Personal experience narratives in three West African sign languages: the influence of time-depth, community size and social interaction

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Chapter 5 – STUDY 2 Narrative devices: Signing perspectives

5.1 Introduction

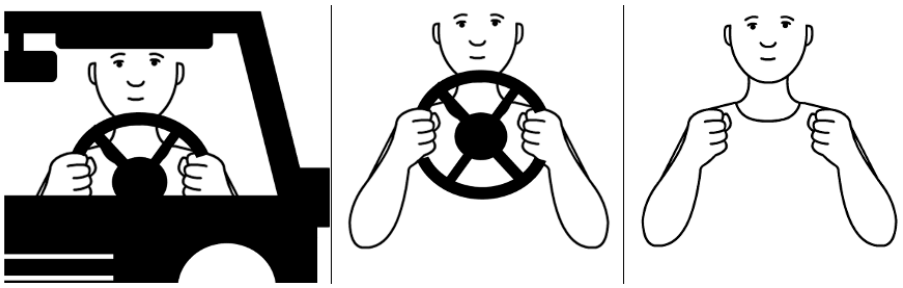
When storytellers tell a story, they usually express in words the images in their heads as they build a story and convey a message inviting the audience to create their images and interpretations (Zeni 2018, 40). Storytellers can assume the role of the narrator throughout their stories, they can embody characters and tell the story through their viewpoint, or they may alternate between the two strategies.

In Study 1, it became clear that, as a general rule, signers of the three sign languages start and end their narratives as narrators and, in between, enact characters (see Chapter 3 for more details). When telling a story, storytellers can use various narrative devices to maintain the audience's attention (Labov 1972, 370; Colaço, 2020, 32). For instance, they can perform the role of characters as if in a play by reconstructing their actions and interacting with life-sized story elements within the space around them (Perniss 2007a, 1316). Moreover, they can play more than one character at a time or portray one character with two different scales using other articulators. Otherwise, signers can arrange and manipulate model-sized elements in their signing space as if in a puppet show (Perniss 2007a, 1317).

Such distinct strategies in telling about narrative events make the stories more appealing to deaf and signing audiences (Pyers and Senghas 2007, 283). In that way, signing perspectives express the evaluation component in personal experience narratives. This is distinct from the structural components since it can overlap with the time-aligned structural components. According to Labov and Waletzky (1967; hereafter L&W), storytellers enrich the narrative through evaluative devices. This way, they hold the interlocutors' attention by inviting them to emotionally enter the event and experience it similarly.

Like Labov (1972) stresses the importance of the evaluation component in spoken languages, so is it also a factor in sign languages (c.f., Wilson 1996; Mulrooney 2009; and Sohre 2017). In this chapter, I look at one of the evaluative devices in sign languages, concerning the **perspectives** adopted by signers while telling their narratives. They can embody a character and act within the moment of the event, as if in a play (Labov 1972) (real scale perspective, in Figure 42a) or at least two characters (multiple perspectives, in Figure 42b). Otherwise, signers can represent a character using two different scales at a time (simultaneous perspectives, in Figure 42c). In addition, they can choose to narrate their own experiences without going into details and maintaining the narrator's perspective (reduced scale perspective, in Figure 42d). The four perspective types analysed in this study are referred to within a graduated scale, with the real scale perspective at one end and the reduced at the other end.

a. real scale perspective



b. simultaneous perspectives

c. multiple perspectives

d. reduced scale

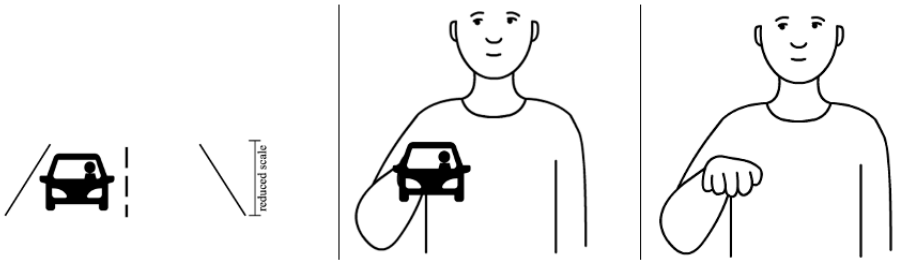


Figure 43. Signing perspectives: acting as if driving by holding a steering wheel in a real scale perspective (a); as if driving while being looked at by someone else by

representing the eyes with a two-finger handshape in multiple perspectives (b); as if driving a moving car represented by flat hand, palm downward in simultaneous perspectives (c); and a moving car using a model-sized classifier in a reduced scale perspective (d)

