



HAL
open science

Impersonal human reference in French Sign Language (LSF)

Brigitte Garcia, Marie-Anne Sallandre, Marie Thérèse L'Huillier, Hatice Aksen

► **To cite this version:**

Brigitte Garcia, Marie-Anne Sallandre, Marie Thérèse L'Huillier, Hatice Aksen. Impersonal human reference in French Sign Language (LSF). TISLR13, Sep 2019, Université de Hambourg, Germany. . hal-04366271

HAL Id: hal-04366271

<https://hal.science/hal-04366271v1>

Submitted on 28 Dec 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

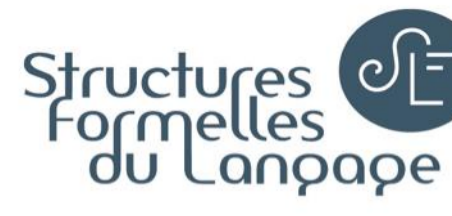


Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0
International License

Impersonal human reference in French Sign Language (LSF)



Brigitte GARCIA, Marie-Anne SALLANDRE,
Marie-Thérèse L'HUILLIER, Hatice AKSEN



UMR 7023 SFL – University Paris 8 / University Paris-Lumières & CNRS



STATE OF THE ART

Definition: “R-impersonals have the appearance of regular, personal constructions but feature a subject which is human and non-referential.”
(Siewierska 2011: 57; see also, a.o., Cabredo-Hofherr 2006)

•Barberà & Quer 2013 : pioneering work on impersonal human reference in a sign language : Catalan Sign Language (LSC) > LSC overtly marks impersonal human reference through a distinctive spatial location in the upper area of the frontal plane, a zone already identified for encoding non-specific indefinite referents (Barberà 2012).

Nota: in LSF, a similar value of the upper area of the frontal plane has been noted, as a starting point for the motion of directional/agreement verbs with an indefinite agent (Millet 1997; Cuxac 2000)

•Special Issue of *Sign Language & Linguistics*: 'Impersonal Human Reference in Sign Languages' (Barberà & Cabredo-Hofherr, 2018) >> RSL, LIS, TID, HKSL, LSF, LSC

•For LSF, L'Huillier et al 2016 : first systematic study focalised on the expression of impersonal human reference.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL OPTIONS

Semiological approach

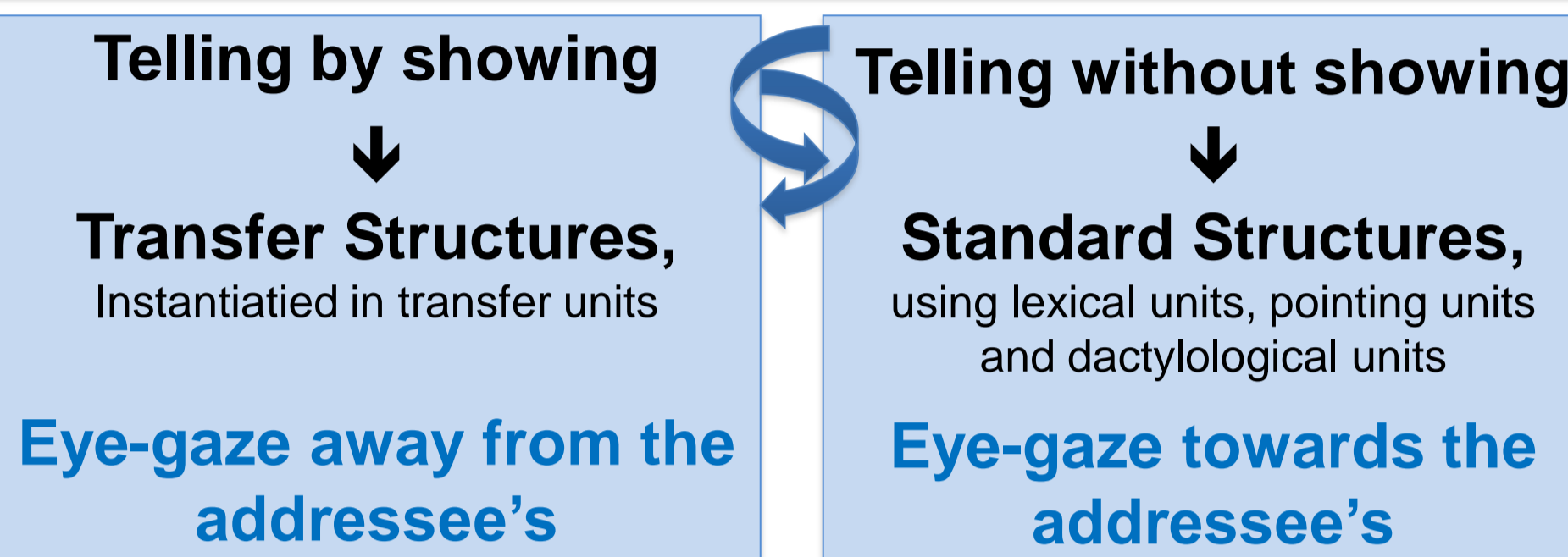
(Cuxac 2000, Cuxac & Sallandre 2007, Garcia & Sallandre 2014...)

