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Polly B. Lawson
University of Southern Maine

Kyle Warnock
University of Southern Maine

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Rule Governed Variation in Elicited Narratives in Peruvian Sign Language (LSP)

Polly B. Lawson, BA, USM 2012, Kyle Warnock, USM student, Judy Shepard-Kegl, Ph.D., Department of Linguistics, USM

BACKGROUND

In May of 2010, the National Congress of Peru officially recognized Peruvian Sign Language (LSP) as one of the nation's indigenous languages. Since then, efforts have been under way to document the lexicon and the grammar of this rich language, as well as to document the various dialects evident in Peru's large and diverse Deaf community. Since signed languages around the world do not typically have written form, documentation involves filming elicited narratives. Since 2007, our team has been gathering filmed language samples from Deaf adults who are lifelong LSP signers. The following study stems from this body of data. We are deeply indebted to Guadalupe Jara Ibarra, Jorge Luis Herrán Alcedo, Miguel Angel Silvertre Rios, Patricia Isabel Diaz Miranda and Vanessa Celeste García Rondón for allowing us to use their narratives. They are the true authors of this research.

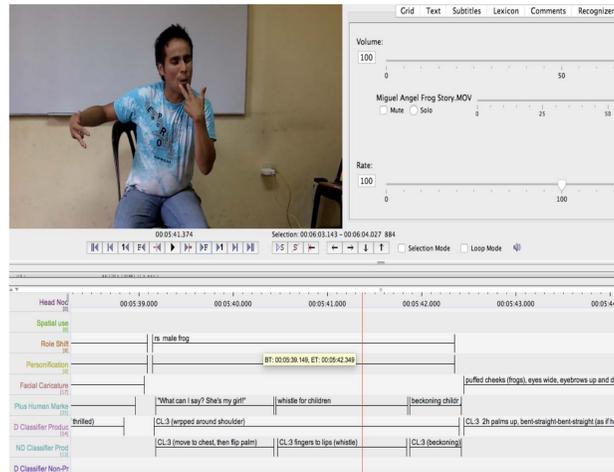
ABSTRACT

Wordless books offer a single-source methodology for the crosslinguistic elicitation of both spoken and signed narratives. (Chafe, 1980). Yet, Labov (1972), in *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, argued that the most natural narratives result when subjects are emotionally engaged in their own life stories. Our study seeks to combine this methodology with Labov's approach. Following Slobin (2004), we used Mercer Mayer's book, *Frog, Where are You?*, to elicit a narrative from a single subject in isolation (Figure 2) and compared it to four narratives filmed in a group setting (Figure 3), where the storytellers saw each other's recountings. All of the subjects are Deaf and fluent in Peruvian Sign Language (LSP). This poster presents the results of transcription using Elán, an annotation software, (Figure 1) and linguistic analysis of excerpts from both the single-subject and group elicitation. The group elicitation yielded a richer, more varied use of options (involving classifiers that exhibit more variation, size and shape specifiers, role shift/personification, affect marking, facial adverbs, and narrative perspective), yet they worked within the same LSP grammatical constraints in terms of lexical choice, use of space, ordering of Ground before Figure, perspective, agreement, tense, syntax, and non-manual grammar marking. We compare responses to elicitation under these two conditions and argue for the group methodology as a more natural and productive approach to single-source elicitation.

SOURCE MATERIAL



DATA ANNOTATION METHOD



Transcription and linguistic analysis, using Elán, an annotation software, allows for a detailed comparison between the single subject and group elicitation. Each story is analyzed frame by frame for both lexical and grammatical content.

Figure 1

SINGLE vs. GROUP COMPARISON



SA
Figure 2

Signer A consistently uses the lexical sign for "FROG" throughout the story.



SB

Group members use many alternatives to the standard lexical item "FROG" including role shift, productive classifiers, non-manual modifiers, and spatial reference via eye gaze.



SC

Figure 3



SD



SE



Figure 4

"ESCAPE" is signed using the standard directional verb with the typical classifier modified with a facial adverb and body lean.



Figure 5

In role shift, Signer D's frog escapes with huge leaps. CL:3 (2h), facial modifier and direction; filling sign space.



Figure 6

On tippy toes, Signer C's frog, scurries away. Role shift, CL:3 (2h), facial adverb, body lean.



Figure 7

Signer B's frog leaps away. 3rd person, CL: 3(rh) #CL:B (lh), directional verb, facial modifier, eye gaze.

EVIDENCE OF GROUP INNOVATION

Signer A (SA) was filmed as a single subject, in isolation (Figure 2). Filming of the group elicitation occurred in the following order: Signer B (SB), C (SC), D (SD) and E (SE) (Figure 3). Using Elán, we coded how each storyteller discussed the frog throughout the story. FROG was rendered in three primary ways: lexically, with productive classifiers, and via role shift/personification.

The data below compare the isolated elicitation with the group elicitation. A clear trend away from the lexical and toward use of productive classifiers can be seen in the group elicitation, (Figure 8). Furthermore, the group elicitation employed role shift far more heavily in comparison to the isolated elicitation, (Figure 9). Use of productive classifiers and role shift in LSP allow for natural creativity and variation of expression while remaining within the rule governed parameters of sign space, phonemic constraints, location, verb agreement and non-manual modifiers.

Figure 8
Lexical Items vs. Classifiers (CLs) in signing "frog"

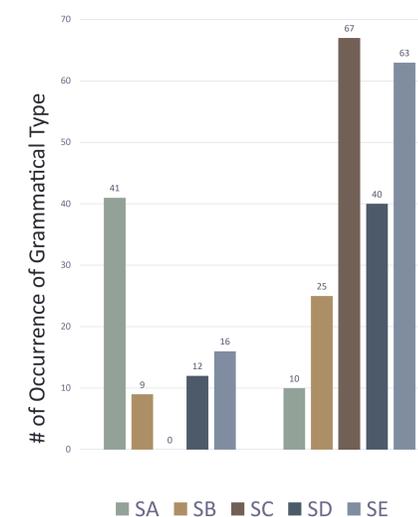
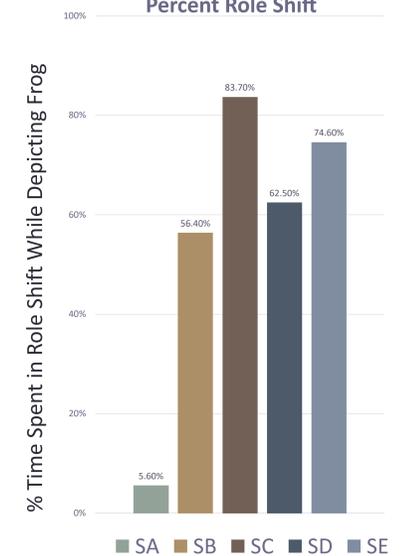


Figure 9
Percent Role Shift



CONCLUSION

- Interactive group elicitation yields a more natural and grammatically varied response than isolated single-subject elicitation, while still reflecting the core grammatical features of LSP.
- Grammatically constrained creativity is indicated most strongly by an increased use and variety of productive LSP verbs involving classifiers as well as an increased use of role shift, in particular personification.
- These preliminary findings warrant further comparisons of single subject and group elicitation methods.

References:

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