

Ch 3 case studies

- **“Sign language is just skilled charades”**

Background preparation:

- *Kaplan (2016), Ch 3, sec 3.3*

0. Course info and announcements

- **M Sept 13** → case-study presentation workshop
 - I will provide info about the assignment
 - You will have a chance during class to get together with your presentation group and start working on finding your research paper
 - You may do this in person, remotely, by email (etc.), or in some combination; please decide with your group **before class** how this will go
 - I will be available in class and on Zoom for questions and discussion

1. Myths and research questions

- Ch 3 “myth”
‘Signed language is skilled charades’
- Case-study section (3.3) theme
‘Are signed languages just pantomime?’
- How can we turn “just pantomime” into a **research question?**
 - What linguistic property is actually under investigation in the sec 3.3 case studies?

2. Petitto (1987)

- Participants, methods
 - Two young girls acquiring ASL/L1, ages 6mo–2+
 - Videos made periodically of each girl playing with a parent or playing 'games' with researcher
- Focus of the analysis was the pronouns ME, YOU
 - What kinds of mistakes do children acquiring a spoken language often make with 'me', 'you'?
 - Why is it interesting to compare ASL?
- Results? What two patterns does Kaplan report?

2. Petitto (1987)

- Results? What two patterns does Kaplan report?
 - Each girl had a phase where she avoided pronouns (linguistic pointing), while still using non-linguistic pointing as a gesture
 - Each girl had a phase where she used *you* to mean 'me'

Discussion:

- What were the big-picture and measurable RQs?
- Concerns or critiques about the study?
- How does the study relate to the Ch 3 themes?

3. Meier et al. (2008)

- Participants, methods
 - 4 Deaf children learning ASL, ages 8mo–17mo
 - Each child sign in “several hours of videotaped interaction” was rated by an adult signer:
How iconic, compared to adult target sign?

3. Meier et al. (2008)

- Results (Kaplan 2016: 45, Table 3.1)

Table 3.1 Iconicity of children's signs relative to adult signs as a percentage of each child's total number of signs; raw counts are given in parentheses. Richard P. Meier, Claude E. Mauk, Adrienne Cheek, and Christopher J. Moreland, The form of children's early signs: Iconic or motoric determinants?, Language Learning and Development 2008, Table 1. Reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd., www.tandfonline.com.

Child	Much Less Iconic	Somewhat Less Iconic	Neutral	Somewhat More Iconic	Much More Iconic
Caitlin ($n = 45$)	20.0 (9)	0.0	80.0 (36)	0.0	0.0
Katie ($n = 238$)	10.1 (24)	18.1 (43)	63.4 (151)	7.1 (17)	1.3 (3)
Noel ($n = 113$)	28.3 (32)	13.3 (15)	52.2 (59)	6.2 (7)	0.0
Susie ($n = 209$)	25.4 (53)	29.7 (62)	42.1 (88)	2.4 (5)	0.5 (1)
Mean Percentage	20.9	15.3	59.4	3.9	0.4
<i>SD</i>	8.0	12.3	16.2	3.3	0.6

3. Meier et al. (2008)

- Results (Kaplan 2016: 44)
 - The majority of the children's signs were rated just as iconic as the target adult forms
 - only a few signs (4.3% of the total) were rated as more iconic
 - the less iconic signs significantly outnumbered the more iconic signs ($p < .002$ for each child)

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4. Marshall et al. (2004)

- Participants, methods
 - BSL-signing stroke patient, “Charles”, with anomia (trouble remembering words)
 - Frequently used actual pantomime to communicate when he couldn’t recall words
 - Was shown 20 pictures depicting highly iconic signs, 20 pictures depicting non-iconic signs
- Results? How did Charles’s accuracy on the two sets of signs compare?

4. Marshall et al. (2004)

- Results (Kaplan 2016: 46)
 - he was no better at remembering the iconic signs than the non-iconic ones (about 50% accuracy for each group; at $p > .5$, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant)

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5. Ormel et al (2009)

- Participants, methods
 - 40 students, ages 8–12, bilingual in Sign Language of the Netherlands (SLN) and written Dutch
 - SLN sign shown on screen with picture; choose whether sign and picture match
 - Strongly vs. weakly iconic signs compared

5. Ormel et al (2009)

- Results (Kaplan 2016: 47, Table 3.2)

Table 3.2 Reaction times (in milliseconds) and accuracy by grade and strong/weak iconicity. Ellen Ormel, Harry Knoors, Daan Hermans, and Ludo Verhoeven, The role of sign phonology and iconicity during sign processing: The case of deaf children, Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education 14(4): 2009, 436–448, Table 2 (adapted).

Factors and conditions	Grade	Reaction times	Accuracy
Condition 1: Strong	3rd/4th grade	1871 (455)	.92 (.05)
Condition 2: Weak	3rd/4th grade	1959 (367)	.83 (.09)
Condition 1: Strong	5th/6th grade	1542 (378)	.93 (.06)
Condition 2: Weak	5th/6th grade	1680 (384)	.81 (.11)

5. Ormel et al (2009)

- Results (Kaplan 2016: 46–7)
 - both groups of students were faster, and more accurate, when they saw iconic signs
 - the difference between strongly and weakly iconic signs was significant for both measures ($p < .05$ for reaction time and $p < .01$ for accuracy)

Discussion:

- What were the big-picture and measurable RQs?
- Concerns or critiques of the study?
- How does the study relate to the Ch 3 themes?

6. Discussion

- Initial “myth” as presented by Kaplan:

Are sign languages just pantomime?

- Clearly busted... by description of grammar of signed languages as well as by the case studies
- What is the somewhat more sophisticated but still “big-picture” research question that Kaplan raises when she begins reviewing the case studies in Ch 3?

6. Discussion

- Petitto (1987): Does iconicity make pronoun acquisition easier for children?
- Meier et al. (2008): Are children's production errors more, less, or equally iconic as compared to the target (adult) forms?
- Marshall et al. (2004): Is a BSL-signing stroke patient with anomia — who uses actual pantomime to communicate! — better at remembering iconic signs than non-iconic ones?
- Ormel et al. (2009): Are signers faster, or more accurate, in a sign/picture matching task when the sign is more strongly iconic?

6. Discussion

- What is the somewhat more sophisticated but still “big-picture” research question that Kaplan raises when she begins reviewing the case studies in Ch 3?
 - Does the fact that signed languages typically have a **higher proportion of iconic elements** make them (their grammar, their use) **fundamentally different** from spoken languages?

6. Discussion

- Kaplan's general conclusions (Kaplan 2016: 47–48)
 - All this leaves us with the conclusion that signed languages are highly conventionalized ... but signers do sometimes exploit the fact that there's a useful connection between the shapes of many signs and their meanings.
 - Some researchers have suggested that both signed and spoken languages use iconic symbols when they can, but it's easier to create an iconic symbol using gesture...
 - In other words, spoken languages would be happy to be more iconic, if only they could be!
- Any other points to raise or discuss?

7. More resources

Phonology in signed languages

- [Studying phonology in sign language](#), Handspeak.com
 - Some phonology basics; ASL examples
- [Sign Language Phonology](#), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia: Linguistics* (may need UNC connection or ONYEN)
 - A more advanced theoretical approach; BSL examples

7. More resources

Sutton SignWriting — an orthographic (spelling) system intended for any signed language

- [What is SignWriting?](http://SignWriting.org), SignWriting.org
- [SignWriting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SignWriting), Wikipedia