The head takes it all! Functions of head and body movements in Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS)

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Methodology:
An empirical and inductive approach was followed. First, head and body movements recorded in narratives and lectures from 13 fluent ÖGS signers were identified by various Deaf annotators and compared. These movements were described with regard to their form, meaning, context of occurrence and co-occurrence with other markers.

Results: 3 classified groups of identified head and body markers:

1st classified group
Characteristics
• regularity / uniformity in the movement production
• can only be produced by the head (no spatial indicators such as those of the 2nd class)
• not guided by the signing space

Markers: forms and coded functions

2nd classified group
Characteristics
• are spatial indicators: can be produced by head, torso, entire body and others (e.g. gaze) depending on language-internal and/or -external reasons
• hypothetical and alternative markers are directed by absolute values of the signing space (i.e. up, front, back, lateral)

Markers: forms and coded functions

3rd classified group
Characteristics
• irregularity / non-uniformity in the movement production
• not directed by the signing space
• each marker can only be produced by the same articulator (no spatial indicators)

Markers: forms and coded functions

Ongoing research:
Identifying further head and body movements (e.g. one or more head nods or body straightening up) in ÖGS texts which function as segmentation and/or structuring cues in natural discourse data – implemented in the Project on Segmentation and Structuring of ÖGS-texts cues, funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF)

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Abbreviations:
cu – chin up  cd – chin down  hf – head forward  hb – head forward
hs – headshakes  ht-r/l – head turn to the right/left  bl-r/l – body lean to the right/left
hts – head rotations forward/upward
bs – body sways