*. Another possibility is that there is something essential about loci – for instance the fact that they can serve as 'pure' logical variables – which allows them to have nominal, temporal and uses alike. We leave this question open, and turn to case of visibility which is arguably connected in a more essential way to the signed modality.

## 2.4 Dynamic variables<sup>9</sup>

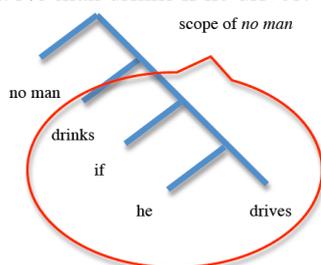
As we noted at the outset, if loci can the overt realization of some variables, binding relations, which must be *inferred* in spoken languages, can be made overt in sign languages. Specifically, by virtue of the device of locus establishment and retrieval, the connection between pronouns and their antecedents is sometimes made *formally explicit* in sign language. This matters because in some cases the nature of the relation between a pronoun has been hotly debated in the literature of spoken languages.

The debate concerns the role of c-command (or 'scope', in traditional logical terminology) in the establishment of a binding relation between a pronoun and a quantificational antecedent. In some cases, it seems that such a relation is necessary. *No man drinks if he drives* has a meaning akin to *no man x is such that x drinks if x drives*, and *he* does appear in the scope of *no man*, as shown in (16)a. By contrast, *If no man drinks, he drives* does not allow the pronoun to be dependent on *no man* because *he* is not in the scope of *no man*, as shown in (16)b (to be felicitous, *he* would have to refer to some salient individual).

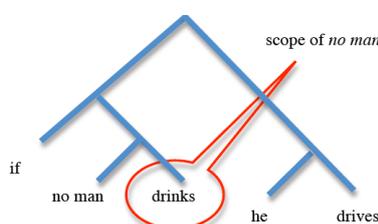
### (16) Scope in English I

A pronoun must (usually) be in the scope of [= 'c-commanded by'] a quantifier it depends on.

a. No man drinks if he drives.



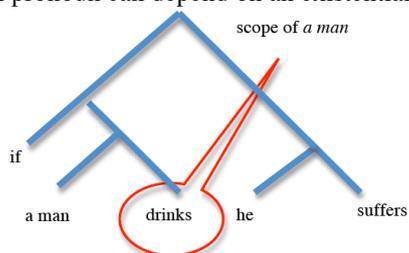
b. If no man drinks, he drives.



When *no man* is replaced with *a man*, however, the facts change. *If a man drinks, he suffers* is naturally interpreted as: *If a man drinks, that man suffers*; the pronoun is dependent on the quantifier although it is not within its scope, as shown in (17).

### (17) Scope in English II

A pronoun can depend on an existential quantifier without being in its scope.



Because Geach originally discussed examples such as (18)a-b to show that a pronoun may depend on a quantifier without being in its scope, pronouns that have this property are called 'donkey pronouns' in the literature.

<sup>9</sup> This section borrows from Schlenker 2011b,c, 2013b.

- (18) a. Every farmer who owns a donkey beat it.  
 b. If a farmer owns a donkey, he beats it.

There have been two reactions to the problem of ‘donkey pronouns’.

1. *Dynamic Semantics*: One view is that the logic underlying natural language is just different from standard logic. An entire movement, called ‘dynamic semantics’, has developed new rules that make it possible for a variable or a pronoun to depend on an existential quantifier or an indefinite without being in its scope (this may be done by treating indefinites themselves as variables, as in Kamp 1981 and Heim 1982; or by allowing existential quantifiers to bind outside of their syntactic scope, as in Groenendijk and Stokhof 1991).

2. *E-type analysis*: The opposing view is that no new logic is needed for natural language because the assimilation of pronouns to variables is incorrect. On this view, the pronoun should be analyzed as a concealed description such as *the man*, or *the man who drinks* (e.g. Evans 1980; Heim 1990; Elbourne 2005); analyses that make this assumption are called ‘E-type theories’. In some E-type theories, the pronoun is literally taken to come with an elided noun: *he = he ~~man~~*, where *man* is unpronounced and *he* is a version of *the* (this identity is morphologically realized in German, where *der* means both *the* and *he*) (Elbourne 2005). In other E-type theories, the pronoun is taken to have a richer semantic content, with for instance *he = the man who drinks* (e.g. Heim 1990). We henceforth restrict attention to the former analysis (Elbourne’s), which is one of most elegant and articulated E-type theories currently on the market (see Schlenker 2011c for a discussion of other E-type theories in the present context).

Each analysis involves some refinements, which we will only briefly mention.

- The *dynamic analysis* develops rules of semantic interpretation that allow *he* in (17) to depend on *a man* without being in its scope. This formal connection is taken to be represented in language through unpronounced variables similar to those of logic. Thus the sentence *If [a man]<sub>x</sub> drinks, he<sub>x</sub> suffers* is taken to include a variable *x* that encodes the dependency of *he* on *a man*.

- The *E-type analysis* must address two challenges.

(i) First, it must explain which man the pronoun *he* (analyzed as meaning *the man*) refers to in (17) – for there is certainly more than one man in the world. The standard solution is to take the word *if* to make reference to ‘situations’ that are small enough to contain just one man. *If a man drinks, he suffers* is thus analyzed as: *In every situation s in which a man drinks, the man in s suffers*, with one man per situation.

(ii) Second, the classical analysis must explain what kind of formal link connects *he* to *a man* in (17). While the thrust of the approach is that this link is not directly interpreted (or else the analysis would be granting the main point of the dynamic solution), there appears to be some formal connection between the pronoun and its antecedent, which forces the latter to be a noun phrase. The motivation for this conclusion is that when one keeps the meaning of the *if*-clause constant, it can be shown that the presence of a noun phrase is crucial to license the pronoun. For instance, *John is married* and *John has a wife* are usually synonymous; but although (19)a is grammatical, (19)b is not – it seems that the pronoun is missing a noun phrase as its antecedent.

- (19) a. If John had a wife, he would be kind to her.  
 b. #If John were married, he would be kind to her.

This is known as the problem of the ‘formal link’ between the pronoun and its antecedent (Heim 1990). While different E-type theories give different solutions to this problem, we will follow here Elbourne’s elegant analysis (Elbourne 2005): the desired data can be derived if *her* is represented as *the ~~wife~~*, with ellipsis of *wife*, which must be recovered through a syntactic operation; ellipsis resolution can in effect establish the desired formal link between *she* and its antecedent.

In Schlenker 2011b,c, ASL and LSF data were used to suggest that:

- (i) dynamic approaches predict the correct indexing patterns in the case of donkey sentences;

(ii) E-type approaches in general, and Elbourne's analysis in particular, are faced with a dilemma: either they are refuted by our sign language data, or they must be brought so close to dynamic semantics that they might end up becoming a variant of it.

To understand the nature of the dilemma, we must focus on so-called 'bishop' sentences, which are characterized by the fact that two pronouns are dependent on non-c-commanding indefinite antecedents with symmetric semantic roles, as in (20)a.

- (20) a. If a bishop meets a bishop, he blesses him.  
 b. If [a bishop]<sub>x</sub> meets [a bishop]<sub>y</sub>, he<sub>x</sub> blesses him<sub>y</sub>.  
 c. If [a bishop] meets [a bishop], he ~~bishop~~ blesses him ~~bishop~~.  
 c'. If [a bishop] meets [a bishop], he ~~bishop #1~~ blesses him ~~bishop #2~~.

The 'bishop' sentence in (20)a is crucial because the situations referred to by the *if*-clause include two bishops that play symmetric roles (if a bishop *x* meets a bishop *y*, it is also true that a bishop *y* meets a bishop *x*). The *dynamic analysis* in (20)b has no difficulty here because each noun phrase introduces a separate variable; this allows each pronoun to depend on a different quantifier because *he<sub>x</sub>* and *him<sub>y</sub>* carry different variables (we could also have *he<sub>y</sub>/him<sub>x</sub>*, but not *he<sub>x</sub>/him<sub>x</sub>* or *he<sub>y</sub>/him<sub>y</sub>*; the pronouns must carry different variables to refer to different bishops, or else the sentence would be understood as involving self-blessings – and in addition a reflexive would be needed). The *E-type analysis* must first postulate that the two bishops mentioned in the antecedent of (20)a are in principle distinguishable by some descriptions. This is not quite trivial: if bishop *b* meets bishop *b'*, by virtue of the (symmetric) meaning of *meet*, it is also the case that bishop *b'* meets bishop *b*. In the theory developed in Elbourne 2005, the *if*-clause is taken to quantify over extremely fine-grained situations – so fine-grained, in fact, that a situation  $\langle x, y, \text{meet} \rangle$  in which *x* meets *y* is different from a situation  $\langle y, x, \text{meet} \rangle$  in which *y* meets *x*. But this is not quite enough: to obtain the right meaning the pronouns must still be endowed with some additional material – perhaps provided by the context – to pick out different bishops in a given case  $\langle \text{bishop}_1, \text{bishop}_2, \text{meet} \rangle$ . (20)c is thus insufficient because it does not specify *which* bishop each pronoun refers to; in (20)c', the pronouns are enriched with the (stipulated) symbols #1 vs. #2, which are intended to pick out the 'first' or the 'second' bishop in  $\langle \text{bishop}_1, \text{bishop}_2, \text{meet} \rangle$ . But the question is how these index-like objects end up in the Logical Form. For Elbourne's theory, the dilemma is as follows:

**Horn I.** If #1 and #2 are provided by a mechanism – possibly a contextual one – which is independent from NP ellipsis resolution, we make the counterintuitive prediction that the two pronouns can be dependent on the same quantifier *while still carrying different index-like objects*. Importantly, this is so while we keep the intended meaning constant, a meaning that involves one bishop blessing *the other* bishop (no self-blessings, here!). The reason for the counterintuitive prediction is that the role of distinguishing the two bishops falls on the symbols #1 and #2, which are provided independently of the ellipsis resolution process by which pronouns are formally linked to their antecedents. So long as ellipsis provides the right NP (just *bishop* in (19)a), and *no matter where this NP is obtained*, the right truth conditions will be produced.

**Horn II.** If #1 and #2 are inherited by the mechanism of ellipsis resolution itself, we will end up with something very close to a dynamic analysis: the antecedents carry a formal index, and the pronouns recover the very index carried by their antecedent, as is illustrated in (21):

- (21) If [a bishop]#1 meets [a bishop]#2, he ~~bishop #1~~ blesses him ~~bishop #2~~.

The innovation of the analysis is in essence to *add* a story about ellipsis to a dynamic-style account, but it's not clear at all that the latter has been *replaced* with a classical account.

For spoken languages, one might well want to choose Horn I of the dilemma – after all, *he* and *him* in (19)a do not wear their antecedents on their sleeves, hence the counterintuitive prediction (namely that the two pronouns could go back to the same antecedent *while still yielding the intended meaning*) is just this, counterintuitive. But things are different in ASL (and LSF): in this case, there is clear evidence that the only way to obtain the intended reading is to ensure that the pronouns index

different antecedents. This is shown in a structurally related example in (22) (it is a bit more complex than (20)a because we wanted to display a sentence that does not involve a 'Condition B' configuration in which the second pronoun is locally c-commanded by the first; in the end this point is immaterial, since in any event the intended reading does not involve coreference between the two pronouns, and hence shouldn't yield a Condition B effect in the first place).

- (22) WHEN [FRENCH MAN]<sub>a</sub> MEET [FRENCH MAN]<sub>b</sub>,  
 'When a Frenchman meets a Frenchman,'  
 a. IX-a WONDER WHO IX-b LIVE WITH.  
 'the former wonders who the latter lives with.'  
 b. ? IX-b WONDER WHO IX-a LIVE WITH.  
 'the latter wonders who the former lives with.'  
 c. # IX-a WONDER WHO IX-a LIVE WITH.  
 'the former wonders who the former lives with.'  
 d. # IX-b WONDER WHO IX-b LIVE WITH.  
 'the latter wonders who the latter lives with.'

Our sign language data do not refute all E-type analyses; in fact, it has been repeatedly argued in the literature that some E-type accounts are notational variants of dynamic accounts (Dekker 2004). But they suggest that there is overt motivation for the main ingredients of the dynamic analysis:

- (i) A sign language locus appears to play very much the role of a formal index, which is carried by a pronoun *and* by the antecedent it is anaphoric to.
- (ii) Just as is the case with loci, the formal relation which is mediated by dynamic indices is not constrained by c-command.
- (iii) The semantics of indices and quantifiers guarantees that two indices introduced by different quantifiers can 'refer' (under an assignment function) to different individuals; the fact that two pronouns carry the same or different variables will thus have a direct semantic reflex, as is desired.

## 2.5 Variables or features - or both?<sup>10</sup>

We take examples such as (7)-(9), as well as much of the foregoing discussion, to have established the plausibility of the Weak Hypothesis of Variable Visibility in (6)a: a given locus may be associated both to a pronoun and to its antecedent to mark their dependency; furthermore, deictic pronouns that refer to different objects may be associated to different loci. But this does not prove that loci share in all respects the behavior of logical variables, and thus these facts do not suffice to establish the Strong Hypothesis of Variability in (6)b.

### 2.5.1 Kuhn's attack

This stronger hypothesis was recently attacked by Kuhn (to appear), who argues that loci should be seen as features akin to person and gender features, rather than as variables. The positive part of his argument is based on the observation that the disambiguating effect seen in (7)-(9) is based on the idea that sign language could 'create features on the fly', and that on the assumption that a pronoun must inherit its features from its antecedent, this might account for the disambiguating effect of loci. The negative part of his argument is based on two constraints that one would expect to find in *bona fide* variables, but which he claims are not at work with ASL loci.