This chapter focuses on which of these perspectives that signers in the three sign languages use during their personal experience narratives. As explained in the previous chapter (see Table 23 in §4.4), signers can tell their stories neutrally as narrators or they can make them more compelling by portraying elements, especially characters, in different scales. To this purpose, signers can embody characters while adding – or not – additional information, or engage the audience in the story setting by laying it out on reduced scale. Because neutral narrations are not considered evaluative they will not be analysed in Study 2.

This chapter starts by looking at the literature background on signing perspectives (§5.2). First, it gives an overview of the four types of signing perspectives analysed here (§5.2.1). Then, it looks at previous studies of signing perspectives in personal experience narratives (§5.2.2) and specifically in emerging and village sign languages (§5.2.3). Next, the research questions for Study 2 (§5.3) as well as a summary of the methods used in the analysis are reprised (§5.4). Afterwards, the analysis of the four perspectives is presented in the three sign languages included in this thesis (§5.5). The analysis starts with the real scale perspective (§5.5.1), followed by multiple (§5.5.2), simultaneous (§5.5.3) and the reduced scale perspective (§5.5.4). Finally, the chapter synthesises the results (§5.6), discusses them concerning the literature (§5.7) and finishes with a conclusion (§5.8).

5.2 Background on signing perspectives

Signers can tell their narratives either through the narrator's perspective or by somehow representing a character. If the narrator becomes the character, they assume a real scale perspective. If the signer remains in a narrator mode, their explanations usually rely on lexical signs, but the narrator can also create descriptions based on model-sized **classifiers** in which a hand represents a physical entity – either animate (e.g., a person or animal) or inanimate (e.g., the car in Fig. 42, house, stick, etc.), as suggested by Mulrooney (2009, 34). This literature review seeks to systematise how such dual perspectives of narrator and character, and combinations therein (e.g., involving classifiers), have been analysed and classified by previous scholars.

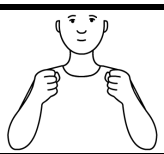
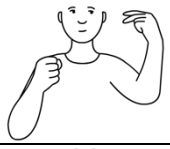
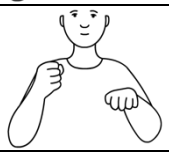
Here I summarise the signing perspectives in terms of the taxonomy adopted in this study. Table 25 shows that the **real scale perspective** (Dudis 2004; Perniss 2007a)[19] relies on life-sized referents and is expressed by character embodiment, which is called **constructed action** (Fig. 42a). Such embodiment may have different degrees, from being primarily enacted by a character to cooccurring with utterances produced by the narrator. The first form is called **overt constructed actions** by Cormier et al. (2015). In the second form, these authors distinguish between reduced and subtle constructed actions, but in this chapter, I will refer to these as **partially overt constructed actions** (partially overt CA), in contrast to overt constructed actions (overt CA). Partially overt constructed actions include mainly narrative information given with lexical signs and classifiers. In this study, I distinguish between life and model-sized classifiers, although they have been termed differently elsewhere (e.g., by Perniss 2007a, 1319, as large-scale and small-scale size and shape specifiers or SASS).

To indicate referents in the story – i.e., various characters and actions, each type of signing perspective uses different linguistic resources. Referents can be indicated through constructed action, such as directing eye gaze and communication to another character while enacting some part of the story, or referents can be indicated in the character handling some object (using a handling classifier, referred to here as **life-sized classifiers**). This is the representation method used in a real scale perspective. Another way to indicate referents, mentioned above, is through the use of entity classifiers, such as a handshape that represents a human. This method is tied to the reduced scale perspective, in which the linguistic referent is **model-sized classifiers** – i.e., in the 'puppet show' dimension (Perniss 2007b). Some model-sized entity classifiers are represented by body parts, like a "V" handshape standing for two legs or two eyes; these are called **body part** classifiers (Supalla 1986).

