

From Signing to Writing

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This empirical study focuses on the written expression of deaf signers. It is designed as a qualitative, corpus-based study with the object languages German and Swiss German Sign Language (DSGS). The main aim is to describe grammatical and lexical phenomena found in written texts produced by deaf signers and to discuss the distinctive linguistic features against the background of modality interferences with signing.

Data – The data set contains school essays and is organized in three cohorts: The first cohort consists of students from secondary school, the second cohort of students from vocational school for deaf apprentices, and the third cohort of adult deaf sign language teachers. The data set includes written as well as corresponding signed texts in DSGS. The signed texts were then transcribed with ELAN in order to detect and analyze the bimodal interferences in the written texts accordingly. Based on a pre-study on everyday written communication of deaf signers (cf. Meili, 2016), such interferences are to be expected in the areas of syntax (e. g. ellipsis, doubling), lexicon (e. g. auxiliaries), or discourse organization (e. g. rhetorical questions).

Theoretical Framework – Hitherto, grapholinguistics and multimodality research has primarily focused on modality shifts within the framework of spoken language systems (cf. Klug & Stöckl, 2016). To account for the specific properties of writing in bimodal bilingual contexts (i. e. when sign language meets writing), the terminology currently used by the respective disciplines will be discussed and re-considered in order to achieve clear conceptual distinction and consistency with and within sign language linguistics.

References: Klug, N.-M. & H. Stöckl (2016). Handbuch Sprache im multimodalen Kontext. Berlin: de Gruyter. Meili, A. (2016). Schriftliche Alltagskommunikation gehörloser Personen in der Deutschschweiz. Eine qualitative Korpusanalyse von WhatsApp-Nachrichten. <https://doi.org/10.15488/2966>.