- First, a variable is constrained to depend on the structurally closest operator it is co-indexed with. Thus the boxed variable  $x_i$  in (23)a cannot be semantically dependent on the universal quantifier  $\forall x_i$ , because of the intervening quantifier  $\exists x_i$  – by contrast with (23)b, where the intervening quantifier carries a different index. For the same reason, the boxed variable in both formulas cannot be free and refer (deictically, in linguistic parlance) to a fixed individual.

<sup>10</sup> This section borrows from Schlenker 2014b.

(23) **Variable capture in First-Order Logic**

- a.  $\forall x_1 \exists x_1 \dots P \boxed{x_1} \dots$   
 b.  $\forall x_1 \exists x_2 \dots P \boxed{x_1} \dots$

• By the same token, the two occurrences of the variable  $x_i$  in must have the same semantic value – in particular, if no quantifier binding  $x_i$  appears at the beginning of the formula, both occurrences will be free and will denote a fixed individual.

(24) **Variable re-use in First-Order Logic**

...  $Px_1$  &  $Qx_1$  ...

2.5.2 *Two problems*

Kuhn (to appear) argues that both predictions are incorrect: first, expected cases of variable capture fail to arise under the quantificational adverb *only*; second, multiple occurrences of the same locus may refer to different individuals.

## (i) Variable capture

First, Kuhn shows that under *only*, the loci-as-variables view fails to generate some attested readings, as in the multiply ambiguous sentence in (25). (Like ours, Kuhn's examples are assessed on a 7-point scale, with 7 = best.) CONTINUE

(25) 7 IX-a JESSICA TOLD-ME IX-b BILLY ONLY-ONE FINISH-TELL  $\boxed{\text{POSS-b}}$  MOTHER  $\underline{\text{POSS-b}}$  FAVORITE COLOR.

'Jessica told me that only Billy told his mother his favorite color.'

Can be read as: bound-bound, bound-free, free-bound, or free-free. (Kuhn, to appear)

Let us focus on the (available) 'bound-free' reading, on which the boxed possessive is read as bound by *ONLY-ONE* while the underlined possessive refers to Billy. Thus on this reading, the sentence means: *Jessica told me that only Billy is an individual  $x$  such that  $x$  told  $x$ 's mother Billy's favorite color.* Here the boxed possessive  $\boxed{\text{POSS-b}}$  is bound, so *ONLY-ONE* must somehow bind this variable, say by way of a Logical Form akin to (26), with the assumption that *IX-b BILLY* comes with a requirement that  $b$  denotes Billy, and that there is an empty copula preceding *ONLY-ONE* to yield a meaning such as: 'Billy is the only person who...'

(26) IX-b BILLY ONLY-ONE  $\lambda b$   $t_b$  FINISH-TELL  $\boxed{\text{POSS-b}}$  MOTHER  $\underline{\text{POSS-b}}$  FAVORITE COLOR

But now comes the problem: if the boxed possessive  $\boxed{\text{POSS-b}}$  is bound by  $\lambda b$ , the underlined pronoun  $\underline{\text{POSS-b}}$ , which is lower in the structure, cannot get a deictic reading on which it denotes Billy.

On the view that loci may be interpreted, these data suggest that there are some environments in which they can be disregarded as well. Precisely this view is standard for *phi*-features (= person, gender, and number features) which are believed to be interpreted on free pronouns but to remain uninterpreted on bound variables under *only*, a point to which we return shortly; this similarity between loci and *phi*-features is what we call 'Kuhn's Generalization'.

## (ii) Locus re-use

Second, Kuhn shows that in (27) a single locus is assigned to John and Mary, and another locus is assigned to Bill and Suzy. As a result, the boxed occurrences  $\boxed{\text{IX-a}}$  and  $\boxed{\text{IX-b}}$  refer to John and Mary respectively, while the underlined pronouns  $\underline{\text{IX-a}}$  and  $\underline{\text{IX-b}}$  refer to Mary and Suzy.

(27) 6 EVERY-DAY, JOHN<sub>a</sub> TELL MARY<sub>a</sub>  $\boxed{\text{IX-a}}$  LOVE  $\underline{\text{IX-a}}$ . BILL<sub>b</sub> NEVER TELL SUZY<sub>b</sub>  $\boxed{\text{IX-b}}$  LOVE  $\underline{\text{IX-b}}$ .

'Every day, John<sub>i</sub> tells Mary<sub>j</sub> that he<sub>i</sub> loves her<sub>j</sub>. Bill<sub>k</sub> never tells Suzy<sub>l</sub> that he<sub>k</sub> loves her<sub>l</sub>.' (ASL, Kuhn, to appear)

As Kuhn observes, this example is problematic for the variable-based view. The initial association of the proper name *JOHN* with variable  $a$  should force  $a$  to refer to John; but then how can  $a$  also refer in the same clause, and without any intervening binder, to Mary? By contrast, these data are unproblematic for the feature-based analysis of loci: just like two Noun Phrases may bear the same feminine gender features while denoting different individuals, so it is with loci-as-features. (Locus re-use is certainly limited by pragmatic or other constraints – a more standard strategy is to assign one locus per individual. Kuhn's argument is really an existential proof that in *some* cases loci display a

behavior which is incompatible with the view that they spell out variables.)

### 2.5.3 Two directions

#### □ *Loci as features (Kuhn, to appear)*

Kuhn (to appear) solves these problems by treating loci as features which are not interpreted (so that neither the problem of variable capture nor of variable re-use can arise in the first place), but are inherited by a mechanisms of morpho-syntactic agreement; this allows him to provide a variable-free treatment of loci.

To see the appeal of this strategy, consider the behavior of the feminine features of *her* in (28) and of *my* in (29).

- (28) In my study group,  
 a. Mary did her homework (but John didn't do his).  
 b. only Mary did her homework (... therefore John didn't do his).  
 c. only Mary  $\lambda_i^{\text{fem}} t_i$  did ~~her~~<sub>i</sub> homework
- (29) In my study group,  
 a. I did my homework (but John didn't do his).  
 b. only I did my homework (... therefore others didn't do theirs).  
 b'. only I  $\lambda_i^{\text{+st}} t_i^{\text{+st}}$  did ~~my~~<sub>i</sub> homework

In the simple examples in (28)a and (29)a, these features constrain the denotation of the possessive pronoun, which may only denote female individuals in (28)a, and only the speaker in (29)a. But something interesting happens in (28)b and (29)b: due to the semantics of *only*, the possessive pronoun can be interpreted as a bound variable which ranges over non-female individuals and over non-speakers. This has lead several researchers (e.g. Heim 1991, 2008, Kratzer 2009, Schlenker 1999, 2003, Stechow 2004) to posit that in this case these features remain uninterpreted, something that some of these frameworks represent in the Logical Forms in (28)c-(29)c by including the features on variables but in barred form to indicate that they can be 'deleted under agreement' with their binder

But if features can be inherited without being interpreted in such cases, why couldn't one extend the same mechanism to ASL loci so as to account for Kuhn's cases of 'variable capture'? If so, it could be that these are *just* features, which constrain antecedence relations but are not otherwise interpreted. Kuhn must accept the consequence that features need not be part of a closed inventory, since there is no natural upper bound on the number of loci that can appear in a sentence (though there are clear performance limitations). While this may go against standard assumptions in morpho-syntax, there might be some reasons, possibly due to the expressive means afforded by signing space, why constraints that are thought to hold of spoken languages do not hold in this case.

Kuhn's analysis has the further advantage of explaining why the same locus can be used to refer to distinct individuals in the case of 'locus re-use' in (27). For him, this case is no different from that of ambiguous uses of the pronoun *she*, which can refer to different individuals as long as they are female: features may but need not disambiguate reference.

Finally, Kuhn's analysis would need to be extended to cover deictic loci. As mentioned, when individuals are present in the discourse situation, the signer normally points towards them to realize deixis. In that case, then, one would need to posit that the point in signing space that corresponds to the individual's actual position plays the role of a feature; and here too, one needs to posit that there is potentially an unbounded number of possible features.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> As suggested by an anonymous reviewer for an earlier manuscript, one could implement these general ideas within the general framework of Jacobson 1999, 2012. Briefly, Jacobson takes *she* and *you* to behave as other pronouns in denoting an identity function, but that they come with a domain restriction to female individuals for *she* and to addressees for *you*. On this view, then, the pronoun *you* evaluated in a context *c* denotes the partial identity function  $\lambda x_c: x \text{ is an addressee of } c . x$  (= the function which is defined on an individual *x* just in case *x* is an addressee of *c*, and which outputs *x* itself if this condition is met). Given the rest of Jacobson's system, the sentence *You left* ends up denoting a partial function of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ , restricted to a domain of addressees; and a truth value is finally obtained when that function is applied to a salient individual. The same analysis could be extended to a deictic locus *a* corresponding to the position of an individual *s(a)*: the meaning of *a* could be seen as an identity function restricted to individual *s(a)*. Importantly, however, this takes Kuhn's and Jacobson's 'features' one step closer to variables: not only is there a potentially infinite number of them (as there is no

This treatment of loci as features brings features rather close to variables. First, realizing a pronoun by pointing towards a locus introduced by a quantifier yields the same effect as binding by a quantifier. If Kuhn's device were applied to predicate logic, it would amount to giving a variable-free treatment of formulas such as (30)a-b, one in which  $x$  and  $y$  do not have an autonomous semantics (unlike variables), but still provide information about which argument position is quantified  $\forall, \exists$ .

- (30) a.  $\forall x \exists y Pxy$   
 b.  $\forall y \exists x Pxy$

Furthermore, Kuhnian features also resemble variables in being able to be associated to individuals in the extra-linguistic context when they are not dependent on a linguistic expression. More generally, while Kuhn's analysis clearly goes against the Strong Version of Variable Visibility (= the view that loci can genuinely display the behavior of variables – (6)b), it is fully compatible with the Weak Version, which only posits that sign language has covert counterparts of the indices taken to disambiguate the English sentences in (3)-(5).

□ *Loci as variables and as features (Schlenker 2014b)*

Can we preserve the view that loci are sometimes overt variables in spite of Kuhn's counterexamples? A solution is developed in Schlenker 2014b, which suggests that loci may *both* display the behavior of variables and of features – they are thus 'featural variables'. Specifically, *when they are interpreted* their semantics is given by an assignment function, just like that of standard indices. But they may be disregarded in precisely the environments in which person or gender features can be disregarded. Furthermore, in many environments loci constrain the value of covert variables. Importantly, it was never claimed that *all* variables are overt in sign language, as this would have been immediately refuted by the existence of null pronouns, or by the fact that temporal and modal variables are almost always covert (in fact, it took some effort to find the contexts discussed in Section 2.3, in which a counterpart of English *then* is expressed by way of an overt pointing sign). Thus this proposal does not change the inventory of referential expressions available in sign language, although it makes greater use of complex expressions that include both a covert variable and an overt one.

To make things concrete, Schlenker 2014b gives loci a presuppositional semantics modeled after that of 2<sup>nd</sup> person features. But whereas the latter are *context*-dependent, as shown in (31)a, loci have an *assignment*-dependent semantics, as shown in (31)b.

- (31) For every expression  $E$  of type  $e$ , for every context  $c$ , assignment function  $s$  and world  $w$ :  
 a.  $[[E^2]]^{c,s,w} = \#$  iff  $[[E]]^{c,s,w} = \#$  or  $[[E]]^{c,s,w}$  is **not an addressee of  $c$** . If  $[[E^2]]^{c,s,w} \neq \#$ ,  $[[E^2]]^{c,s,w} = [[E]]^{c,s,w}$   
 b. for every locus  $a \neq 1, 2$ , if  $E$  is an expression of type  $e$ ,  
 $[[E^a]]^{c,s,w} = \#$  iff  $[[E]]^{c,s,w} = \#$  or  $[[E]]^{c,s,w}$  **isn't a part of  $s(a)$** . If  $[[E^a]]^{c,s,w} \neq \#$ ,  $[[E^a]]^{c,s,w} = [[E]]^{c,s,w}$ .

Note that an effect of rule (31)a is that the pronoun  $you_i$  only comes with a requirement it the index  $i$  denote *an* addressee of the context, not that that it denote the one and only addressee. This is useful in sentences such as *You<sub>i</sub> and you should stop talking to each other*, where the two pronouns denote different individuals. We will see shortly that a similarly weak constraint is similarly useful in the analysis of loci. With these rules, an overt locus can constrain the value of a covert variable, as illustrated in (32).

- (32) Assume that  $a$  is a non-first, non-second person locus and that  $s(i) \neq \#$ . Then  $[[pro_i^a]]^{c,s,w} \neq \#$  iff  $[[pro_i]]^{c,s,w} = s(a)$ . If  $[[pro_i^a]]^{c,s,w} \neq \#$ ,  $[[pro_i^a]]^{c,s,w} = [[pro_i]]^{c,s,w} = s(i)$ .

In such cases, then, loci are interpreted variables that constrain the value of other expressions. Crucially, Schlenker 2014b assumes that phi-features but also locus features can be deleted under binding, as was illustrated in (28)-(29) above.

How does this analysis address Kuhn's problem of 'variable capture'? Presumably Kuhn must assume that, by one mechanism or another, *ONLY-ONE* in (25) can inherit the locus feature of *BILLY*. The key is then to assume that variables can be bound by ( $\lambda$ -operators introduced by) *BILLY<sub>b</sub>* or by

---

natural upper bound on the number of loci), but in an addition all the deictic ones must be associated with potentially distinct individuals – a relation that comes close to the reference relation established by assignment functions.

*ONLY-ONE<sub>b</sub>*, but that in any event the feature *b* which they inherit need not be interpreted. As an example, the 'bound-free' reading is represented in (33)b; barred loci are assumed to be deleted under binding.