Multiple perspectives (Liddell 2003 uses the term multiple blend) express the interaction between different characters through constructed action and classifiers, which are usually life-sized but also model-sized. **Simultaneous perspectives** (as designated by Perniss 2007a) represent one character in life-sized and model-sized at the same time, by relying respectively on constructed action and classifiers. Finally, the **reduced scale perspective** uses only model-sized classifiers (as coined by Perniss 2007a) to display both animated and inanimated referents in the signing space.

[19] Dudis coined the term *real scale*, while Perniss added the term *perspective*.

Table 25. Taxonomy used in this study to describe signing perspectives

Perspective[b] type		**Scale**	**Representation of referents**
	**Real scale**[a]	Life-sized[b]	Constructed action - overt CA[c] - partially overt CA
	**Multiple**[d] (≥ 2 characters)	Life-sized [+model-sized]	Constructed action+ Classifiers (life or model-sized)
	**Simultaneous**[b] (same character)	Life-sized +model-sized	Constructed action+ Classifiers (model-sized)
	**Reduced scale**[b]	Model-sized[b]	Classifiers (model-sized)

[a]Dudis 2004, [b]Perniss 2007a, [c]Cormier et al. 2015

In sum, a story can be told with constructed actions, by fully embodying characters through real scale bodily and manual movements or eventually adding lexical signs (real scale perspective). In addition, character embodiment may cooccur with classifiers to represent interactions between two or more characters (multiple characters). Otherwise, while the body enacts a character, the hands may simultaneously refer to that character using model-sized classifiers (simultaneous perspectives). Finally, events can be told by manipulating the signing space with reduced scale classifiers (reduced scale perspective).

Throughout this chapter, I repeatedly refer to the two concepts of **constructed action**, i.e., character embodiment, and **classifiers**, i.e., handshapes that stand for referent categories (further described in the next subsection). Above, I have alluded to how they relate to the perspectives, but in brief: constructed actions are always life-sized, whereas classifiers may represent referents in both real and reduced scales. In this chapter, I will use the terms real scale and life-sized interchangeabley. Also, the terms reduced scale and model-sized will often refer to the same phenomena. Of course, the first terms – real and reduced scale – specifically designate perspective types, while the second ones – life-sized and model-sized – refer specifically to the scale of

referents. In addition, I use the terms character embodiments, enactments or dramatisations as equivalent terms to constructed actions.

It is important to note that scholars have viewed the phenomena discussed in this chapter in a variety of ways, which also leads to different terms and categories. For example, they have used different terms for the character's role, such as role playing (Lidell 1980), enactment (Hodge & Ferrara 2013) and personification (Baker 2017). Metzger (1995) introduces the term constructed action (CA) to refer to the moment when the signer plays the character by embodying actions, utterances, emotions, feelings, or thoughts. She adapted this designation from Tannen (1986; 1989), who coined the term **constructed dialogue** (which I also use; see Chapter 6) as a replacement for 'reported speech'. Tannen argues that narrators do not retell a dialogue exactly how it happened, but rather as close to it as possible, i.e., they (re)construct the dialogue. Metzger applies this term constructed dialogue to sign language discourse, arguing that it coincides with the construction of characters' actions, behaviour and emotions, not precisely as it happened, but as similarly as possible (1995, 256-257). **Constructed action** or CA seems to be the most commonly-used term (Quinto-Pozos 2007; Beal-Alvarez & Trussell 2015; Cormier et al. 2015; Jantunen 2017, Puupponen et al. 2022, Ferrara & Johnston 2014).

In summary, CA can fully engage the body to interpret a life-sized character, playing actions on a real scale. Dramatisations can also be combined with classifiers to represent different characters or the same character in different scales. It is implicit that character enactments express equally character shifts, dialogues or thoughts (Liddell 2003, 158-164), using both lexical signs and classifiers. Although role shift and constructed dialogue rely on CA, this device will be discussed separately in Chapter 6. Finally, in the absence of life-sized character embodiments, signers display classifiers on a reduced scale in the space in front of them.

