

The interplay of different head movements and their functions in Austrian Sign Language

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Introduction

In recent years typological work on Sign Languages (SLs) increased like e. g. cross-linguistic comparison on negation (see Zeshan 2006) as well as the attention is directed more to the occurrence (frequency and form) and the function of nonmanual articulators in SLs (see among other activities the "Workshop on Nonmanuals in Sign Languages", 2009 in Frankfurt).

Concerning the articulator head and its functions, some work has been done on various SLs (see e.g. Pfau 2008 or Yasuhiro 2004), however most studies have their own object of analysis, but include the function of head movements to a certain extend (see f.i. Sandler & Dachkovsky 2009 or Wilbur 2000). On ÖGS some work has been done on interrogatives including head positions (see Schalber 2006) and on turn-taking signals including e.g. head nods at the end of turns (see Lackner 2007/2009).

In the present study we present investigated head movements and their functions in ÖGS and give an outlook on an still ongoing analysis on the interplay of the different head movements and their functions in ÖGS (which will be part of our research work, the MA thesis on negation [Stalzer] and the thesis on 'information marking functions and rhythm of head and body movements [Lackner]).



Head movements

Methodical approach:

Head motion perception test: The probands get a video presented (one to five manuals layered by a head movement) together with an answer pair of which they have to choose one answer (one contains our supposed function, one another function). The videos are performed by a Deaf native signer who presents different functional settings which require different head movements.

The participants:

4 male and 4 female fluently signing deaf people who all come from the same mountain valley (or are related to it) and are in close contact.

Test battery: exercise & results:



Exercise 1:
5 manuals (ALMDUDLER GEBEN ICH BLEIBEN TRINKEN – ALMDUDLER[drink] EXIST I STAY DRINK) layered by different head movements are presented. Two answers are presented which express different functional settings. (The different functional settings are, of course, produced with the manuals to avoid using the head movements.)

Results:

head movement/s:	supposed function/s:	percentage of agreement with predicted function, comments of probands
no head movement	neutral statement	unnatural, nonmanuals are missing
nod/s	assertion	100 %
shake/s	negation	100 %
small, fast nods	certainty	100 %
head tilt/s	uncertainty	100 %
head forward > backward (layering 2, 2, 1 manual)	emphasis	100 %
head forward (2 manuals) > head neutral (3 manuals) [incl. shoulders and body forward; more extension]	conditional construction	50 % (of probands, who have more knowledge on German, compared with an if-construction) 50 % (defined as a combination of emphasis and certainty)
chin down (just first 2 man.)	polar question	100 %
chin up (just first 2 manuals)	polar question, but expressed with arrogance	100 %

Exercise 2:
One manual sign (WANDERN – HIKING) is presented with different head movements.

Results:

head movement/s	supposed function/s	percentage of agreement
curved movements	description of curved path	100 %
head turn right > left > ...	description of zigzag path	100 %
small circle movements forward	description of straight path	100 %
fast small circle mov.s forward	fast walking	50 % 50 % (fast walking or time laps)
small head nods	time laps	100 % (fast walking or time laps – depending on context)

Further exercises:
on head nod as aspectual end marker, head indexing, ...

Ongoing research

Second part of the study of head movements in ÖGS was that the participants were forced to produce the listed functional settings. Analyses to this are in process.

Furthermore, already existing free ÖGS texts are analyzed according to head movements together with their functions and their possible correlation. A selected example shows this. Obvious therein are head shakes and the abruption of the movement - firstly by lowering the chin, secondly by moving the head forward. The first head shake is not aligned, the second one is aligned with the manual component. The second performed head shakes do not directly negate the semantics of the signs, but give a general rejection of the content. The following forward movements of the head are done twice which emphasizes the manual components (MY BROTHER-IN-LAW). Additionally emphasis is marked by brow raise and forward movements of the body.



D3:M1/M3 1:27-1:33