- (33) a. IX-b BILLY ONLY-ONE FINISH-TELL POSS-b MOTHER POSS-b FAVORITE COLOR  
 b. billy<sub>b</sub> λ<sub>i</sub><sup>b</sup> only one<sub>b</sub> λk<sup>b</sup> t<sub>k</sub><sup>b</sup> tell pro<sub>k</sub><sup>b</sup> mother pro<sub>i</sub><sup>b</sup> favorite-color

What about Kuhn's problem of 'locus re-use'? In order to account for (27), all we need to posit is that *a* (and *m*) denotes the plurality John+Mary; and under this assumption, we don't need feature deletion, as seen in (34).

- (34) John<sub>a</sub> λ<sub>i</sub><sup>a</sup> Mary λk<sup>a</sup> t<sub>i</sub><sup>a</sup> tell t<sub>k</sub><sup>a</sup> [pro<sub>i</sub><sup>a</sup> love pro<sub>k</sub><sup>a</sup>]. pro<sub>m</sub><sup>dual,a</sup> smart.

The key is that in (31)a and (31)b alike we have a requirement that the denotation of the pronoun should be a (*mereological*) part of (rather than *identical to*) the denotation of a variable. This makes it possible to posit that in cases of locus re-use the denotation of the locus is less specific than that of the covert variable whose value it constrains.

In the end, the view that loci can be the overt manifestation of variables can be maintained, although it must be refined; in particular, one must accept Kuhn's insight that loci may display the behavior of features – which doesn't mean they don't also display the behavior of variables.<sup>12</sup> (In addition, we will come back in Section 4.3 to uses of plural pronouns that can be analyzed within a loci-as-variables analysis, but not so easily within a pure loci-as-features framework.)

### 3 Logical Visibility II: Beyond Variables

In this section, we turn to further cases – not related to loci – in which sign language makes overt parts of Logical Forms that are usually covert in spoken language. The first case involves context shifting operators, which were argued by Schlenker 2003, Anand and Nevins 2004 and Anand 2006, among others, to be active but covert in spoken language. Following Quer 2004, we suggest that context shifting might be realized overtly in sign language, by way of an operation called 'Role Shift'. We then move to the aspectual domain, and summarize results, due to Wilbur 2003, which suggest that some primitive categories in the representation aspectual classes are made visible in sign language but are usually covert in spoken language.

#### 3.1 Role Shift as visible context shift<sup>13</sup>

##### 3.1.1 Basic data

Two strands of research on context-dependency have come together in recent years. In the semantics of spoken languages, considerable attention has been devoted to the phenomenon of *context shift*. The chief motivation lied in the behavior of indexicals. While these were traditionally thought to

<sup>12</sup> One key question for future research is to determine whether some instances of bound loci are in fact interpreted as such. Schlenker 2014b argues that this is the case when one considers 'high' and 'low' loci, with come with a condition that their denotations should be in a high or low position in space. Thus in (i) the high locus *a\_high* and *a\_low* are both bound by quantifiers, and yet each has non-trivial meaning contribution. These contributions are discussed in greater detail in Section 4.4. While these readings can be directly captured within the analysis of loci as (presuppositional) variables, they require a decompositional analysis of loci on the view that these features: one would need to say in these cases that the horizontal specification of the locus is a feature inherited through agreement, while the vertical specification is interpreted. See Schlenker 2014b for discussion.

- (i) GYMNAST COMPETITION MUST STAND BAR FINISH STAND HANG.  
 'In a gymnastics competition one must stand on a bar and then go from standing to hanging position.'  
 a. 6.3 ALL GYMNAST IX-a\_neutral WANT IX-1 LOOK-a\_high FINISH FILM IX-a\_low.  
 'All the gymnasts want me to look at them while they are up before filming them while they are down.' (ASL; 23, 20c; 3 judgments)  
 b. 7 ONLY-ONE IX-a\_neutral GYMNAST WANT IX-1 LOOK-a\_high FINISH FILM IX-a\_low.  
 'Only one of the gymnasts wants me to watch her while standing before filming her while hanging.' (ASL; 23, 21c; 3 judgments)

<sup>13</sup> This section borrows from Schlenker, to appear.

depend rigidly on the context of the actual speech act, it turned out that there are languages and constructions in which this is not so: some attitude operators appear to be able to 'shift the context of evaluation' of some or all indexicals (e.g. Schlenker 1999, 2003, 2011c, Anand and Nevins 2004, Anand 2006). In research on sign languages, there has been a long-standing interest in Role Shift, an overt operation (often marked by body shift and/or eyegaze shift) by which the signer signals that he adopts the perspective of another individual (e.g. Padden 1986, Lillo-Martin 1995, Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006). Role Shift comes in two varieties: it may be used to report an individual's *speech or thought* – henceforth 'Attitude Role Shift'. Or it may be used to report in a particularly vivid way an individual's *actions* (henceforth 'Action Role Shift'; a more traditional term in sign language research is 'Constructed Action')<sup>14</sup>.

As summarized in Quer, to appear, Role Shift across sign languages is morpho-syntactically characterized by non-manual markers such as the following: (i) 'temporary interruption of eye contact with the actual interlocutor and direction change of eye gaze towards the reported interlocutor'; (ii) 'slight shift of the upper body in the direction of the locus associated with the author of the reported utterance'; (iii) 'change in head position'; (iv) 'facial expression associated to the reported agent.' What semantics should be associated to these formal properties? For our purposes, the key observation is that Attitude Role Shift has sometimes been analyzed as an overt instance of context shift because some or all indexicals that appear in that environment acquire a shifted interpretation. For such an argument to be cogent, however, an alternative analysis must be excluded, one according to which the role-shifted clause is simply quoted – for quoted clauses are arguably mentioned rather than used, which obviates the need to *evaluate* their content relative to a shifted context.<sup>15</sup> Quer (2005, to appear) shows that some indexicals in Attitude Role Shift in Catalan Sign Language (LSC) have a shifted interpretation, i.e. are intuitively evaluated with respect to the context of the reported speech act. Second, it is not the case that the entire role-shifted clause is quoted. This is because *other* indexicals can be evaluated with respect to the context of the actual speech act. This pattern is illustrated in (35), where the first person pronoun *IX-I* is evaluated with respect to the reported context (and thus refers to Joan), while *HERE* is evaluated with respect to the actual context.

(35)

$\overline{\text{IX}_a \text{ MADRID}_m \text{ MOMENT JOAN}_i \text{ THINK IX-I}_i \text{ STUDY FINISH HERE}_b}$  RS-i  
 'When he was in Madrid, Joan thought he would finish his study here (in Barcelona).'

(LSC, Quer 2005, to appear)

As emphasized by Quer (to appear), it is also possible to understand *HERE* as being shifted; but the 'mixing of perspectives' found in (35) is particularly important in order to argue that there is context shift rather than standard quotation. In the end, Quer (to appear) suggests on the basis of syntactic evidence that Attitude Role Shift in Catalan Sign Language can in some contexts involve *bona fide* quotation, but that in other contexts it involves *bona fide* indirect discourse with some shifted indexicals. For present purposes, we are only concerned with cases that can be shown not to involve standard quotation.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.1.2 Typology

In Schlenker 2003, by contrast, a context-shifting analysis of attitude reports was developed in which different indexicals could be evaluated with respect to different contexts. On the one hand, it was observed on the basis of preliminary data that two occurrences of a first person feature that occur in

<sup>14</sup> While the term 'Action Role Shift' is new, the observation that Role Shift can be used beyond attitude reports isn't; see for instance the survey in Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006, where it is noted that Role Shift "can be described as quoting the thoughts of another or simply representing a scene from the point of view of another" (p. 380).

<sup>15</sup> At this point, we assume that quotation must target an entire clause, and we come back below to the possibility of a theory with 'partial quotation', as argued in Maier, to appear.

<sup>16</sup> Quer, to appear a writes that "direct quotes in LSC can be preposed (topicalized)" in sentences that include a marker of direct discourse which is literally *SENTENCE SAME*. By contrast, "ungrammaticality results if we try to do the same with a role shift segment which is interpreted as indirect discourse".

the same embedded environment may be evaluated with respect to different contexts, which suggests that *Shift together* fails to hold.<sup>17</sup>

(36) Amharic first person pronouns (apparently) fail to obey Shift Together (Anand 2006)

John lij-e ay-ittazzəzəññ ala  
 John son-my NEG.3s-obey.mkimperf-1sO say.PERF.3sm  
 Johni said, “my son will not obey AUTH(c).”  
 ‘Johni said, “AUTH(c)’s son will not obey me.”

Schlenker 2003 also treated the Russian present tense as a shiftable indexical; if this analysis is correct, Russian must be allowed to 'mix perspectives' in embedded clauses. Thus in (37) the present tense is evaluated with respect to the shifted context, but the third person pronoun isn't (since it denotes the speaker of the reported context).

(37) Shifting is possible under attitude verbs

petja<sub>i</sub> skazal, čto on<sub>i</sub> plačet [Russian]  
 Petja<sub>i</sub> said that he<sub>i</sub> is-crying  
 ‘Petja said that he was crying [at the time of his utterance]’

By contrast, Anand and Nevins 2004 and Anand 2006 showed that in Zazaki, and Indo-Aryan language of Turkey, some verbs are *bona fide* context-shifting operators, but they argued that when the context of evaluation of a clause is shifted, all the indexicals that are found in it must be evaluated with respect to the same context – a constraint they labeled 'Shift Together':

(38) Shift Together (Anand & Nevins 2004)

If an indexical is shifted in the scope of a modal operator, all other indexicals in the same clause must be shifted as well.

... attitude verb ... δ [ ... shifted indexical<sub>1</sub> .... shifted indexical<sub>2</sub> ... ]

For Anand and Nevins 2004 and Anand 2006, a covert context-shifting operator is optionally present under the verb *say* in Zazaki. When it is absent, the embedded clause behaves like an English clause in standard indirect discourse. When the context-shifting operator is present, it shifts the context of evaluation of *all* indexicals within its scope – hence the fact that we cannot 'mix perspectives' within the embedded clause.

The data from Catalan Sign Language in (35) mirror the Russian data in that two indexicals that appear in the same clause may be evaluated with respect to different contexts. Similarly, German Sign Language allows for 'mixing of perspectives', with a shifted indexical co-existing with an unshifted one in the same clause (Herrmann and Steinbach 2012, Hübl and Steinbach 2012, Quer to appear). By contrast, Schlenker 2014a,b shows that American and French Sign Language appear to display the Zazaki pattern: under Role Shift, all indexicals are obligatorily shifted. A case in point is displayed in (39), where the first person pronoun *IX-1* and the adverb *HERE* are both signed under Role Shift, and both are obligatorily interpreted with a shifted meaning.

(39) *Context*: the speaker is in NYC

RS<sub>a</sub> \_\_\_\_\_  
 7 IN LA WHO IX-a JOHN<sub>a</sub> SAY IX-1 WILL MEET HERE WHO  
 Informant JL (on a video on which he signed the sentence [ASL, 6, 316]): 7, *HERE* = LA  
 Informant 2 (on a video on which he signed the sentence with *IX-b* replacing *IN* [ASL, 6, 293]): 7, *HERE*  
 = preferably LA [6, 294-295].<sup>18</sup>  
 ‘In LA, who did John say he would meet there [in LA]?’ (ASL; 6, 293; 6, 316)

In sum, given the available data it seems that the typology of context-shifting operations in sign language mirrors that found in spoken language: some languages requires that indexicals 'shift together', whereas others allow for 'mixing of perspectives'. The difference between the two modalities is, of course, that in sign language Role Shift is overtly realized.

<sup>17</sup> Anand (2006) re-analyzed these data by positing an ambiguity: the Amharic first person marker may behave as an unshiftable indexical, or as a logophoric element, which according to Anand falls under a different generalization.

<sup>18</sup> Informant 2 gave *HERE* = LA with a rating of 5/7; *HERE* = NYC with a rating of 2.5/7.

If this analysis is on the right track, several important questions arise. First, are there spoken languages in which some overt operators also force context shift? Second, if one answers in the negative, what might be the source of this typological distinction between spoken and sign language? Two considerations might prove helpful to address the second question if relevant. First, Role Shift is *simultaneous* with the expressions it affects, as indicated for instance by the line above the embedded clause in (39); instances of simultaneous marking exist in spoken language (e.g. at the intonational level) but are more restricted than in sign language. Second, sign language signs can simultaneously be used iconically, and one could take the body shift and eyegaze shift that characterize Role Shift to be an instantiation of an *imitation* of somebody else's speech; we come back to this possibility in Section 5.3.

### 3.1.3 Further complexities

While our basic picture of Role Shift as overt context shift is appealingly simple, it abstracts away from important complexities.

(i) Role Shift doesn't just occur in attitude reports (= 'Attitude Role Shift'), but it can also be used in action reports, especially to display in a particularly vivid fashion some parts of the action through iconic means (= 'Action Role Shift'). But whereas Attitude Role Shift can target an entire clause, as well as any indexicals within it (optionally or obligatorily depending on the language), Action Role Shift is more constrained; depending on the author, in ASL it's believed to just target verbs (Davidson 2014), or possibly larger constituents, but if so only ones that contain no indexicals or 1<sup>st</sup> person agreement markers (Schlenker, to appear).

(ii) The literature suggests that Catalan and German Sign Language Role Shift (LSC and DGS), which allows for 'mixing of perspectives' (as in (35)), cannot be analyzed as simple instances of quotation. But the facts are far less clear in American and French Sign Language (ASL and LSF), precisely because in those languages all indexicals that have been tested are obligatorily shifted under Role Shift, which makes it possible to envisage a quotational analysis. In spoken languages, the standard strategy to disprove a quotational analysis of a clause under *say* is to establish a grammatical dependency between the embedded clause and the matrix clause – with the assumption that 'grammatical dependencies do not cross quotation marks' (presumably because quoted material is mentioned, not used). Thus quotation is possible in (40)b and (41)b but not in (40)a and (41)a because in the latter two cases a grammatical dependency exists between the embedded clause and the matrix clause, involving a moved interrogative expression ('*wh*-extraction') in (40)a and a dependency between a Negative Polarity Item (NPI) and its negative licenser in (41)b.