The following subsection gives a detailed overview of the four perspective types: (1) real scale; (2) multiple perspectives; (3) simultaneous; and (4) reduced scale.

5.2.1 Overview of signing perspective types

Real scale perspective

Telling about events from a real scale perspective involves character embodiment, i.e., constructed action (CA), based on the assumption that 'I am the character' (Sutton-Spence 2021). Besides being designated as constructed action (Metzger 1995; Cormier et al. 2015), real scale character enactments have been studied in sign

languages under other labels, such as participant viewpoint (Dudis 2004) or character perspective in which the signer may use life-sized handling classifiers referring to the manipulation of referents in their actual size and shape (Perniss 2007a, 1330).

Other than assuming the character's standpoint, the CA can be looked at according to the perception of the signer's surroundings, as a surrogate space, where there is a blend between the real space around the signers and the space of the event (Liddell 2003). Liddell (2003) based his work on a general cognitive process described by Fauconnier and Turner (1994, 1996), where two mental spaces serve as the input for a third blended space. Liddell exemplifies such a process with a cartoon of Garfield and Jon. In the cartoon, Garfield sits on the sofa in front of the television, and Jon stands up to his right. As shown in Figure 44, the cartoon is the event space, and the signer embodying and describing the cartoon is in the real space. Together they project a third space called surrogate blend. The signer playing the character Garfield is in a surrogate space. The elements that are around him are also surrogates inside that same space. When looking up, the signer who plays the cat presents a new element in the space, Jon, who becomes an invisible surrogate, while Garfield is the visible surrogate. All this surrogate space occurs on a real scale perspective.

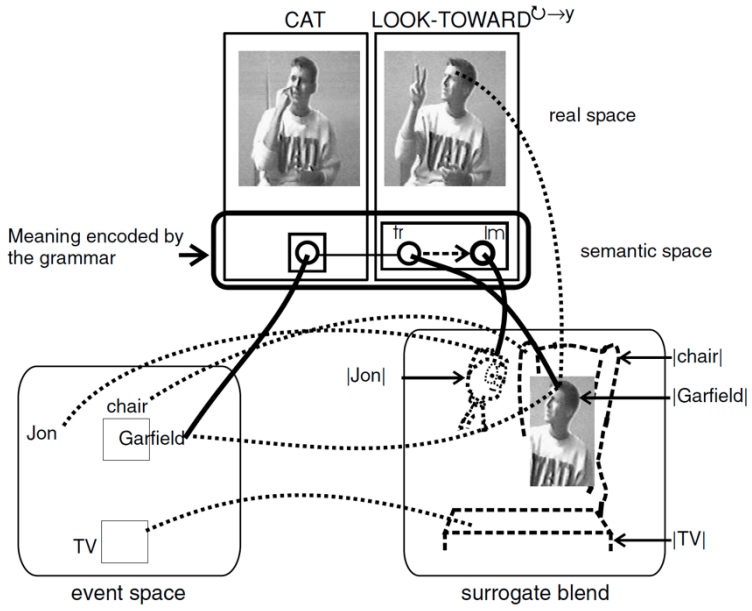


Figure 44. Creation of a surrogate space by the signer blending the real space and the event space (in Liddell 2003, 152)

The audience watching the signer understands that there are two elements in the signer's space: the one that is being played by the signer, which is Garfield, and the one that Garfield looks at, which is Jon, presented as a new surrogate. The cartoon that was watched (event space) and the cartoon that was processed by the brain (mental space) are mapped into real space. The elements are mapped so that the audience perceives where they are located, namely where the television and the sofa are in relation to the characters, Garfield and Jon. The elements can be placed near the signer and further away. They can be above or behind the signer within their signing space.

In surrogate space, there can be moments of full CA, where the whole body, including the hands, represents only the character. Still, there can also be moments where the hands or other body articulator is no longer part of the CA (Liddell 2003, 155 – 157). This implies that CA may be expressed in different degrees, from full enactments as a character to partial embodiments cooccurring with utterances produced by the narrator.

