

Pinkie First: List Constructions in Brazilian Portuguese Co-speech Gesture and Libras.

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Lists play an important role in conversational interaction to structure discourse for the speaker and the audience (Jefferson 1990; Schiffrin 1994). Lists occur in spoken, written, gestural, and signed modalities. Liddell (2003) introduced the concept of list buoys for signed languages, that is, a set of signs in which the non-dominant hand is held in a stationary configuration while the dominant hand continues producing signs.

In this presentation we compare list constructions in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) and in co-speech gestures of Brazilian Portuguese speakers. Data come from YouTube videos. We collected data using key phrases such as “four things people need to know” to identify videos with lists. The data were annotated in Elan based on analytic categories from the analysis of signed list buoys. Specifically, we coded our data for gestured list type based on the taxonomy of (Heitkoetter & Xavier 2020), according to which list buoys can be fixed (simultaneous presentation of the list-fingers); sequentially-built (sequential presentation of the list-fingers); perseverating (list-hand is held in place throughout a stretch of discourse); non-perseverating (list-hand alternates with other signs); and mixed (use of two or more types in a single list expression).

We find formal and semantic similarities in list constructions in co-speech gestures and in signing. Formally, we found cases of both sequential and mixed types. In cases that would appear to be fixed, the speaker often extends all five fingers at once but only uses one or two fingers to refer to list entities.

Among the differences, we find that modality affects the presentation of list. Whereas signers always produce two-handed lists in which the dominant hand directs attention by pointing to non-dominant hand list fingers, speakers produce one- or two-handed lists. In two-handed expressions, speakers point to, grab, or otherwise direct attention to the list fingers; in one-handed lists, speakers use other means to direct attention, such as intonation and gestural beats. A further finding is that Brazilian Portuguese speakers tend to prefer starting the list with the pinkie finger, whereas Libras signers generally prefer starting with the index. In Libras, palm-in orientation is considerably more common. For speakers, palm-up and palm-in are both frequent.

References

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