(40) a. \*What did John say 'I understand \_'?  
b. John said: 'I understand chemistry'.

(41) a. \*John didn't say 'I understand any chemistry'.  
b. John didn't say: 'I understand chemistry'.

Now in the data reported in Schlenker to appear, 2015, ASL Role Shift allows for *wh*-extraction out of role-shifted clauses, but so does another construction that is a plausible candidate for quotation (with a 'quotational operator' at the beginning of a non-role-shifted clause). For this reason, the evidence that the role-shifted clause doesn't involve quotation is weak – maybe quotation just does allow for *wh*-extraction in that case, for ill-understood reasons. Furthermore, another standard test of indirect discourse fails; it involves the licensing of a Negative Polarity Item, *ANY*, by a negative element found in the matrix clause. When the embedded clause is in standard indirect discourse, licensing is authorized (both in the English sentence in (42)a, and in an analogous sentence in ASL); when the clause is under Role Shift, it fails – just as it does in quoted sentence in English in (42)b, and in role-shifted example in ASL.

(42) a. <T> John never said he showed Mary any kindness.  
b. #John never said: 'I showed Mary any kindness'.

In LSF, the *wh*-extraction test fails. Thus for both languages, the argument that Role Shift involves context shift depends rather heavily on Action Role Shift – which as we'll see below could also be analyzed in different terms.

(iii) Schlenker to appear, 2015, following much of the literature, argues that Role Shift comes with a requirement that some elements be interpreted iconically (and suggests that the quotational effects discussed in (ii) above are a special case of iconicity). We come back to this point in Section 5.3.

### 3.2 Aspect: visible event decomposition

For completeness, and also because we will revisit this issue from another perspective in Section 5.2., we mention an important instance of Visibility discovered by Wilbur (2003) in the aspectual domain. Semanticists traditionally classify event descriptions as *telic* if they apply to events that have a natural endpoint determined by that description, and they call them *atelic* otherwise. *John spotted Mary* and *John built the house* have such a natural endpoint (the points at which John spotted Mary and completed the house, respectively); *John knew Mary* and *John danced* lack such a natural endpoint and are thus atelic. As summarized in Rothstein 2004, "the standard test for telicity is the use of temporal modification: *in a time* modifies telic VPs and *for a time* modifies atelic VPs as in [(43)]":

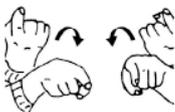
- (43) a. John knew Mary for years/\*in a year.  
 b. John danced for hours/\*in an hour.  
 c. John spotted Mary in a few minutes/\*for a few minutes.  
 d. John built the house in a few weeks/\*for a few weeks."

Remarkably, Wilbur 2003 suggested that *the distinction between telic and atelic predicates is often realized overtly in ASL*. In Malaia and Wilbur's (2008) words, the observation was that

ASL lexical verbs could be analyzed as telic or atelic based on their form: telic verbs appeared to have a sharper ending movement to a stop, presumably reflecting the semantic end-state of the affected argument (...). These end-states were observed to be overtly marked in ASL by several mechanisms: (1) change of handshape aperture (open/closed or closed/open); (2) change of handshape orientation; and (3) abrupt stop at a location in space or contact with a body part. (...) The observation that semantic verb classes are characterized by certain movement profiles was formulated as the Event Visibility Hypothesis (EVH) for sign languages: "In the predicate system, the semantics of the event structure is visible in the phonological form of the predicate sign" (Wilbur, 2008: 229).

On a theoretical level, Wilbur 2008 posits that in ASL and other sign languages, telicity is overtly marked by the presence of an affix dubbed *EndState*, and which 'means that an event has a final state'. Its phonological form is "a rapid deceleration of the movement to a complete stop", which can come in several varieties, illustrated in (44).

(44) Examples of movement sin signs denoting telic events (from Wilbur 2008, figure 3)

			
a. change of aperture handshape change SEND	b. orientation change HAPPEN	c. setting change proximal / distal POSTPONE	d. change of location with contact HIT

Remarkably, then, Wilbur's findings suggest that sign language makes it possible express overtly some grammatically relevant aspects of event decomposition. In Section 5.1, we will revisit Wilbur's Event Visibility Hypothesis, asking whether it might not follow from a more general property of structural event iconicity.

## 4 Iconicity I: Iconic Variables

### 4.1 Introduction

In the cases we have discussed up to this point, sign language makes some aspects of the Logical Forms of sentences more transparent than they are in spoken language, for accidental or sometimes for essential reasons (notably, the fact that indices are overtly realized in sign language but not in spoken language). In this section, we turn to cases in which sign language has greater expressive power than spoken languages because it can make greater use of iconic resources. There are certainly iconic phenomena in spoken language, for instance when the adjective *loooooong* is modulated so as to give an idea by its duration of the degree of length that's intended (*shoooooort* would accordingly yield a rather odd effect). But sign language make more systematic use of iconic resources, presumably because their depictive possibilities are much greater than those of spoken language. While one might initially seek to separate neatly between a 'grammatical/logical' and an 'iconic' component in sign language, we will see that the two are closely intertwined: iconic phenomena are found *at the core of the logical engine of sign language*. In particular, we will revisit in detail the case of sign language loci, and we will argue that in some cases they are *simultaneously* logical variables and simplified pictures of what they denote.

Before we plunge into the richness of iconic data, it will be useful to have a highly simplified example of a system that combines logic with iconicity. Let us compare two ways of defining an assignment function for a simple first-order logic in (45). In (45)a, two sorts of variables are used,  $x_i$  and  $y_i$ ;  $y_i$  ranges over the entire domain  $D$ , whereas  $x_i$  is constrained to range over a designated subdomain  $D_x$ . It goes without saying that nothing substantive would change if we decided to call these variables  $a_i$  and  $b_i$  instead  $x_i$  and  $y_i$ . In (45)b, the variables  $x_i$  are iconic variables, in the following (admittedly strange!) sense: they are constrained to *only denote objects that resemble the shape of  $x$*  – hence cross-like objects. Here the particular symbol used for the variables matters, as the assignment function would be constrained in a very different way if the variables  $x_i$  were replaced with variables  $a_i$ , with the requirement that the latter denote objects that resemble the symbol  $a$ .

(45) Let  $x_i, y_i$  ( $i \in \mathbb{N}$ ) be variables of a logical language with a domain of objects  $D$ .

a. Standard assignment function

$s$  is an assignment of values to  $x_i, y_i$  ( $i \in \mathbb{N}$ ) just in case for all  $i \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $s(x_i)$  and  $s(y_i)$  are individuals from  $D_x$  and  $D$  respectively, with  $D_x \subseteq D$ .

b. Partly iconic assignment function

$s$  is an assignment of values to  $x_i, y_i$  ( $i \in \mathbb{N}$ ) just in case for all  $i \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $s(x_i)$  and  $s(y_i)$  are individuals from  $D$ , and  $s(x_i)$  is an object that resembles  $x$  (by being cross-like).

The practical use of a partly iconic function as in (45)b is limited, in part because the iconic potential of letters of the alphabet isn't very rich. But things are different in sign language, as we will see shortly.

### 4.2 Iconic Effects<sup>19</sup>

But first, what are iconic effects in sign language? To see an intuitively clear example, consider the verb *GROW* in (46), which can be realized in a variety of ways, six of which were tested in (47) (in the 'slow movement' line, we have included pictures of the beginning and endpoint of *GROW*).

(46) POSS-1 GROUP GROW.

'My group has been growing.' (ASL; 8, 263)

<sup>19</sup> This section borrows from Schlenker 2013b.

(47) Representation of *GROW*

	<b>Narrow endpoints</b>	<b>Medium endpoints</b>	<b>Broad endpoints</b>
<b>Slow movement</b>	small amount, slowly 	medium amount, slowly 	large amount, slowly 
<b>Fast movement</b>	small amount, quickly 	medium amount, quickly 	large amount, quickly 

As is seen in (47), the sign for *GROW* in (46) starts out with the two hands forming a sphere, with the closed fist of the right hand inside the hemisphere formed by the left hand; the two fists then move away from each other on a horizontal plane (simultaneously, the configuration of the right hand changes from closed to open position). The signer varied two main parameters in (47): the distance between the endpoints; and the speed with which they were reached (only the first parameter is depicted). All variants were entirely acceptable, but yielded different meanings, as indicated in (47). Intuitively, there is mapping between the physical properties of the sign and the event denoted: the broader the endpoints, the larger the final size of the group; the more rapid the movement, the quicker the growth process.

Such effects are pervasive in sign language. Schlenker et al. 2013 asked (i) how they interact with the representation and interpretation of variables; and (ii) how this interaction should be modeled. The main claim was that sign language loci are simultaneously variables and pictorial representations: their values are provided by assignment functions, but the interpretation function is constrained to preserve some geometric properties of signs, and thus it has an iconic component. In effect, this proposal attempted to reconcile two camps in sign language research. The 'formalist camp' (e.g. Lillo-Martin and Klima 1990, Neidle et al. 2000, Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006) emphasizes the importance of predictive formal models, but so far it has had relatively little to say about iconic considerations. The 'iconic camp' (e.g. Cuxac 1999, Taub 2001, Liddell 2003) emphasizes the importance of iconic conditions, but does so within frameworks that are considered insufficiently explicit by the formalist side. Schlenker et al. 2013 claimed that some of the insights of the iconic camp are essential for a proper understanding of the semantics of sign language variables; but that understanding requires the kind of formal frameworks espoused by formalists – hence the necessity to incorporate to the latter an explicit iconic component.

We will argue below that expressions that have a pronominal component in sign language (pronouns and their associated 'loci', and also agreement verbs) sometimes involve *iconic variables*, i.e. symbolic expressions that are *both* logical variables and simplified pictures of what they denote. We make our case on the basis of three phenomena: (i) *plural loci*, where relations of inclusion and complementation among loci are directly reflected in their denotations (Section 4.3); (ii) *high and low loci*, which can be used for individuals whose head is (in fact or metaphorically) situated up or down (Section 4.4); and (iii) instances of 'locative shift' (briefly discussed in Section 2.3), where a nominal locus can 'move' in the horizontal space to join locative loci that its denotation is associated with (Section 4.5).

We will make use of the first case study (= plural loci) to define an 'iconic semantics' as one in which some geometric properties of signs are preserved by the interpretation function. In this particular case, we will be able to be quite explicit about the resulting semantics. While we believe that other iconic uses of loci could in the future be handled in an equally explicit fashion, in our other case studies we will leave things at a more informal level due to the complexity of the interpretive phenomena involved.

### 4.3 *Embedded Loci: Plurals*<sup>20</sup>

The simplest instance of an iconic constraint concerns plural ASL and LSF loci, which are usually realized as (semi-)circular areas. These can be embedded within each other, and we hypothesize that this gives rise to cases of *structural iconicity*, whereby topological relations of inclusion and relative complementation in signing space are mapped into mereological analogues in the space of loci denotations.

Our initial focus is on the anaphoric possibilities made available in English by the sentence *Most students came to class*. Recent research has argued that such a sentence makes available two discourse referents for further anaphoric uptake: one corresponding to the maximal set of students, as illustrated in (48)b ('maximal set anaphora'); and one for the entire set of students, as illustrated in (48)c ('restrictor set anaphora').

- (48) a. *Complement set anaphora*: #Most students came to class. They stayed home instead.  
 b. *Maximal set anaphora*: Most students came to class, and they asked good questions.  
 c. *Restrictor set anaphora*: Most students came to class. They are a serious group.

Crucially, however, no discourse referent is made available for the set of students that didn't come to class ('complement set anaphora', as this is the complement of the maximal set within the restrictor set); this is what explains the deviance of (48)a. This anaphoric pattern, whereby *they* in (48) is read as referring to the students that did *not* come, is at best limited when the initial quantifier is *few*, and nearly impossible with *most*. Nouwen 2003 argues that when available, complement set anaphora involves *inferred* discourse referents: no grammatical mechanism makes available a discourse referent denoting the complement set – here: the set of students who *didn't* come.

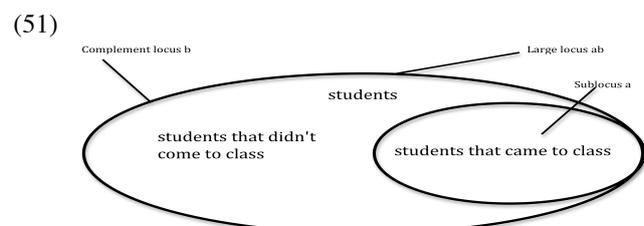
On the basis of ASL and LSF data, Schlenker et al. 2013 made two main observations.

**Observation I.** When a default plural locus is used in ASL, data similar to (48) can be replicated – e.g. complement set anaphora with *most* is quite degraded. This is illustrated in (49), with average judgments (per trial) on a 7-point scale, with a total of 5 trials and 3 informants.

- (49) POSS-1 STUDENT FEW a-CAME CLASS.                      POSS-1 STUDENT MOST a-CAME CLASS.  
 3.6 IX-arc-a a-STAY HOME                                      2.8 IX-arc-a a-STAY HOME  
*Intended*: 'Few/Most of my students came to class. They [the students that didn't come] stayed home.'

**Observation II.** When embedded loci are used, the effect is circumvented: one large locus (written as *ab*, but signed as a single circular locus) denotes the set of all students; a sub-locus (= *a*) denotes the set of students who came; and a complement locus (= *b*) thereby becomes available, denoting the set of students who didn't come, as illustrated in (50) and (51).