Metzger (1995, 262 – 264) distinguishes different forms of CA. The one expressed at its fullest, involves primarily the body, shoulders, trunk, head, face, eye gaze and hands, combined, eventually, with limited use of lexical signs and classifiers, is designated as a direct action (ibid., 263). For resembling mime, Liddell and Metzger (1998, 673) consider it gestural, which refers to an ongoing discussion (Lillo-Martin 2012; Kegl 1985; Quinto-Pozos & Mehta 2010). Similarly, Cormier and colleagues (2015,19) present distinct types of CA. When the signer acts mainly as a character, instead of as the narrator, they label it as **overt CA**.

The intermediary stage involving simultaneously character embodiment and narration with lexical signs and classifiers directed at the audience is termed by Metzger (1995) as direct and indirect actions. Not exactly alike, Cormier and colleagues (2015) consider that, in this form of CA, which they label as reduced CA, the signer acts mainly as a character and second as the narrator. This form of CA involves the most articulators since the signer can use facial expressions and body movements as a character while the hands produce lexical signs as the narrator.

When the CA is reduced to a minimum, the narrator steps further in and takes the stage in what has been labelled by Metzger (1995) as indirect actions. In this form of CA, the narrator plays the leading role with limited involvement of the body. Cormier and colleagues (2015) designate such a form where the signer acts mainly as the narrator and second as a character as a subtle CA. Here, the character's role is reduced, and the narrator's role is increased. Thus, the narrator can tell the story and, at the very least, have some articulator in the body representing a character. Finally, when the

signer acts mainly as the narrator, and there is no character dramatisation at all, Cormier and colleagues (2015,19) state that CA is non-existent, or none.

Another type of CA is the embodiment of animals or objects. Rachel Sutton-Spence highlights anthropomorphism in deaf literature, such as poetry, visual vernacular, children's stories and fables (Sutton-Spence & Napoli 2010; Sutton-Spence & Kaneko 2017; Sutton-Spence 2021; Baker 2017; Asmal & Kaneko 2020). Such embodiment of animals, other living beings, like trees, or objects, like a ball, is very common in folkloric deaf literature (Sutton-Spence & Kaneko 2017 and Sutton-Spence 2021). Anthropomorphism is yet to be studied in personal experience narratives. Nonetheless, Sutton-Spence describes a personal experience narrated by a deaf man telling his experience with a mouse in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras). He embodies the mouse in some moments of his narrative, using facial expressions and body movements to represent the mouse in detail. She also adds that during anthropomorphism, signers may use classifiers.

Hodge and Ferrara (2014) observe that the way signers tell their narratives is influenced by their background, experience as storytellers, age or education. For instance, when comparing the use of CA in younger and older adults, Puupponen and colleagues (2022) see that overt CA is used more often by older deaf people. Such a result may have to do with educational policies affecting successive generations of deaf people, namely by a decrease in the number of deaf peers with whom interact.

Thus, CA is a mime-like form to represent characters' experiences on a real scale, which is overwhelmingly used in sign languages. When the embodied character interacts with someone else represented by a life-sized classifier, then we are facing multiple perspectives, which are reviewed next.

Multiple perspectives

If one character can be expressed under a real scale perspective, as shown above, how can the interaction between characters be represented? Here, the signer acts as two or more characters simultaneously, using different articulators, in what Cormier and colleagues (2015) designate as mixed CA, Dudis (2004) as partitionable zones in a single blend and Liddell (2003) as a multiple blend. Although Cormier and colleagues do not refer to which perspective is used in these interactions, Dudis places character representation on the same scale, while Liddell considers the combination of CA with classifiers in different scales.

Dudis exemplifies such multiple perspectives with a signer acting as being punched or, actually, as punching himself on the chin (2004, 231). This way, the signer embodies one character and the arm and hand act as if belonging to another character,

being both represented as life-sized from the character's perspective. He further adds that this is so straightforward that even gesturers express it in the same way (ibid., 236).

