One and the same or two of a kind?
Comparing **constructed action** in **FinSL** and **LSFB** narratives

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Constructed action, a uniform phenomenon?

Constructed action (CA), the use of the body to depict the actions, attitudes, utterances and thoughts of a referent has been well-documented in sign languages (Cormier et al., 2015). Our study focuses on a common assumption, that CA is a uniform phenomenon across sign languages. We ask: How **similar** are CA practices across **different sign languages**, like **FinSL** and **LSFB**?

- How **frequent** is CA in FinSL and LSFB narrations?
- How similar are the different bodily **articulations** that contribute to CA across FinSL and LSFB signers' narratives (articulators used and mean number of articulators)?
- How does the use of different **degrees** of CA compare across the two languages?

Annotations carried out following Cormier et al.'s (2015) guidelines on the multimodal annotation software ELAN (Crasborn & Sloetjes, 2008) were compared across two types of narrations in the FinSL and LSFB corpora (Salonen, Kronqvist & Jantunen, 2020; Meurant, 2015). First, 8 renditions of *Frog, where are you?* – an elicitation material used in both corpora – were compared. Second, to increase the number of participants and tokens of CA, two other narrative retelling tasks, both based on films, were used: *Mr. Bean* in FinSL and *Paperman* in LSFB (4 participants each). The use of CA was compared in about 19 minutes of storytelling in each language (38 minutes in total).
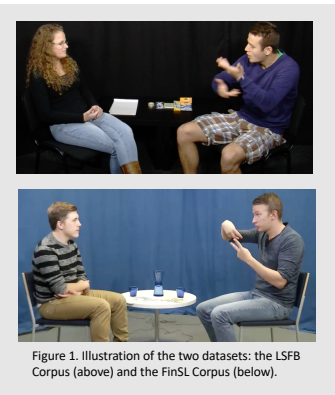

Figure 1. Illustration of the two datasets: the LSFB Corpus (above) and the FinSL Corpus (below).

> FinSL signers and LSFB signers use constructed action in their narratives in very similar ways.

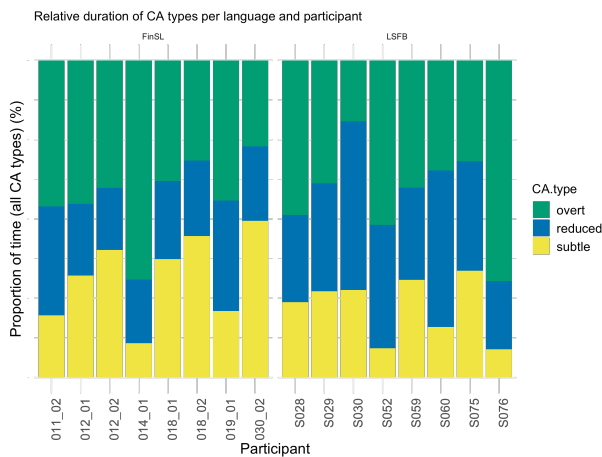FinSL signers and LSFB signers use a **similar distribution** of CA **degrees**.

Figure 2. Distribution of the relative duration of CA types in FinSL and LSFB

Table 1. Distribution of CA types (relative duration) in FinSL and LSFB

Language	Distribution of CA types (%)		
-	overt CA	reduced CA	subtle CA
FinSL	48.86944	24.36178	26.76878
LSFB	43.13526	35.18695	21.67779

> But **LSFB** signers may use CA **slightly more** often **than FinSL** signers do.
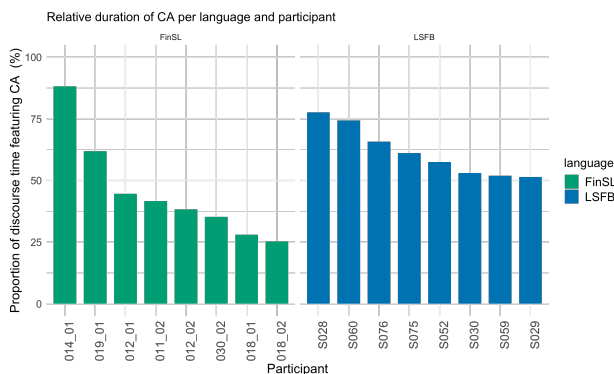
Figure 4. Comparison of discourse time spent on CA in FinSL and LSFB

FinSL signers and LSFB signers resort to a **similar hierarchy of articulators and a similar mean number of articulators** used per token of CA (4.45 for FinSL, 4.49 for LSFB).
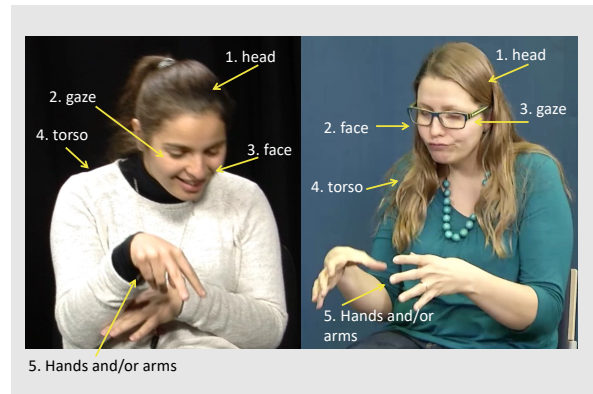

Figure 3. Hierarchy of articulator use in LSFB and FinSL

Limitations and conclusion

This study has several potential limitations. First, not all of the data is directly comparable. It may well be that characteristics specific to the *Mr. Bean* and *Paperman* stimuli affect participants' use of CA. In addition, the data has not been annotated by the same individuals, leading to a risk of annotation differences. Next, inter-annotator agreement measures are lacking for the LSFB data at this stage of the research project. Finally, 16 participants is a low number to be confident that observations in the sample reflect wider community practices and statistical testing is needed to further study potential differences. Keeping these limitations in mind, it is interesting to note striking similarities in the articulators used for CA as well as in the distribution of CA types across FinSL and LSFB, two unrelated sign languages. The potential difference in frequency, if it were to be confirmed in a larger and more comparable dataset, could be explained by the different ecologies (e.g., social-cultural differences) in which FinSL and LSFB are used (Ferrara et al., 2022; Jantunen & Rainò, 2022).

References

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