

Contents

Acknowledgments	1
About this study	3
1 General background	5
1.1 Sign linguistics	5
1.2 An anthropological conception of deafness	6
1.3 Iconicity and recent tendencies of change in sign linguistics	7
1.3.1 Iconicity	7
1.3.2 First approaches to iconicity and sign languages	8
1.3.3 Recent perspectives on the iconicity question	9
1.3.4 Sign classifiers and iconicity	10
1.4 Venezuela	10
1.4.1 General information about the country	10
1.4.2 Languages in Venezuela	11
1.5 The Venezuelan Deaf community	12
1.5.1 The concept of Deafness as used in this book	12
1.5.2 Deaf people in Venezuela	12
1.6 Venezuelan Sign Language: LSV	13
1.6.1 Schools for the Deaf in Venezuela and the origins of LSV	14
1.6.2 LSV research	15
2 Methodological considerations	17
2.1 The informants	17
2.2 Video-recorded data	18
2.3 Elicited data	18
2.4 Data transcription	18
2.4.1 Glosses	19
2.4.2 Transcription of classifiers	19
2.4.3 Transcription of the internal sign structure	22
2.4.3.1 Handshape	22

2.4.3.2	Activity of the hand	27
2.4.3.3	Spatial hand orientation	30
2.4.3.4	Location	31
2.4.3.5	Non-manual activity	34
2.5	LSV structural types of signs	35
2.5.1	One-handed signs	36
2.5.2	Two-handed signs	38
2.5.2.1	Symmetric signs	38
2.5.2.2	Asymmetric signs	40
2.6	The terms sign, gesture, lexeme and citation form	42
3	Classifiers	45
3.1	General assumptions about classifiers	45
3.2	Classifiers representing the spatial activity of entities	45
3.2.1	Classifiers representing the spatial activity of entities conceived as a whole	46
3.2.2	Classifiers representing bodypart movements	47
3.3	Classifiers that represent the spatial location of entities	49
3.4	Classifiers representing the handling of a patient by an agent in space	51
3.5	Classifiers that represent physical properties of an object	52
3.6	Classifiers as a group of signs	54
3.7	Handshapes used in classifiers	55
3.8	Why “classifiers”?	56
3.9	The term “classifier” called into question	59
4	LSV and current descriptions of classifiers	63
4.1	Two problems and three theoretical positions	63
4.1.1	First problem: Do classifiers have duality of patterning?	66
4.1.2	Second problem: Is there a limit to the number of forms of classifiers?	68
4.2	Classifiers and the first surveys on sign linguistics	70
4.3	First theoretical position: Classifiers are linguistic units	71
4.3.1	Initial research	71
4.3.2	Supalla’s work	72

4.3.3	Psycholinguistic evidence used by Supalla	74
4.3.4	Problems of Supalla's model	74
4.3.5	Iconicity in the frame of a linguistic approach to classifiers	80
4.3.6	Free combinations of pre-existing meaningful units?	83
4.4	Second theoretical position: Classifiers are not linguistic units at all	84
4.4.1	The visual imagery of DeMatteo	84
4.4.2	Classifiers are a visually based semiotic system	87
4.4.3	Cogill's model and the description of LSV data	90
4.5	Third theoretical position: Classifiers enjoy a hybrid nature	95
4.5.1	A continuum between lexical signs and pantomime	95
4.5.2	Liddell's model	96
4.5.2.1	The case of pronouns and agreement verbs	96
4.5.2.2	Mental spaces	97
4.5.2.3	Analysis of classifiers	98
4.5.2.4	Liddell's model and the two problems discussed in this chapter	99
4.6	Summary of Chapter 4	100
5	Signs and gestures in LSV	103
5.1	Prototypical signs and prototypical gestures	103
5.2	Fully phonologically specified changes	104
5.3	Gestures	107
5.3.1	Gestures and words in spoken discourse	107
5.3.2	Vocal and physical gestures	108
5.3.3	Classes of physical gestures accompanying the spoken discourse	109
5.3.4	Kendon's continuum applied to spoken language linguistics	110
5.3.5	"Signers do gestures"	110
5.3.6	Kendon's continuum applied to sign languages	110
5.3.7	Prototypical gestures	111
5.4	Partially phonologically specified changes	115
5.4.1	Agreement verbs	116
5.4.2	Pronominal and adverbial deictics	119
5.4.3	Pluralisation of nouns	123
5.4.4	Augmentative quantification	128
5.5	Summary of Chapter 5	134

6	A model for LSV classifiers	137
6.1	LSV classifiers as lexical entries	137
6.1.1	Lexical roots in classifiers representing spatial activity of entities	137
6.1.2	Examples with classifiers representing the spatial location of entities	148
6.1.3	Examples with handling classifiers	152
6.1.4	Examples with classifiers describing physical properties of objects	157
6.2	Interpretative keys behind the gestures: an example	160
6.2.1	Comments on the gestural component in LSV classifiers	161
6.2.2	Revisiting some problems reported in the analysis of classifiers	165
6.3	Non-systematic changes: A point still to be discussed	170
6.4	Summary of Chapter 6	175
7	Conclusions	177
7.1	The semiotic nature of classifiers	177
7.1.1	A linguistic analysis of classifiers would seem to be non-viable	177
7.1.2	Alternative theoretical models	178
7.2	Frozen vs. productive signs?	178
7.2.1	Classifiers are not as productive as has been assumed	178
7.2.2	The citation forms of LSV classifiers	179
	References	181
	Appendix: Handshapes observed in LSV classifiers	193