The moment when two perspectives come together, or there are multiple perspectives expressed not only by the hands but also by other nonmanual articulators, are called by Dudis nonmanual partitionable zones. He exemplifies these with the case of a signer showing suspicion through his facial expression without lexical signs. At the same time, the hand articulates a body part classifier, with the “V” handshape representing someone's eyes looking at him. Here, two characters are expressed simultaneously, one by the signer’s facial expression and the other by the classifier's handshape (2004, 234 – 235).

In the example given by Liddell (2003), where Garfield is sitting on a sofa, the signer embodies Garfield's character by tilting the head slightly upwards and looking up on a real scale. While the signer’s facial expression represents the main character, the handshape "V" stands for a secondary character looking at the main character. In this case, there is contact between characters. In particular, the signer’s gaze embodying the main character is directed towards the hand that represents the second character looking towards the signer (Dudis 2004). Thus, the signer’s eye gaze from the character’s perspective is directed at the second hand, i.e., the second character.

Liddell (2003) further describes a multiple blend by representing different elements under distinct scalar perspectives. Liddell illustrates this with a signer embodying a character, while the left hand represents a police car passing in front of him as an entity classifier. The signer acts as a character on a real scale, and the hand represents a car on a reduced scale, involving both real and reduced scale perspectives and more than one referent at the same time (2003, 307 – 308).

After describing the interaction between characters, usually expressed by a combination of CA and life-sized classifiers, I discuss next how the same character is represented simultaneously with different scales.

Simultaneous perspectives

While the two perspectives described previously refer to character embodiments and their interactions with their surroundings, the third perspective described here expresses the same character simultaneously in real and reduced scale. This way, signers embody a character acting in their life-sized space, while using a model-sized figure to represent that same character (Perniss 2007b; Sutton-Spence 2021). These simultaneous representations of the same referents in different scales have been designated as simultaneous perspectives (Perniss 2007a), double perspectives (Perniss

2007b), simultaneous blends (Liddell 2003) or scalar properties of blends (Dudis 2004).

Liddell (2003) illustrates this phenomenon with a signer enacting Garfield looking up by tilting the head slightly upwards and directing his eye gaze upwards on a real scale. While the signer looks up, within the character's gaze, acting as if he were Garfield, his hand represents Garfield's eyes directed upwards with the body part classifier produced with the handshape "V". In this way, even if it seems that there are four eyes, the reality is that the same character is again expressed simultaneously with different articulators.

Dudis exemplifies this perspective type with the signer enacting a life-sized motorbiker while the hand represents the motorbike with an entity classifier. It is the same event represented simultaneously in different scales. He further adds that the elements do not establish contact with each other. Perniss (2007a) demonstrates simultaneous perspectives with an example where a signer embodies a driver stopping at an intersection and looking both ways. Here, the left hand represents the vehicle as an entity classifier (2007a, 1320).

After describing a signer producing the same character in both scales, real and reduced, at the same time, I focus next on spatial arrangements set up in the signing space by the narrator in a reduced scale perspective.

Reduced scale perspective

The three signing perspectives explained above involve constructed actions to different degrees. In contrast, the reduced scale perspective, which Sutton-Spence (2021) puts as 'These are the characters', does not involve character enactments. Again, this signing perspective, where the narrator is outside the event arranging it on a reduced scale, has been labelled differently as a global viewpoint (Dudis 2004) or observer perspective (Perniss 2007a). This suggests that story elements are set up in the signing space as model-sized miniatures in a depicting space (Liddell 2003).

The fact is that, when telling a narrative, signers usually start by giving the audience a mental picture of the event space from a reduced scale perspective (Poulin & Miller 1995). In this three-dimensional special arrangement, the signer resorts mainly to model-sized classifiers (Sutton-Space 2021, 52). Such prototypical handshapes stand for semantic features, while also representing their actions and locations as depicting verbs (Liddell 2003, 263) or classifier predicates (e.g., Perniss 2007a). The most common reduced scale classifier is designated generally as an entity classifier, where the size and shape of an object are mapped into the shape of the hand(s) and, eventually the arm(s).

