The contribution of the written form (SW) of sign languages to the field of sign linguistics: The case of writing Maltese Sign Language (LSM) pointing signs and pronominals.

Abstract

The use of SignWriting (henceforth SW) (Sutton, 2011) is spreading at an accelerating speed (Hoffmann-Dilloway, 2011) with the largest corpus of written sign language data available in written ASL of the New Testament (written by Nancy Romero[1]). Galea (2014) describes ten active and public literature SignPuddles between the years 2011-2014: ASL Bible, Brazil, Czech, Germany, Malta Nicaragua Norway, Spain, Tunisia and US Literature Puddles. She argues that enough data is now available for researchers to commence serious investigations into the linguistic analysis of the written forms of different sign languages.

The developing orthography of Maltese Sign Language (LSM) that uses SW (Galea, 2014) can be found in the Literature Sign Puddle for LSM[2]. From the analysis of the LSM texts (Galea, 2014) it became clear that the reading of pointing signs (index finger plus movement) is highly ambiguous. The forms were tested and read by ten Deaf SW readers. It was found that in order for LSM pronominal pointing signs to become readable and distinct from other pointing signs the pronominal forms required written-marking of 1st, 2nd and 3rd person. This indicates that LSM pronoun pointing forms are marked by pronominal loci for 1st, 2nd and 3rd person.

Within the field of sign linguistics there is an ongoing debate concerning the ambiguity of pointing signs within the agreement debate (cf. Cormier, Schembri & Woll, 2013). It is argued here that an analysis of the readability of SW texts of specific languages can shed light on the different forms of pointing signs in sign language.

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[1] ASL Bible Translated from the New Living Translation (NLT) (by Interpreter Nancy Romero) available at http://www.signbank.org/signpuddle2.0/index.php?ui=1&sgn=151

[2] The LSM Literature Puddle can be found at this link: http://www.signbank.org/signpuddle2.0/index.php?ui=1&sgn=0&sgn=127

In the following paper, the LSM written forms of the readable forms of LSM pronominal pointing forms and other related issues regarding the writing of agreement in LSM are discussed.