Transfer Units = ±

- classifier constructions/productive signs/depicting signs
- constructed action/ role shift/surrogate

(Garcia & Sallandre 2014)

Two semiological and linguistic modes of meaning production in SLs



Approach for our discursive corpora (L'Huillier et al 2016)

- A cognitive-functional approach ((Reichler-] Béguelin 1993, Cornish 1999, Jonhsen 2011)
- Prevalence of semantic and communicative intent
- Taking into account the cognitive representations of the interlocutors

TYPIMP QUESTIONNAIRE

—Adaptation to SLs by Cabredo-Hofherr & Barberà (2015) of a questionnaire developed by the Franco-German project *Towards a typology of human impersonal pronouns (Typolimp)*, ANR-11-FRAL-0011 & DFG—

The sentences of the questionnaire cover a range of contexts that are characteristics for human impersonal subjects in better-studied languages such as English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Russian and Spanish

1. Anchored existential context (anchoring at a known point in space and time)
2. Vague existential context (event took place at some point in the past)
3. Indirect evidential existentials (event is inferred on the basis of [mostly visual] evidence)
4. Predicates requiring a plurality of referents
5. Existentials uses, with a generalizing/habitual predication
6. Corporate / collective subjects : 6.1 in episodic contexts; 6.2 In generic contexts
7. Locative universals : 7.1 In generic contexts; 7.2 in episodic contexts
8. Universal readings without a modal
9. Verbs of saying
10. Unrestricted universals
11. Conditionals

TWO COMPLEMENTARY TYPES OF METHODOLOGIES > TWO KINDS OF DATA

- (1) **Corpus data (LS-Colin, Cuxac et al 2002; Creagest, Garcia & L'Huillier 2011):** the sequences we considered (*chosen on a merely semantic basis*) come from the productions of **7 Deaf adults** (5 from Creagest, 2 from LS-Colin).
- (2) **Elicited data (Typolimp Questionnaire):** **2 French Deaf adults**, F & M, respectively 50 & 65 years-old, interacting with a Deaf researcher (M-T. L'Huillier), assisted by a Deaf researcher (Hatice Aksen)

MAIN RESULTS

❖ **DIRECTIONAL VERBS (including verbs of saying),** like GIVE, SAY or INFORM: **use of a high frontal zone** as a marker of impersonal human reference in LSF (starting point of directional verb).

❖ **UNIVERSAL:** the preferred strategy appears to be the **agent ellipsis**.

❖ **EXISTENTIAL** tend to occur with **overt agent marking**

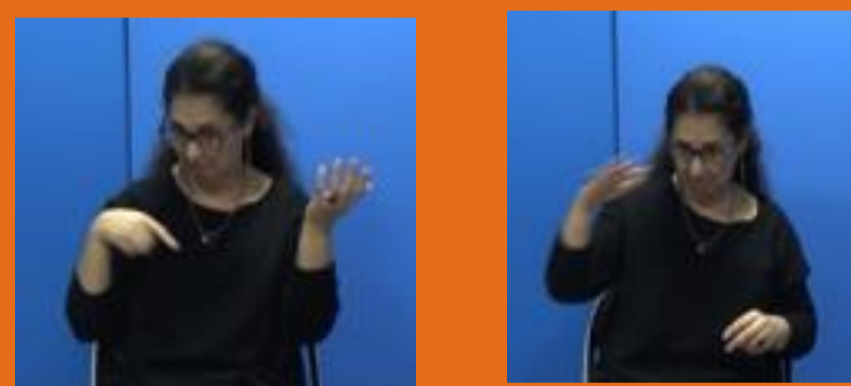
In existential contexts, contrast between:

- **A singular agent : marked by ONE (SOMEONE) or PERSON**



The marker ONE (left: thumb variation; center: index variation; right: in LSC) **The marker PERSON**

- **Contexts evoking a non-singular agent or a vague plurality: marked by IX3pl (circular pointing).**



IX3pl markers (left: index rotation down; right: sweeping flat palm)

❖ **EXISTENTIAL WITH GENERALISING/HABITUAL PREDICATION and LOCATIVE UNIVERSALS**
Nota: in both contexts (5) & (7), impersonals are marked by the LSF sign PI



FRANCE PI WHAT PI EAT SNAIL
Transl. Engl.: In France, they eat snails. (Fr. En France on mange des escargots.)

❖ **UNRESTRICTED UNIVERSALS**

- **Dominant strategy: agent ellipsis without spatial anchoring : highest degree of impersonality**



MUST ENJOY ONE TIME LIFE
Transl. Engl.: You live only one. (Fr. On ne vit qu'une fois.)