Each sign language has its own set of handshapes that can be manipulated within a reduced scale space. For instance, in American Sign Language (ASL), the '3' handshape (thumb, index, and middle fingers stretched) can represent a car (Sutton-Spence 2021) or a motorbike, which can be placed over the other hand with an open palm handshape as the ground, both as entity classifiers for a motorbike going uphill on a steep road (Dudis 2004, 225). In British Sign Language (as well as in Portuguese Sign Language, LGP), a car is represented instead by the downward-facing open palm handshape (Sutton-Spence 2021, 51).

However, in the real scale perspective, the handling classifier is used together with the entity classifier. The handling classifier may also occur in the reduced scale, where the entity classifier is standard. Although this is rare in German sign language, her study with Özyürek (2008) showed that it is pretty common in Türk İşaret Dili (Turkish Sign Language).

The reduced scale perspective can be combined with partially overt constructed actions where the signer usually embodies the character's gaze. Otherwise, when narrating only under a reduced scale perspective, the eye gaze is generally on the hands, which Perniss (2007a) does not clearly assign to the narrator or the character.

Having presented the two four types of signing perspectives, I look next at the studies on signing perspectives specifically on personal experience narratives.

5.2.2 Signing perspectives in personal experience narratives

The previous subsections focused on signing perspectives in all types of storytelling. What about in personal experience narratives? In the literature review on the structure model in sign language narratives, in §1.2.5., I discussed more in-depth work by three scholars, Wilson (1996), Mulrooney (2009) and Sohre (2013), who analysed signing perspectives as evaluative devices in personal experience narratives.

Wilson (1996) saw that in her data, a personal experience narrative in American Sign Language (ASL), the signer preferred to dramatise actions rather than to describe them with lexical signs. Both Mulrooney (2009) and Sohre (2013) analysed their narratives (respectively 12 ASL narratives and four in Romanian Sign Language, LSR) according to Liddell's (2003) model of blended mental spaces, finding real and reduced scale perspectives.

Mulrooney concluded that signing perspectives depend on the information expressed. Hence, factual information is given by the narrator usually at the beginning and the end of the narrative. In the middle parts of the story, signers tell about events or reactions to those events mainly through a combination of CA with the information

given by the narrator, while in more emotional moments they tend to rely on overt enactments. Similarly, Sohre observed that the real scale perspective was especially frequent during the complication and the resolution components.

After summarising the findings of the few studies on signing perspectives in personal experience narratives, I turn to previous work on signing perspectives in emerging and village sign languages.

5.2.3 Signing perspectives in emerging and village sign languages

Having explained the four perspective types in depth, I now explore what we know already – before the research in this study – on perspective-taking in signers from young or emerging sign languages (e.g., Pyers & Senghas 2007; Stamp & Sandler 2021) and village sign languages (e.g., Nyst 2007a; De Vos 2012a; Edward 2021). This issue also involves consideration of gesture, homesigning, and language acquisition in children, which I will briefly touch on.

Concerning **gesture** and **sign language acquisition**, the most common perspective is expressed by real scale constructed actions involving the signer's body to enact a character. Real scale is used by both non-signers when gesturing (McNeill 1992; Godoy 2020) and hearing children very early on (McNeill 1992); for example, when they move their bodies without music to represent 'dance' (Iverson et al. 2008, 4). The real scale perspective is also used by deaf children before the third year of life (Loew 1984; Lillo-Martin & Quadros 2011; Smith & Cormier 2014). Then, at around three years old, ASL-exposed deaf children start producing constructions of entities (e.g., people, vehicles) on a reduced scale (Slobin et al. 2003). At eight, they play with this type of reduced scale ASL classifiers (Smith & Cormier 2014), but even by 12, most still do not master them (Slobin et al. 2003). This indicates that there might be a parallel developmental phase at the individual level and the language level.

When it comes to deaf individuals who grow up without fluent signing interlocutors and no compensatory language training (e.g., audiological interventions), they are usually called '**homesigners**'. Morford and Kegl (2000) distinguish between isolated homesigners and homesigners in contact with other deaf people using the visual-spatial modality alone. These authors have observed that isolated homesigners use only the real scale perspective, engaging the whole body to represent actions and handling imaginary objects (2000, 377). However, homesigners in contact are observed to replace the actions of the legs with the arms and hands, i.e., with body part classifiers and entity classifiers to represent objects (but not human entities) in addition to handling signs (2000, 378). In this case, the use of classifiers suggests that its emergence may be driven by the interactions in the signed modality.