- (50) POSS-1 STUDENT IX-arc-ab MOST IX-arc-a a-CAME CLASS.  
 'Most of my students came to class.'  
 a. 7 IX-arc-b b-STAY HOME  
 'They stayed home.'  
 b. 7 IX-arc-a a-ASK-1 GOOD QUESTION  
 'They asked me good questions.'  
 c. 7 IX-arc-ab SERIOUS CLASS.  
 'They are a serious class.'  
 (ASL; 8, 196)



We account for Observation I and Observation II by assuming that (i) Nouwen is right that in English, *as well as ASL and LSF*, the grammar *fails* to make available a discourse referent for the

<sup>20</sup> This section borrows from Schlenker 2013b and Schlenker et al. 2013.

complement set, i.e. the set of students who didn't come; but (ii) the mapping between plural loci and mereological sums preserves relations of inclusion and complementation, which in (50)a makes available the locus  $b$ . The main assumptions for us are that (a) the set of loci is closed with respect to relative complementation: if  $a$  is a sublocus of  $b$ , then  $(b-a)$  is a locus as well; and (b) assignment functions are constrained to respect inclusion and relative complementation: if  $a$  is a sublocus of  $b$ , the denotation of  $a$  is a subpart of the denotation of  $b$ , and  $(b-a)$  denotes the expected complement set. These conditions are stated more completely in (52):

(52) Conditions of loci

Let LOC be the set of plural loci that appear in signing space, and let  $s$  an admissible assignment function that assigns values to loci. We make the assumptions in (a)-(b), where we view plural loci as sets of geometric points, and loci denotations as sets of individuals.

a. Conditions on LOC: for all  $a, b \in \text{LOC}$ , (i)  $a \subseteq b$  or  $b \subseteq a$  or  $a \cap b = \emptyset$ ; (ii) if  $a \subset b$ ,  $(b-a) \in \text{LOC}$

b. Conditions on  $s$ : for all  $a, b \in \text{LOC}$ , (i)  $a \subset b$  iff  $s(a) \subset s(b)$ ; (ii) if  $a \subset b$ ,  $s(b-a) = s(b)-s(a)$

In (50)a, where embedded loci are used, we can make the following reasoning:

- Since  $a$  is a proper sublocus of a large locus  $ab$ , we can infer by (52)a(ii) that  $(ab-a)$  (i.e.  $b$ ) is a locus as well;
- by (52)b(i), we can infer that  $s(a) \subset s(ab)$ ;
- and by (52)b(ii), we can infer that  $s(b) = s(ab)-s(a)$ .

In this way, complement set anaphora becomes available because ASL/LSF can rely on an iconic property which is inapplicable in English. But this does not mean that there is an independent grammatical difference between these languages: as we saw, with default loci the English data are replicated, which suggests that Nouwen's assumption that the grammar does not make available a discourse referent for the complement set applies to sign language too. Rather, it is because of iconic conditions on plural loci, not grammar in a narrow sense, that a difference does arise in the case of embedded loci.

One additional remark is worth making in connection with our discussion of the debate between analyses of loci as variables vs. as features. It is notable that the locus  $b$  in (50)a and (51) is not inherited by way of agreement, since it is not introduced by anything. From our present perspective, the existence of this locus is inferred by a closure condition on the set of loci, and its interpretation is determined by an iconic rule. But the latter makes crucial reference to the fact that loci have denotations. It is not trivial to see how these results could be emulated in a variable-free analysis in which loci don't have a denotation. Presumably these loci could be treated as deictic (the one case in which the variable-free analysis has an analogue of variable denotations). This might force a view of these iconic phenomena in which they are handled in a diagrammatic-like fashion, a point to which we return in 6.1.

#### 4.4 High and low loci

In the preceding section, relations of inclusion and relative complementation among loci were preserved by the interpretation function. We turn to cases in which the vertical position of loci is meaningful and argues for an iconic analysis.

##### 4.4.1 Initial cases<sup>21</sup>

While loci are usually established in a single horizontal plane, in some contexts they may be signed high or low. Our point of departure lies in the inferences that one obtains when a high or a low locus is used to refer to an individual. An ASL example without quantifiers, from Schlenker et al. 2013, is given in (53) In brief, a high locus is used to refer to a tall, important or powerful individual, whereas a low locus is used to refer to a short individual (similar data were described for LSF in Schlenker et al. 2013).

<sup>21</sup> This section borrows from Schlenker 2014a and Schlenker et al. 2013.

- (53) YESTERDAY IX-1 SEE R [= body-anchored proper name]. IX-1 NOT UNDERSTAND IX-a<sup>high / normal / low</sup> (ASL)  
 a. 7 High locus. Inference: R is tall, or powerful/important  
 b. 7 Normal locus. Inference: nothing special  
 c. 7 Low locus. Inference: R is short  
 'Yesterday I saw R [= body-anchored proper name]. I didn't understand him.' (ASL; 11, 24; 25)

As can be seen, the relevant inferences are preserved under negation, which provides initial motivation for treating them as presuppositional in nature, a proposal that has been made about the semantic specifications of pronouns, such as gender, in spoken language (Cooper 1983).

Importantly, high and low loci can appear under binding, with results that are expected from the standpoint of a presuppositional analysis of the semantic specifications of pronouns. From this perspective, (54)a is acceptable because the bound variable  $her_i$  ranges over female individuals; and (54)b is acceptable to the extent that one assumes that the relevant set of directors only comprises females.

- (54) a. [None of these women]<sub>i</sub> thinks that I like her<sub>i</sub>.  
 b. [None of these directors]<sub>i</sub> thinks that I like her<sub>i</sub>.

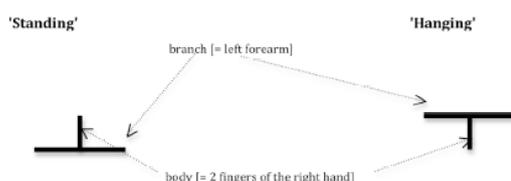
Similar conditions on bound high and low loci apply in (55)-(56) (here too, similar examples were described for LSF):

- (55) NO TALL MAN THINK IX-1 LIKE IX-a  
 a. 7 High locus  
 b. 6 Normal locus  
 c. 3 Low locus  
 'No tall man thinks that I like him.' (ASL; 11, 27)

- (56) NO SHORT-PERSON THINK IX-1 LIKE IX-a  
 a. 2 High locus  
 b. 6 Normal locus  
 c. 7 Low locus  
 'No short person thinks that I like him.' (ASL; 11, 28)

As argued in Schlenker et al. 2013, it will not do to treat height specifications of loci as contributing information about an *intrinsic* property of their denotations, for instance in terms of being tall or short. Rather, in at least some of their uses they provide information about the spatial position of the upper part of a person's body. This is shown by the paradigm in (58), which is about people that are either standing on a branch, or hanging, upside own, from a branch. In these examples, a finger classifier was used to represent the relevant individuals, knuckles up for the 'standing' position, knuckles down for the 'hanging' position. The signer attempted to keep the middle of the initial classifier (representing a philosopher) at a constant height, as shown in (57). It turned out that the *orientation* of the denoted person – in standing or hanging position – had consequences for the acceptability of high and low loci: the same tall philosopher could be referred to with a high locus when he was in standing position, and with a low locus when he was in hanging position.<sup>22</sup>

- (57) Rough position of the index and middle finger of the dominant hand and of the non-dominant hand in example (58) below



<sup>22</sup> Schlenker et al. 2013 discuss a third condition (involving a lying position).

- (58) *Context*: People have conversations in the weirdest of positions. (ASL; simplified from Schlenker et al. 2013)

TREE BRANCH VERY TALL LINGUIST PERSON CL-\_\_\_\_\_a SAME VERY TALL  
PHILOSOPHER PERSON CL-\_\_\_\_\_b, IX-a<sup>1/2/3/4/5</sup> UNDERSTAND IX-b<sup>1/2/3/4/5</sup>.

'[A very tall linguist]<sub>a</sub> was (a) standing on (b) hanging from a branch and [a very tall philosopher]<sub>b</sub> was (a) standing on (b) hanging from a branch. He<sub>a</sub> understood him<sub>b</sub>.'

Levels range from 1 = top to 5 = bottom.

a. CL-\_\_\_\_\_ = CL-stand

translation = 'standing on' (ASL; 10, 106)

Acceptability: **Level 2. 6.3** **Level 4. 5**

b. CL-\_\_\_\_\_ = CL-hang

translation = 'hanging from' (ASL; 10, 105)

Acceptability: **Level 2. 3.3** **Level 4. 7**

In this paradigm, the sentence is kept constant, except for two parameters: the classifiers in loci *a* and *b* may correspond to a person in standing or hanging position, as represented in (57); and the pronouns *IX-a* and *IX-b* index five different levels in each case, with Level 1 = highest and Level 5 = lowest. While extreme positions are dispreferred, the heights that can be targeted are a bit higher in the 'standing' than in the 'hanging' condition, as shown by the partial ratings in (58) (see Schlenker et al. 2013 for full ratings). In essence, the interpretation function seems to be preserving a certain ordering: if a locus *i* is above a neutral locus *n*, the denotation of *i* must be above the denotation of *n* on some salient ordering; and when talking about people in physical situations, it would seem that the salient ordering in question is often given by the relative positions of their upper bodies.

A formal analysis was developed in Schlenker et al. 2013, based on the idea that height differences among loci should be proportional to the height differences among their denotations. The model for the analysis was the presuppositional analysis of gender features developed in Cooper 1983, given in (59). In a nutshell, the idea was that a pronoun *she<sub>i</sub>* evaluated under an assignment function *s* refers to *s(i)*, *unless* the presupposition triggered by the feminine features of *she* – that its denotation is female – are not satisfied.

- (59) *Gender specifications*

Let *c* be a context of speech, *s* an assignment function and *w* a world (with  $c_w$  = the world of *c*).

$[[she_i]]^{c,s,w} = \#$  iff  $s(i) = \#$  or ***s(i)* is not female** in  $c_w$ . If  $[[she_i]]^{c,s,w} \neq \#$ ,  $[[she_i]]^{c,s,w} = s(i)$ .

Schlenker et al. 2013 extend this presuppositional analysis to high and low loci, but with an iconic condition in the presuppositional part, boldfaced in (60).

- (60) *Height specifications*

Let *c* be a context of speech, *s* an assignment function and *w* a world (with  $c_w$  = the world of *c*).

If *i* is a locus, *n* is a locus with neutral height, *h* is a measure of the heights of loci in signing space,  $h_c$  is a measure (given by the context *c*) of heights of objects in  $c_w$ , and  $\alpha_c > 0$  is a parameter given by the context *c*,

$[[IX-i]]^{c,s,w} = \#$  iff  $s(i) = \#$  or  **$h_c(s(i)) - h_c(s(n)) \neq \alpha_c(h(i) - h(n))$** . If  $[[IX-i]]^{c,s,w} \neq \#$ ,  $[[IX-i]]^{c,s,w} = s(i)$ .

In words: the height difference between the denotations *s(i)* and *s(n)* should be proportional to the height difference between the loci *i* and *n*, with a multiplicative parameter  $\alpha_c > 0$ ; in particular, this imposes that orderings be preserved (with the more stringent constraint that distances be preserved *modulo* the parameter  $\alpha$ ; weaker conditions were also explored in Schlenker et al. 2013). Since bodies are not points, further hypotheses were needed to determine which parts of locus denotations mattered in the relevant ordering; an initial hypothesis is that when it comes to people, their upper bodies matter:

- (61) Partial hypothesis (slightly modified from Schlenker et al. 2013)

When evaluating the height of loci denotations,

a. the position of  $c_a$  is assessed by considering the real or imagined position of the upper part of the body of  $c_a$  in  $c_w$ ;

- b. if  $s(i)$  is a person, the position of  $s(i)$  corresponds to the position of the upper part of the body of  $s(i)$  in  $c_w$ .

It was further shown in Schlenker et al. 2013, that the same generalizations hold of ASL reflexive pronouns indexing loci of different heights. For this reason, it is not possible to argue that index pointing alone is affected by height specifications; ASL reflexives, which index loci in a different way (thumb upwards, rather than pointing towards the locus), are subject to the very same locus specifications.

#### 4.4.2 Further developments

Several questions were addressed in more sophisticated research.

(i) First, how seriously should one take the analogy between the context-dependency of *she* in (59) and of high loci in (60)? In both cases, the boxed parts indicate that femaleness or height must be evaluated with respect to the context of utterance, not with respect to the world of evaluation. Schlenker et al. 2013 show by considering cases in which an attitude holder has mistaken beliefs about another person's height or gender, English feminine features and ASL height specifications alike seem to go with the real rather than the perceived specifications when the pronoun is embedded under an attitude operator.<sup>23</sup>

(ii) Second, how rich is the iconic semantics that is required for the analysis of pronouns? In the semantics in (60), only the vertical heights of loci play a role. But Schlenker 2014 considers cases of rotation in which one needs to posit that loci are areas of space rather than points, and they are simplified pictures of what they denote. In effect, one needs to borrow aspects of a 'pictorial semantics', recently investigated in a very different context by Greenberg 2012. Specifically, we will posit in some cases that there must be a geometric projection (satisfying requirements to be determined) between objects and the loci that denote them.

The point was made in Schlenker 2014a by ASL and LSF paradigms such as that in (62) (from ASL). Here  $CL_a$  is a finger (person-denoting) classifier on the right, representing a tall astronaut;  $CL_b$  is a finger (person-denoting) person classifier on the left representing a short astronaut.

(62) HAVE TWO ROCKET PERSON [ONE HEIGHT]<sub>a</sub> [ONE SHORT]<sub>b</sub>. THE-TWO-a,b PRACTICE DIFFERENT VARIOUS-POSITIONS [positions shown].

IX-a HEIGHT IX-b SHORT, **CL<sub>a</sub>-[position]-CL<sub>b</sub>-[position]**.

'There were two astronauts, one<sub>a</sub> tall, one<sub>b</sub> short. They trained in various positions [positions shown]. They were in [\_\_\_] position.'

a. IX-a\_upper\_part LIKE SELF-a\_upper\_part IX-b\_lower\_part NOT.