- **Two alternative strategies but specially in discourse corpora vs. elicited data**

1/ **Instructional personal transfer**



MIX^{Instructional} PT
Transl.: Mixing it well, like this, you see ?

2/ **2nd person pronoun : pointing IX2 (rare)**



IX₂ (YOU) PREGNANT SMOKE NEVER DANGER
Transl.: You must never smoke when pregnant, it's very dangerous.

Types of space:

The figure synthesizes the different distances and heights used in 'ALL DEAF' (blue) – 'ALL WORLD' (red) – 'ALL' (green) – 'THREE PERSONS' (blue) – 'ALL THREE' x3 (yellow) – 'PUBLIC' (white).



(Aksen, 2018)

FURTHER RESEARCH

Hypothesis requiring further investigations:

The agent ellipsis strategy is an option in almost all contexts tested by the questionnaire and in the vast majority of cases, the target sentences could be translated to French with the pronoun *on* (according to Gast & van der Auwera 2013)

⇒ **The agent ellipsis in LSF appears to be the closest equivalent to French *on*.**

REFERENCES

- Aksen, H., 2018. Les constructions de l'impersonnel dans les types de discours en LSF : perspectives linguistiques et didactiques, Master Thesis, University Paris 8, Saint-Denis, France.
- Barberà, G., 2012. *The meaning of space in Catalan Sign Language (LSC). Reference, specificity and structure in signed discourse*. PhD dissertation, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona.
- Barberà, G. & P. Cabredo Hofherr (eds), 2018. *Reference Impersonals in Sign Languages*. Special issue of *Sign Language & Linguistics* 21:2. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Barberà, G. & J. Quer, 2013. Impersonal reference in Catalan Sign Language (LSC), in Meurant, L., Sinte, A., van Herreweghe, M. & M. Vermeerbergen (eds.) *Sign Language Research Uses and Practices*. (...). Ishara Press and de Gruyter Mouton, p. 237-258.
- Cornish, F., 1999. *Anaphora, Discourse, and Understanding: Evidence from English and French*. Oxford, Clarendon.
- Cabredo Hofherr, P., 2006. 'Arbitrary' pro and the theory of pro-drop. In Peter Ackema, Patrick Brandt, Maaike Schoorlemmer & Fred Weerman (eds.), *Agreement and Arguments*, 230-258. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Cuxac, C., 2000. *La langue des signes française. Les voies de l'iclicité*. Faits de langue 15-16, Paris: Ophrys.
- Cuxac, C. et al. 2002. *Corpus LS-COLIN*, http://cococon.tge-adonis.fr/exist/crdo/meta/crdo-FSL-CUC021_SOUND
- Cuxac C. & Sallandre M-A., 2007. « Iconicity and arbitrariness, in French Sign Language: Highly Iconic Structures, degenerated iconicity and diagrammatic iconicity », Pizzuto E., P. Pietrandrea & R. Simone (eds.), *Verbal and Signed Languages (...)*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 13-33.
- Garcia, B. & M.-A. Sallandre, 2014. Reference resolution in French Sign Language (LSF), in Cabredo Hofherr, P. & A. Zribi-Hertz (eds) *Crosslinguistic studies on Noun Phrase structure and reference*, Leiden: Brill, p. 316-364.
- Garcia, B., Sallandre, M.-A. & L'Huillier, M.-T. 2018. Impersonal human reference in French Sign Language (LSF), *Sign Language & Linguistics* 21:2 (2018), 308–334, edited by Gemma Barberà & Patricia Cabredo Hofherr.
- Gast, V. & J. van der Auwera, 2013. Towards a distributional typology of human impersonal pronouns, based on data from European languages. *Languages across Boundaries. Studies in Memory of Anna Siewierska*, p. 31-56.
- Johnsen, L.A., 2011. « Who are they ? On the reference of collective ils ('they') in French », in Branco A. et al. (eds.), *Conference Proceedings of The 8th Discourse and Anaphor Resolution Colloquium*, Edições, Colibri, p. 23-38.
- L'Huillier, M.-T., Sallandre, M.-A. & B. Garcia, 2016. Impersonal reference to human agents in French Sign Language (LSF). Poster, in *Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research Conference (TISLR 12)*, 4-7 January, 2016, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.
- [Reichler-] Béguelin, M.-J., 1993. « Faits déviants et tri des observables ». *TRANSL*, 20, 89–109.
- Siewierska, A., 2011. Overlap and complementarity in reference impersonals: Man constructions vs. third person plural-impersonals in the languages of Europe. In *Impersonal Constructions: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective*, A. Malchukov, and A. Siewierska (eds.), 57–90. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

CONTACT

brigitte.garcia@univ-paris8.fr
marie-anne.sallandre@univ-paris8.fr
hatice.aksen@etud.univ-paris8.fr