

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: LEXICAL VARIATION FOR FOUR AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE SIGNS, ALL OF WHICH MEAN ALL

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American Sign Language (ASL) is a spatial visual language (Stokoe, 1960) and like all languages, has variation based on geographical regional, age, ethnicity, (Lucas et. al., 2003). In addition, variation patterns can be related to language-internal syntactic variation (MacDonald, 2013) and speaker demographics. This study investigated the lexical variation of the four ASL signs that convey the information by the English ALL and what might be driving this choice. This study includes 20 native ASL users with three types of data collection: language elicitation, opinion about their language choice, and acceptability of substituting one of the other variations: ALL_{wrap}, ALL_{glide}, ALL_{area}, ALL_{bounce}. The data suggests that the spatial characteristics of the noun explains the overarching pattern for the variant choice, although age and regional variation might be driving some of the variant choice. This study adds to the understanding of language variation within ASL and seems to be the first of its kind to conduct this study which has implications for future study on language change and language development.

Keywords: ASL, visual language, spatial relations, noun classes, data elicitation, grammaticality opinion