The tall one liked himself. The short one didn't.'

b. \*IX-a\_upper\_part LIKE SELF-a\_upper\_part. IX-b\_lower\_part NOT LIKE SELF-b\_upper\_part.

[intended:] The tall one liked himself. The short one didn't like himself.'

(ASL; 17, 178)

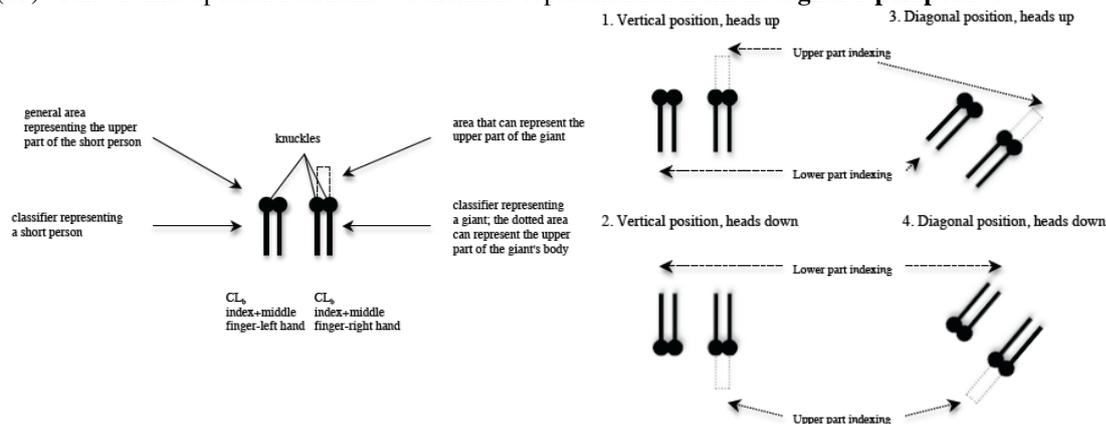
<sup>23</sup> The English example is given in (i); it suggests that in this case gender features of the boldfaced pronouns are assessed relative to the context of evaluation rather than from the standpoint of the attitude holder. ASL versions of (ii) were constructed to test an analogous question relative to the evaluation of height specifications of loci (with pronouns indexing loci of different heights for the realization of the boldfaced pronoun).

(i) Bill wore a dress and make-up and John didn't realize that he was a man. He said that **he**/**she** looked great and that **he**/**she** was staring at him. (Sharvit 2008)

(ii) My cousin wrongly thinks that my younger brother is tall. He thinks **he** is a basketball player.'

Our goal was to show that (i) in 'standing' position, 'tall person' indexing could be higher than 'short person' indexing – as is expected given the discussion in Section 4.4.1; but in addition, that (ii) the indexed position could rotate in accordance with the position of the denoted person on the assumption that there was a geometric projection between the structured locus and the denoted situation. Accordingly, (i) (62) makes reference to a tall and to a short individual; (ii) they are rotated as shown in (63), which depicts the approximate target of upper part vs. lower part indexing in the various situations, with the finger classifiers rotated to represent the different positions of their denotations.

(63) Tall vs. short person rotations – schematic representation from the **signer's perspective**



Concentrating for the moment on the boxed part of (62)a, what was found in these examples was that each finger classifier represented an individual, one taller than the other, with the knuckles representing the upper part of the body; in the case of the tall individual, the locus extended above the knuckles, with the result that the reflexive *SELF-a\_upper\_part* targeted a position above the knuckles in the 'vertical position, heads up' case. But as different cases of rotation of the astronauts were considered, the finger classifiers rotated accordingly, and the 'upper part' of the locus indexed by *SELF-a\_upper\_part* did as well, as represented in (63).<sup>24</sup>

(iii) Third, one could ask how integrated to the grammatical system height specifications are. We mentioned in (i) that their semantics in Schlenker et al. 2013 was modeled after that of gender features, albeit with an iconic twist. Schlenker 2014a cautiously suggests that height specifications behave in another respect like gender (and other) features: they can somehow be disregarded under ellipsis. An example is given in (64)a, where the elided VP has a bound reading, unlike its overt counterpart in (64)b. On the (standard) assumption that VP ellipsis is effected by copying part the antecedent VP, this suggests that by some mechanism the feminine features of that antecedent can be ignored by ellipsis resolution, as represented (with a barred pronoun) in (64)b.

- (64) In my study group,  
 a. Mary did her homework, and John did too.  
 => available bound variable reading in the second clause  
 b. Mary  $\lambda i t_i$  did her<sub>i</sub> homework, and John  $\lambda i t_i$  did [~~do her<sub>i</sub>~~ homework] too  
 c. Mary did her homework, and John did her homework too.  
 => no bound variable reading in the second clause

<sup>24</sup> These results dovetail nicely with earlier arguments for the view that individual loci (i) are structured, and (ii) can be simplified pictures of what they denote. This argument was developed in Liddell 2003 and revisited in Schlenker et al. 2013; it was based on 'agreement verbs' (also called 'directional verbs'), whose morphology includes a movement from or towards a locus – as if the latter were incorporated into the verb. Liddell had argued that different verbs target different parts of a locus depending on their meaning, with *COMMUNICATE-BY-TELEPATHY* targeting a higher position than *GIVE*, for instance. These insights were confirmed by Schlenker et al. 2013, who also showed that in cases of vertical rotations, the upper part (head) of a locus could be moved to become low if the denoted individuals changed from standing to hanging position. (See also Keg1 2004 [written in 1977] for an early argument that agreement verbs have an iconic component.)

The unboxed part of (62)a was designed to test whether ASL ellipsis makes it possible to disregard height specifications as well. Here the antecedent VP includes a reflexive which indexes the upper part of a locus, which is adequate to refer to a giant but not to a short person. Despite this apparent mismatch, the elided sentence is acceptable – unlike the overt counterpart in (62)b, which includes an overt reflexive *SELF* referring to a short person but with high specifications.

The interpretation of these results requires some care, however. The main question is whether the ability of an element to be disregarded under ellipsis is *only* true of featural elements, or targets a broader class. Schlenker 2014a didn't give a final answer, and we will see below that co-speech gestures in spoken language, which certainly don't count as 'features', can almost certainly be disregarded in this way.

#### 4.5 Locative Shift

So far we have primarily discussed cases in which loci can be placed in the 'normal', horizontal plane, or be high or low depending on semantic conditions that appear to be iconic in nature. We further showed that loci are in some cases structured areas of space, with a head and a foot, rather than mere points; and that due to their picture-like qualities they may be rotated in signing space depending on the positions of their denotations. It might be thought that, by contrast, the horizontal position of loci in signing space is 'non-negotiable', because the horizontal space is used to specify the identity of loci. But as we saw in (13) and later examples, this is not so: when an individual has been associated with a spatial location in previous discourse, one can refer to him by pointing towards the locus *associated with that location* (though pointing to the original locus of the individual is often possible too); we further suggested that this property extends more broadly to *situations*, i.e. to loci that refer to times or possible worlds/situations. It remains to understand how this phenomenon comes about, and whether it is iconic in nature.

Importantly, 'locative shift' seems to affect all sorts of expressions that involve loci, not just 'pointing signs' – which might seem somehow special due to their iconic uses, and also the fact that they have non-individual-denoting uses, as we saw above. This is shown by the example in (65), which involves a possessive pronoun *POSS* that either indexes the locus *b* associated *JOHN* or the locus *c* associated with *[AMERICAN CITY]<sub>c</sub>*. It is clear that the second option does not yield a meaning on which the apartment somehow belongs to the American city in question.

- (65) JOHN<sub>b</sub> OWN APARTMENT [FRENCH CITY]<sub>a</sub> SAME OWN APARTMENT [AMERICAN CITY]<sub>c</sub>.  
 'John owns an apartment in a French city, and he also owns an apartment in an American city.'  
 a. 6.5 POSS-**b** APARTMENT NICE  
 => no inference about the apartment's location  
 'His apartment is nice.'  
 b. 7 POSS-**c** APARTMENT NICE  
 => John's American apartment is nice  
 'His American apartment is nice.'  
 (ASL; 27, 62; 2 judgments)

On the other hand, it is important to observe that different readings are obtained in (65)a and (65)b. In (65)a, no inference is derived about the location of John's apartment – given the context, it could be in France or in the US. By contrast, (65)b makes reference to John's American apartment.

At this point, a tentative way to capture the data is to posit a semantics that is more fine-grained than is usually thought, with loci referring either to a individual, to a situation, or to a 'situation slice' of an individual, which can be thought of as an individual-at-a-situation. Using pairs of the form <individual, situation> to capture the latter case, we can state a preliminary hypothesis in (66).

- (66) **Hypothesis**  
 a. Individual arguments can denote locative slices (more generally: situation-slices) of individuals.  
 Possible implementation: *IX-a* can denote John, or <John, LA>, or <John, Paris>.  
 b. Sometimes, this makes a difference to interpretive phenomena – e.g. <John, LA>'s apartment ≠ <John, Paris>'s apartment

The important point is that a locus referring to a situation *s* can be re-cycled as a locus referring to an individual-at-situation-*s*. But recycling this locus will yield potentially different reading than referring to the original individual-denoting locus.

Without giving a full account of these cases, we would like to ask whether locative shift can in some cases involve iconic uses. This appears to be the case. In (67)a, two loci *a* and *b* are introduced for *JOHN* and *PETER* respectively, but in addition *BUILDING LEANING* introduces an area of signing space representing the tower of Pisa, leaning rightwards from the signer's perspective as is represented in (68) and symbolized in (67) with the symbol /.

(67) JOHN\_a PETER\_b IX-1 THE-THREE-a,b,1 VISIT PISA FAMOUS BUILDING LEANING-/. THE-TWO-a,b WALK LONG TOP. IX-1 FILM-rep\_[wavy line along /].

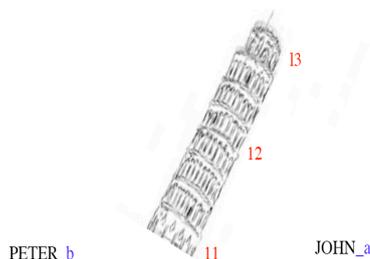
6 JOHN IX-13 SHOW POSS-13 HAND. PETER IX-11 NOT.

=> John showed his hand in the upper part; Peter didn't show his hand (in the middle/lower part) (ASL; 28, 26; 3 judgments)

(68)

a. Intuitive representation of the tower in signing space (signer's perspective)

b. Actual sign establishing the position of the tower (addressee's perspective)



The crucial observation is that when the context allows – by making it clear that John was in the upper part of the tower – the possessive *POSS* can index position *13*, which corresponds to the upper part of the tower rather to the locus *a* originally introduced by *JOHN*, as can be seen in (67) (note that in this case the locus *13* is first introduced by a pointing sign *IX-13* associated with *JOHN*, making clear that at the relevant time John was in a position corresponding to *13*). In addition, it can be ascertained that the possessive is used as a bound variable: the elided VP following *NOT* is naturally understood with a bound reading. (As in some of our earlier examples, ellipsis resolution can disregard specifications of the antecedent, since the second sentence of (67) is understood to involve Peter showing his hand in the middle/lower part of the building, rather than towards the top.<sup>25</sup>)

Interesting, there also appear to be some cases in which a reflexive pronoun and its antecedent do not share the same locative specifications. This is the case in (69). In this case we have indexed the reflexive *SELF* with the loci that appear in (68)a: locus *a* is the locus associated with *JOHN*, while *11*, *12* and *13* are three locations at different levels of the sign for *LEANING-/.*, representing a building in leaning position.

(69) JOHN\_a PETER\_b IX-1 THE-THREE-a,b,1 VISIT PISA FAMOUS BUILDING LEANING-/. THE-THREE-a,b,1 WALK LONG TOP. IX-1 PHOTO-rep\_[wavy line along /], FINISH

a. 6.2 IX-a SEE SELF-13, IX-b NOT

b. 5.5 IX-a SEE SELF-13, IX-b NOT SEE SELF-13

a, b => only John saw himself being high up

c. 7 IX-a SEE SELF-a, IX-b NOT

d. 6.5 IX-a SEE SELF-a, IX-b NOT SEE SELF-b

c, d => only John saw himself (ASL; 20, 82; 4 judgments)

The striking observation is that *IX-a* SEE SELF-13 is understood to mean that John (originally associated with locus *a*) saw himself being *at the top of the tower*; this shows that the reflexive pronoun makes an iconic contribution by indexing position *13*, corresponding to the top of the tower. Still, it can be further ascertained with a sentence with ellipsis *IX-b NOT* referring to Peter that the

<sup>25</sup> In other cases, locative specifications appear to remain interpreted under ellipsis – a point we leave for future research.

boxed VP is indeed read on a bound variable reading. In other words, *SELF-13* simultaneously displays the behavior of a bound variable and of an iconic element. (In this case, the locative specifications of the antecedent seem to be preserved under ellipsis, as can be seen by the interpretation of the elided VP, which entails that Peter didn't see himself *being high up*).

The various pronouns we have just discussed display a grammatical behavior as bound variables while also contributing iconic information about the position of their denotations, possibly analyzed as situation stages of individuals – although the analysis will have to be refined in future research.

## 5 Iconicity II: Beyond Variables

Iconic conditions are pervasive in sign language semantics, and are definitely not limited to the semantics of variable-like constructions. With no claim to exhaustivity, we provide below a few cases that have been studied in the recent literature and are of conceptual interest.

