Spatial and non-spatial deixis in Kata Kolok

Connie de Vos
International institute for Sign Languages and Deaf Studies, University of Central Lancashire, Preston (UK)
&
Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen (the Netherlands)

The Balinese conception of space

Wassmann & Dasen 1998

The cultural significance of the cardinal directions

Cardinal directions are associated with gods

Architecture

Child rearing

Co-speech gesture

(Covarubias 1950; Mead & Bateson 1942; Wassmann and Dasen 1998; 2006)
Fieldsite: Bengkala
2,200 villagers
North Bali
Hindu
Subsistence farmers (rambutan, mango etc.)
Local businesses

Desa Kolok
2.2% congenital deafness versus 0.01% in the United States
(Winata et al 1995)
+ 5 generations of native signers
48 Deaf signers - 1,200 hearing signers
(Marsaja 2008)

Desa Kolok
Integration of deaf villagers into the wider hearing community:
• Communication through sign language in all aspects of village life (politics, liturgy, education etc.)
• Equal chances at marriage (Branson et al. 2004)
• Similar economic status

Desa Kolok
Socio-cultural construction of deafness:
(Branson et al. 2004; Marsaja 2008)
• Special offices reserved for the deaf men
  • burrying the dead
  • village security guard
  • water pipe maintenance
• Bhatara Kolok ‘deaf god’
• Janger Kolok ‘deaf dance’

A corpus of Kata Kolok
• July ‘06-March ‘09
• 11 months of fieldwork
• 100 hours of video data
• Including: informal conversational data, culturally entrenched narratives, hearing (non-)fluent signers, child signing

Kata Kolok
Kata Kolok vs. Balinese

- Differences in core lexical domains such as kinship and colour (de Vos 2011)
- Distinct word order patterns (Arka 2003; de Vos forthcoming)
- Both languages prefer an absolute Frame of Reference

EuroBABEL Village Sign project

Simultaneous Classifier Construction

Interpretation of SCCs

Interpretation of SCCs (N=130)

The Absolute For in narratives (SD approaching dog)
The absolute FoR in narratives (SD’s fall)

Recording 1 (signer facing west)

Recording 2 (signer facing north)

Person deixis in sign languages

Localisation: pronominal pointing in empty signing space

Functions of localisation: spatial verb inflection

Jordanian Sign Language, Hendriks 2008
Functions of localisation: discourse coherence – an example from Indian Sign Language

Kata Kolok: pointing at geographic locations

(Zeshan 2006; Marsaja 2008; Perniss & Zeshan 2008)

Kata Kolok: List buoys

Transitive predicates that are not spatially inflected:
TALK, GIVE, TAKE, SEE, LEARN, BUY, RESPECT, ASK, SUMMON, WANT, MARRY, CALL-ON-TELEPHONE, YELL-AT, and ADOPT

(Gmarsaja 168-171; de Vos forthcoming)

GIVE: 1st person recipient

NM hs ‘pah’
MG B: GIVE NEG RICE
ND ‘He wouldn’t give me any rice.’
Transitive verb: TALK

Incipient transitive construction?

Temporal deixis in sign languages

Typologically common body-anchored timeline
(e.g. Engberg-Pedersen 1993 on Danish Sign Language)

Kata Kolok: absolute celestial timeline to indicate times during day and night

Kata Kolok: temporal inference

With rare exceptions temporal adverbs are vague with respect to past or future reference

Verbs are not marked for tense (as in many other sign languages)

There is a primary distinction between present and non-present is marked by the sign PIDAN

(see also Marsaja 2008)
Summary

Kata Kolok is the first reported case of an ‘absolute’ sign language

• Absolute interpretation of classifiers
• Absolute pointing
• Absolute celestial timeline

Limited use of signing space

Geographic pointing signs are not subsequently exploited to construct cohesive discourse

No spatial verb inflection

Celestial timeline is not extended to other temporal domains

Conclusion

While all sign languages capitalise on the affordances of the visual-gestural modality, they exhibit cross-linguistic variation in the extent to which and the ways in which the signing space is deployed.

While Kata Kolok and Balinese are independent languages, both are grounded in the culturally salient geocentric cognitive style.

This is reflected in Kata Kolok’s use of the signing space in both spatial and non-spatial deictic domains.