### 5.1 Classifier constructions

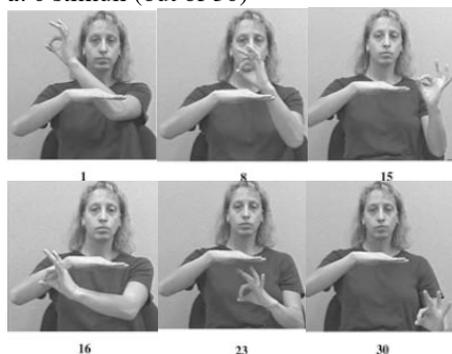
We already saw in (62)-(63) that person classifiers can in part function as simplified pictures of their denotations. They belong to a much broader class of 'classifier constructions', which were shown in Emmorey and Herzig 2003 to give rise to gradient iconicity effects in native signers of ASL. To assess this effect, they gradually modified the position of a classifier representing a small object (a sticker) relative to a handshape representing a flat object (a bar). The small object classifier is called the 'F-handshape' because it looks like the F of the manual alphabet, the flat object construction is called the 'B-handshape' because it looks like the B of the manual alphabet. Emmorey and Herzig describe their experiment as follows:

Participants were asked to place a dot (a 1/2 inch round sticker) in relation to a bar (a line) drawn in the center of a square frame. Where the sticker should be placed was indicated by a native signer (on videotape), who produced a classifier construction in which the F-handshape (specifying a small round object—the dot sticker) was positioned in signing space either above or below a horizontal B-handshape (specifying a flat, surface-prominent object—the bar).

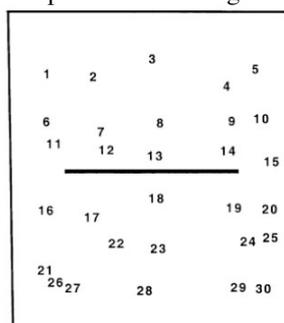
They produced ASL stimuli with 30 different positions for the F-handshape relative to the B-handshape, 6 of which are represented in (70)a. The average positions selected by the deaf signers appear in (70)b; positions 1, 8, 15, 16, 23 and 30 correspond to the stimuli in (70)a.

#### (70) Small object classifier positioned relative to a surface handshape (Emmorey and Herzig 2003)

a. 6 stimuli (out of 30)



b. Responses of deaf signers



As can be seen, deaf signing participants placed the dot in a position that corresponded to the position of the *F*-handshape classifier relative to the *B*-handshape, with effects that were both iconic and gradient (to the extent that gradient can be assessed on the basis of 30 examples).

While the formal analysis of such constructions is still under study, it is clear that one will need rules that make reference to iconic conditions. This can be achieved by directly incorporating

iconic conditions in semantic rules, as we did for high and low loci above, and as was sketched for the case of classifiers in Schlenker 2011a. Alternatively, one could take these expressions to have a demonstrative component that makes reference to *the gesture performed while realizing the sign itself*, as was done in Zucchi 2011 and Davidson to appear. An example from Zucchi 2011 is given in (71)a and paraphrased in (71)b.

- (71) a. CAR CL-vehicle-DRIVE-BY  
 b. 'A car drove by *like this*', where the demonstration is produced by the movement of the classifier predicate in signing space (after Zucchi 2011)

Here *CL-vehicle-DRIVE-BY* is a classifier predicate used to describe the movement of vehicles. The movement of the classifier predicate in signing space tracks in a gradient fashion the movement performed by the relevant car in real space. As informally shown in (71)b, Zucchi takes the classifier predicate to have a normal meaning (specifying that a movement occurred, with a restriction on the argument of the predicate, which must refer to a vehicle) as well as a demonstrative component, which is self-referential; in effect, the classifier predicate ends up meaning something like: 'moved as demonstrated by this very sign'. We come back in Section 6.1 to the possibility that sign language semantics should generally make reference to a gestural component.

## 5.2 Event visibility or event iconicity?

In our discussion of loci, we saw that these lead a dual life: on the one hand, they are – in some cases at least – the overt manifestation of variable-like objects; on the other hand, they can also function as simplified pictures of what they denote. As it turns out, we believe that a similar conclusion holds of Wilbur's cases of 'Event Visibility' discussed in Section 3.2: sign language phonology makes it possible to make visible key parts of the representation of events, *but also to arrange them in iconic ways* (see Kuhn 2015 and Kuhn and Aristodemo 2015 for a detailed discussion involving pluractional verbs, i.e. verbs that make reference to plurality of events). A case in point can be seen in (72), which represented 5 different realizations of the sign for *UNDERSTAND*, three stages of which appear in (73).

- (72) YESTERDAY MATHEMATICS PROOF JEAN UNDERSTAND.  
 'Yesterday Jean understood a mathematical proof.' (LSF 49, 27; 4 trials)  
 Realization of *UNDERSTAND*:

- a. 7 normal  
 b. 7  $\sim$   $\sim$   
     slow fast  
 => difficult beginning, but in the end Jean understood  
 c. 5.5  $\sim$   $\sim$   
     fast slow  
 => easy beginning, then more difficult, but Jean understood  
 d. 1.2  $\sim$   $\sim$   $\sim$   
     slow fast slow  
 e. 1.2  $\sim$   $\sim$   $\sim$   
     fast slow fast

- (73) **Initial, intermedial and final stage in the realization of *UNDERSTAND* in (72)b**



*UNDERSTAND* is formed by the progressive closing of a tripod formed by the thumb, index and middle finger of the dominant hand (right hand for a right-handed signer). But different meanings are obtained depending on how the closure is effected. As in seen in (72)d-e, the examples become odd

when two changes of speed occur within the realization of the sign. But with a single change of speed, as in (72)b-c, the result is acceptable and semantically interpretable: if the sign starts slow and ends fast, one infers that the corresponding process had a similar time course; and conversely when the sign starts fast and ends slow. (In this example the facial expressions remain constant, with lowered eyebrows throughout the realization of the sign; more natural examples are obtained when the facial expressions are also modulated, and in such cases more changes of speed can be produced and interpreted – but it is difficult to tease apart the relative role of the manual vs. non-manual modulation in the semantic effects obtained)

The same facts hold of atelic verbs. Thus in (74) the atelic verb *REFLECT*, which in accordance with Wilbur's generalization lacks a sharp ending, can be modulated so as to map the course of the event. While the modulations with 2 changes of speed in (74)d-e were deemed by our consultant to be artistic forms that one could use only in theater, cases with a single change of speed in (74)a-c were natural and interpreted iconically.

(74) YESTERDAY MATHEMATICS PROBLEM IX-1 REFLECT.

'Yesterday I thought about a mathematics problem.' (LSF 49, 23; 5 trials)

Realization of *REFLECT*:

a. 7 normal

b. 7            
slow fast

=> the reflection intensified

c. 7            
fast- slow

=> the reflection became more quiet

d. 7                 
slow fast slow

=> theatrical use: slow then fast then slow reflection

e. 6.8                 
fast slow fast

=> theatrical use: fast then slow then fast reflection

In this case, then, it seems that sign language doesn't just make visible discrete elements for which there is indirect evidence in spoken language (notably, the endpoint of event type denoted by the verb). It also makes use of them in gradient and iconic ways that would be hard to replicate in spoken language (not for lack of gradience, but simply because the sound stream has fewer iconic possibilities than the gestural modality). In the long term, two theoretical possibilities should be considered. One that is that event iconicity should work *alongside* Wilbur's Event Visibility Hypothesis, which should thus retain a special status, with discrete but covert distinctions of spoken language made visible in sign language. An alternative is that Wilbur's data are a *special case* of event iconicity; on this view, telic and atelic verbs alike have the ability to map in a gradient fashion the development of an event, and it is for this more general reason that telic verbs mark endstates in a designated fashion. (We come back to this point in Section 6.1, where we note that that non-signers have some knowledge of Wilbur's generalization and can thus guess fairly accurately the classification of sign language verbs among telic vs. atelic.)

### 5.3 *Iconic effects in Role Shift*

We now turn once again to the issue Role Shift. In Section 3.1, we suggested that Role Shift can be analyzed as a visible instance of context shift. But we will now see that this analysis is incomplete, and must be supplemented with a principle that makes reference to iconicity. In brief, we will suggest Role Shift is a visible instance of context shift, but one which comes with a requirement that the expressions under Role Shift should be interpreted *maximally iconically*. The argument is in two steps. First, we suggest that Role Shift under attitude reports (= Attitude Role Shift) has a strong quotational component, at least in ASL and LSF. Second, we suggest that Role Shift in action reports (= Action Role Shift) has an iconic component.

Schlenker to appear, 2015 notes that even in his ASL data, which allow for *wh*-extraction out of role-shifted clauses under attitude verbs, several tests suggest that these have a quotational component.

(i) An ASL version of the test discussed in (41), with *ANY* (which in some environments has a clear NPI behavior) suggests that it *cannot* appear under Role Shift without being quoted.

(ii) Another test of indirect discourse based on licensing of ellipsis from outside the attitude report similarly fails. For simplicity, we will just lay out its logic on an English example:

- (75) *Context*: The speaker has recently had a political conversation with John. The addressee and John have never met each other.
- a. You love Obama. John told me that he doesn't.
  - b. (#) You love Obama. John told me: 'I don't.'

In (75)a, the elided VP in the second sentence is licensed by the first sentence, and one definitely does not infer that John's words involved an elided VP. The facts are different in (75)b, which clearly attributes to John the use of the very words *I don't* – hence a possible deviance if the context does not explain why John might have used a construction with ellipsis. When some information to this effect is added, the ellipsis within quotation marks becomes of course acceptable, as seen in (76)b.

- (76) a. I just told John that you love Obama. He told me that he doesn't.  
b. I just told John that you love Obama. He told me: 'I don't'.

While standard indirect discourse in ASL patterns like English with respect to the licensing of ellipsis, the facts are different under Role Shift; there an elided VP is interpreted exactly as if it were quoted.

(iii) Similarly, non-linguistic properties of role-shifted clauses are normally attributed to the agent rather than to the signer, and in this respect Role Shift differs from standard indirect discourse. Schlenker 2015 established this generalization (which is unsurprising for the traditional sign language literature) by asking his consultants to sign sentences in which the signer displays a happy face, something encoded with a happy face :-), followed by ----- over the expressions that were accompanied by this facial expression. Importantly, this happy face is not a grammaticalized non-manual expression. The consultant was asked to start the happy face at the beginning of the report, to maximize the chance that it would be seen to reflect the signer's (rather than the agent's) happiness. In standard indirect discourse, this is indeed what was found, as shown in (77). In Attitude Role Shift, by contrast, the judgments in (78) suggest that it is more difficult to attribute the happy face to the signer only, *despite* the fact that it starts outside the role-shifted clause, and that the context is heavily biased to suggest that the agent of the reported attitude was anything but happy.

- (77) SEE THAT ARROGANT FRENCH SWIMMER IX-a? YESTERDAY IX-a ANGRY.  
'See that arrogant French swimmer? Yesterday he was angry.'  
a. 7 IX-a SAY IX-a WILL LEAVE.  
He said he would leave. '  
b. :-)------  
7 IX-a SAY IX-a WILL LEAVE.  
*Rating under the meaning*: the SPEAKER is displaying his happiness that the French swimmer said he was leaving  
He said he would leave. '  
(ASL, 14, 231)

(78) SEE THAT ARROGANT FRENCH SWIMMER IX-a? YESTERDAY IX-a ANGRY.

a. RS<sub>a</sub>\_\_\_\_\_

6.2. IX-a SAY IX-1 WILL LEAVE.

He said: 'I will leave.'

b. :-)-----

RS<sub>a</sub>\_\_\_\_\_

4.6 IX-a SAY IX-1 WILL LEAVE.

*Rating under the meaning:* the SPEAKER is displaying his happiness that the French swimmer said he was leaving

He said: 'I will leave.'

(ASL, 14, 233)

At this point, one may conclude that despite the possibilities of *wh*-extraction out of Role Shift discussed in connection to (39), role-shifted clauses under attitude verbs just involve quotation (possibly mixed quotation, hence the possibility of *wh*-extraction; see Maier 2014, to appear).<sup>26</sup> But as mentioned above, Schlenker to appear, 2015 argues (i) that Role Shift can also be applied, with specific grammatical constraints, to reports of actions rather than of attitudes; (ii) that in such cases a quotational analysis would be inadequate, as the situations reported need not have involved thought or speech; and (iii) that nonetheless, Role Shift applied to action reports comes with a requirement that whatever can be interpreted iconically should be so interpreted. The suggestion is thus that Action Role Shift provides an argument against a quotational analysis, and provides independent evidence for positing a rule of context shift, *combined* with a mechanism of 'iconicity maximization' under Role Shift.

To get a sense for the main facts, consider first (79). It does not involve Role Shift, and it is possible to understand the signer's happy face as reflecting the speaker's rather than the agent's attitude. But things are different in (80): in this action report under Role Shift, the signer's happy face is naturally taken to reflect the agent's attitude. More generally, *under Action Role Shift, a happy face on the agent's part is normally attributed to the agent* (see Schlenker 2015 for refinements, and for LSF data).

(79) SEE THAT ARROGANT FRENCH SWIMMER IX-a? YESTERDAY IX-a ANGRY.

'See that arrogant French swimmer? Yesterday he was angry.'

a. 7 IX-a a-WALK-WITH-ENERGY(CL-ONE).

He left with energy.'

b. :-)-----

6.2 IX-a a-WALK-WITH-ENERGY(CL-ONE).

*Rating under the meaning:* the SPEAKER is displaying his happiness that the French swimmer was leaving

He left with energy.'

(ASL, 14, 231)

<sup>26</sup> As Schlenker to appear reports, *wh*-extraction is also acceptable for his ASL informant out of clauses involving not overt Role Shift, but 'quotational' operator glossed as "" (= quotation marks signed with both hands at the beginning of a clause). *If* this involves a *bona fide* quotation (rather than a non-standard variety of Role Shift), it provides an independent reason to doubt that *wh*-extraction is an argument against a quotational analysis.

(80) SEE THAT ARROGANT FRENCH SWIMMER IX-a? YESTERDAY IX-a ANGRY.

a. RS<sub>a</sub>\_\_\_\_\_

7 IX-a 1-WALK-WITH-ENERGY(CL-ONE).

He left with energy.'

b. :-)-----

3.6 IX-a RS<sub>a</sub>\_\_\_\_\_

1-WALK-WITH-ENERGY(CL-ONE).

*Rating under the meaning:* the SPEAKER is displaying his happiness that the French swimmer was leaving

He left with energy.'

(ASL, 14, 233)

Schlenker 2015 took these and related to suggest that iconic material is preferably understood to reflect properties of the reported action under Role Shift.

The analysis proposed in Schlenker 2015 posits that Attitude and Action Role Shift alike should be analyzed as context shift, but with an important addition: expressions that appear under Role Shift should be interpreted *maximally iconically*, i.e. so as to maximize the possibilities of projection between the signs used and the situations they make reference to. Following a long tradition (e.g. Clark and Gerrig 1990), Schlenker 2015 argues that quotation can be seen as a special and particular stringent case of iconicity, and that the condition of Maximal Iconicity can thus capture properties of both Attitude and Action Role Shift. In effect, this analysis vindicates the view that some expressions may be simultaneously used and mentioned/demonstrated, as argued for instance in Recanati 2001. Putting together the non-iconic (context-shifting) part of the analysis developed in Section 3.1 and these iconic conditions, the theory has the following structure:

(i) Role Shift has a broadly uniform semantics across attitude and action cases: it shifts the context of evaluation of the role-shifted clause.

(ii) In ASL and LSF, role-shifted indexicals are obligatorily shifted (technically, this is because context shifting is realized by shifting a context *parameter*, as is Anand and Nevins 2004, rather than a context *variable* as in Schlenker 2003). Presumably things are different in Catalan and German Sign Language, where mixing of perspectives is possible (technically, this could be implemented by assuming that context shifting is effected by way of context *variables*).

(iii) In ASL and LSF, all indexicals can appear under Attitude Role Shift, but only indexical agreement markers can appear under Action Role Shift (this is due to the fact that Action Role Shift gives rise to different kinds of shifted contexts than Attitude Role Shift).

(iv) Under Attitude and Action Role Shift alike, signs are interpreted maximally iconically in the scope of the context shift operator.

- In an attitude reports, every sign can be interpreted as being similar to an element of the situation which is reported – namely by way of quotation.

- In action reports, this is not so (as they need not involve speech or thought act), but all potentially iconic features of signs are interpreted iconically and thus taken to represent features of the reported situations. In both cases, expressions that appear under Role Shift are used (rather than just mentioned) but also have a strong iconic (and sometimes quotational) component. (See Schlenker 2015 for a formal analysis of iconic interpretations.)

If this analysis is on the right track, one key question is why context shift in sign language should come with a condition of iconicity maximization. One possibility is that such a condition exists in spoken language context as well but hasn't been described (however Anand 2006 argues that in Zazaki context shift need not be quotational). Another possibility is that we are dealing with a specific property of sign language. Be that as it may, it seems clear that if Role Shift is to be analyzed as context shift, special provisions must be for iconic effects.

#### 5.4 Metaphors (Meir 2010)

While we have been focusing on cases of iconicity that interact with the 'logical engine' of language, there are many further cases of sign language iconicity that are worthy of interest. To cite but one

(recently reviewed by Emmorey 2014) Meir 2010 showed that in American and in Israeli Sign Language there are constraints on metaphorical extensions of iconic signs. This will be best illustrated with the example of *EAT* in (81), which seems to have an iconic structure, with the handshape corresponding to the action of holding food, the signer's mouth standing for the eater's mouth, and the inward movement of the hand corresponding to the action of putting food into one's mouth.

(81) **The form and iconic structure of *EAT* in Israeli Sign Language (from Meir 2010)**

a. Form



b. Iconic mapping and (impossible) metaphorical mapping

EATING		
ICONIC MAPPING		METAPHORICAL MAPPING
ARTICULATORS	SOURCE	TARGET
handshape	holding an object (food)	X
mouth	mouth of eater	X
inward movement	putting food into mouth	X
X	consumption of food	consumption of object

Now Meir 2010 notes that this verb does *not* allow for the same metaphorical extensions as the English verb *eat*, in particular in sentences such as *The acid ate the metal*. She proposes an explanation based on the requirement that the iconic mapping of the sign, encoded in the first column of (81)b, should match the desired metaphorical mapping. Now in order to get the desired meaning for *The acid ate the metal*, we need something that represents the fact that the object of *eat* is consumed. But this is precisely what is *not* represented in the iconic mapping given by *EAT* in Israeli Sign Language. Meir suggests that this is what blocks the metaphorical extension, in accordance with the mapping principle in (82).

(82) **Meir's Double-Mapping Constraint**

A metaphorical mapping of an iconic form should preserve the structural correspondences of the iconic mapping. Double mapping should be structure-preserving.

The problem, then, is that in the proposed metaphorical extension of *EAT* the two structures don't match. In earlier cases, we saw that iconic conditions interact in intricate ways with the 'logical engine' engine; this case, we see that they constrain pragmatic interpretation at the discourse level.

## 6 Theoretical Directions

### 6.1 Sign language vs. spoken language

If the foregoing is on the right track, it should be clear that sign language has, along some dimensions, strictly richer expressive resources than spoken language does, in particular due to its ability to incorporate iconic conditions at the very core of the logical engine of language. There are two conclusions one might draw from this observation..

(i) One could conclude that spoken language is, along some dimensions at least, a kind of 'degenerate' version of what sign language can offer. Specifically, as a first approximation one could view spoken language semantics as a semantics for sign language from which most iconic elements have been removed (and indices have been made covert). From this perspective, if one wishes to understand the full scope of Universal Semantics, one might be better inspired to start from sign than from spoken language: the latter could be understood from the former once the iconic component is disregarded, but the opposite path might prove difficult. The situation is not unlike that found within spoken language syntax with respect to case theory. While syntacticians have developed theories of abstract case for all languages, including English, the effects of case are much easier to see in languages with rich declensions such as Latin, Russian or Hungarian; an analysis of case that disregarded the latter would miss essential facts to be captured.

(ii) An alternative possibility is that our comparison between sign and spoken language was flawed in the first place. What might be special about sign language is that signs and co-speech gestures are realized in the same modality. By contrast, they are realized in different modalities in spoken language, which has led many researchers to concentrate solely on the spoken component. This leaves open the possibility that *when co-speech gestures are reintegrated to the study of spoken language*, sign and spoken languages end up displaying roughly the same expressive possibilities.

Let us give a few illustrations of how the debate could be developed.

### 1. Plural pronouns

We noted in Section 4.3 that plural pronouns in ASL and LSF can give rise to instances of 'structural iconicity' when a plural locus is embedded within another plural locus. One could view this as a case in which sign language has a mechanism which is entirely missing in spoken language. But the realization of sign language loci makes it possible to use them simultaneously as diagrams. From this perspective, the right point of comparison for our examples with 'complement set anaphora' in Section 4.3 are spoken language examples *accompanied* with explicit diagrams with the same shape as embedded loci in (51), and to which one can point *as one utters the relevant pronouns*. For this reason, a comparison between spoken and sign language should start with situations in which speakers can use gestures to define diagrams. This comparison has not been effected yet.

### 2. High loci

As summarized in Section 4.4, it was argued in Schlenker et al. 2013 and Schlenker 2014 that high loci have an iconic semantics, and in addition that their height specifications behave like 'features' in some environments, notably under ellipsis: just like gender features, height specifications can apparently be disregarded by whatever mechanism interprets ellipsis resolution. We fell short of arguing that this shows that height specifications *are* features, for good reason. First, Schlenker 2014 shows that it is hard to find cases in which height specifications really behave differently from other elements that contribute presuppositions on the value of a referring expression (some paradigms displaying this difference were found in ASL but not in LSF).<sup>27</sup> Second, when co-speech gestures are taken into account in spoken language, it appears that they too can be disregarded under ellipsis (Schlenker, to appear)<sup>28</sup>. Thus in (83)a the co-speech gesture (for a tall person) that accompanies the Verb Phrase can be disregarded under ellipsis; whereas in the control in (83)b, deviance is obtained if the gesture that accompanies the antecedent Verb Phrase is explicitly repeated in the second clause (whereas a gesture for a short person is acceptable).

(83) I had two guys standing in front of me, one of them very short and the other one very tall.

- a. The tall one allowed me to remove  [his glasses], but the short one didn't.
- b. The tall one allowed me to remove  [his glasses], but the short one didn't allow me to remove  [his glasses]/ok  [his glasses]

<sup>27</sup> A case in point pertains to ASL and LSF versions of (i). The expression [*the four of them*]<sub>i</sub> does not contribute any more information than would a simple pronoun *them<sub>i</sub>*. On standard theories of ellipsis, and on the assumption that numerals cannot be 'disregarded' by ellipsis, one would expect that (i) only has a strict reading, on which the sentence means: *The three Frenchmen too know people who like the four Germans*. But such examples allowed for a bound variable reading in our LSF data, including in cases in which it is unlikely that the numerals can be treated as feature-like elements. This suggests that there is a broader rule at work here which allows some 'redundant' elements to be disregarded by ellipsis resolution.

(i) [The four Germans]<sub>i</sub> know people who like [the four of them]<sub>i</sub>. The three Frenchmen do, too.

<sup>28</sup> More sophisticated work on this issue is being conducted by J. Gajewski at University of Connecticut.



for extant LSF and possibly ASL data, this raises questions about how her analysis could be extended to German and Catalan Sign Language, which according to the literature display examples of 'mixing of perspectives' within Role Shift.

While it is too early to adjudicate this debate, it is worth noting that there is nothing in the analysis of Schlenker to appear, 2015 that suggests that all iconic constraints found in Role Shift could be replicated in spoken language. For Davidson, by contrast, Role Shift is just the indication that a demonstration is being performed by way of signs that are simultaneously used as demonstration-producing gestures, and thus one might expect the same phenomena to be possible in spoken language properly enriched with co-speech gestures.

#### 4. Telicity

Strickland et al. 2015 revisit Wilbur's Hypothesis of Event Visibility, discussed in Sections 3.2 and 5.2 above. They show that non-signers that have not been exposed to sign language still 'know' Wilbur's generalization about the overt marking of telic endpoints in sign language verbs: when asked to choose among a telic or atelic meaning (e.g. 'decide' vs. 'think') for a sign language verb they have never seen, they are overwhelmingly accurate in choosing the telic meaning in case endpoints are marked. Furthermore, this result holds even when *neither* meaning offered to them is the actual meaning of the sign, which rules out the possibility that subjects use other iconic properties to zero in on the correct meaning. These results can be interpreted in various ways. One is that Wilbur's principle is such a strong principle of Universal Grammar that it is accessed even by non-signers. An alternative possibility is that these use general and abstract iconic principles to determine when a sign/gesture can or cannot represent a telic event. This leaves open the possibility that Event Visibility derives from a general property of cognition rather than from specific properties of sign language – and possibly that similar effects could be found with co-speech gestures in spoken language. (Future research will have to determine whether the iconic modulations of verbs discussed in Section 5.2 are correctly interpreted by non-signers.)

#### 6.2 *One module or two modules?*

Besides the (relatively theory-neutral) comparison of the expressive resources of spoken and sign language, one could ask whether in the end the logic-with-iconicity at work in sign language should be analyzed as one or two systems (the same question might apply to the interaction of iconic effects with logic in spoken language, especially if one studies it *with* co-speech gestures). The traditional view is certainly that grammar and iconicity are two entirely separate modules. But as argued in this piece, there is a non-trivial interaction between grammar and iconicity at the logical core of sign language: one and the same expression – say, a singular or a plural locus – can display a logical behavior (e.g. as a bound variable) while also having an iconic function. This doesn't mean that a two-module theory couldn't be developed; but the relevant notion of 'module' will have to be appropriately abstract. In the end, one will have to develop criteria for what counts as a 'module' on the basis of linguistic or non-linguistic data – so as to determine whether one can isolate a natural class of grammatical phenomena that exclude iconicity in sign language, or whether grammar and iconicity are so intertwined that they should be seen as a single unified module. On the assumption that differences across modules also correspond to differences of brain implementation, neuro-imaging data might directly bear on this issue; sophisticated research is ongoing on this topic, including as part of a comparison between signs and co-speech gestures (e.g. Xu et al. 2009, Emmorey and Ozyurek 2014).

### 7 **Conclusion: the Sign Language Perspective on Meaning**

While the main issues are wide open, we hope to have convinced the reader that sign language has the potential to alter radically the way we look at natural language semantics, and that investigating Universal Semantics from the standpoint of sign language might help reconsider foundational

questions about the logical core of language, and its expressive power.<sup>31</sup> We have suggested that two questions could be illuminated in this way. One pertains to the logical engine of language, some of whose main components are arguably visible in sign but not in spoken language. The other pertains to the expressive power of language, which in its signed modality has a rich iconic component that is rarely taken into account in formal studies of spoken language. Our investigations leave open whether spoken language can match the expressive resources of sign language when co-speech gestures are taken into account; and they also don't decide whether in the end 'grammar' and 'iconicity' should be seen as two modules, or one – in fact, the *criteria* for deciding this question remain to be developed.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Relatedly, but from a very different perspective (with no connections to the formal semantic tradition), Cuxac and Salandre 2007 'propose an epistemological about-face on research in linguistic typology' in which 'sign languages are cognitive objects that lend themselves particularly well to modelling the language faculty'. From the perspective developed in the present piece, part of the challenge is to understand how the iconic phenomena at work in sign languages are connected to the logical and grammatical phenomena which have by now been described in great detail for both spoken and signed languages.

<sup>32</sup> It should go without saying that this enterprise will be considerably facilitated if people who live with sign language – in particular Deaf signers – can take a leading role in these semantic investigations.