In **emerging sign languages**, it has been shown that real scale character embodiment is the first signing perspective to appear, which is attributed to the imitation of human actions as the most "immediate resource" to signers (Stamp & Sandler 2021, 2). In Idioma de Señas de Nicaragua (Nicaraguan Sign Language, ISN), which emerged about 40 years ago, signers also use the real scale perspective. However, they do not consistently set up reduced scale referents in space within the narrative (Pyers & Senghas 2007). It appears that by interacting with other deaf people over time, signers come to use different perspectives, especially when it comes to involving the reduced scale (Stamp & Sandler 2021; Morford & Kegl 2000). In this way, both **language age** and **interaction** between deaf peers seem to be relevant factors in the development of linguistic devices related to real and reduced scale perspectives.

In Israel, there are three relatively young sign languages (of about 90 years ago, see Chapter 1 for more details): Israel Sign Language (ISL or Shassi), Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL) and Kufr Qasem Sign Language (KQSL). The last two ones have developed in villages, where KQSL is used by a smaller deaf population than ABSL. Studies of these three sign languages have identified a proportional use of the real scale perspective according to the size of the deaf population. In other words, KQSL signers produce much more overt constructed actions than ISL. Inversely, the authors found that multiple perspectives are produced often by ISL signers, followed by those of ABSL and were seldom verified in KQSL (Stamp & Sandler 2021, 14). The authors suggest that the **larger size of the deaf community** – and, importantly, not the **age** – in ISL, promotes faster development of more complex devices (Aronoff et al. 2008; Meir 2012; Stamp & Sandler 2021).

Previous work has also been done on one of the languages in the current study, Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL), a village sign language with a much longer **time depth** (ca. 200 years and 30 deaf people, see Chapter 1 for more details). In her research of AdaSL, Nyst (2007) did not find the reduced scale perspective nor moving entity classifiers in the retellings of the Tweety and Sylvester cartoon. For example, the two-legged classifier found in most Western sign languages was unattested in AdaSL (Nyst 2007a, 196). However, Edward (2021) later compared AdaSL and Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL; a school-based sign language with an ASL substrate) and showed that some AdaSL signers (six of ten) did use the reduced scale perspective. Through elicited descriptions of short videos featuring real people as actors rather than cartoons, she observed that signers produced entity classifiers. Such an elicitation methodology prompting responses for instance to 'boy and girl ride [a bicycle] towards each other' was likely decisive in obtaining classifiers like opposing upward index fingers to represent two people riding towards each other (Edward 2021, 204), as shown in Figure 45.

CL_E (boy); mov. right to left
CL_E (girl); mov. left to right

Figure 45. Representation of two people running into each other with the index fingers pointing upwards in AdaSL (in Edward 2021, 202)

Although this coincides with a GSL classifier (GSL also has a second two-legged classifier to represent a human figure), signers of both AdaSL and GSL produced the real scale perspective much more frequently. It is important to remember that the deaf people in Adamorobe are in contact with GSL (the younger generation is schooled in the national sign language, and the Sunday mass is given in that language by a deaf priest). Thus, since they can use GSL to communicate with outsiders (see Chapter 1 for more details), **borrowing** might have influenced AdaSL data on the reduced scale collected by Edward (2021, 347).

Another village, in Benkgala, Bali (see Chapter 1 for more details), has a similar deaf population to Adamorobe, and its sign language, Kata Kolok, also has a long **time depth** (De Vos 2012a). De Vos collected narratives from personal experience in Kata Kolok and shows that the signers use real and reduced scale. However, unlike AdaSL, Kata Kolok signers make extensive use of model-sized classifiers. The perspective they used the most was the reduced scale perspective. For example, in one of the narratives, the right hand would represent a man while the left depicted a tree, both as entity classifiers. In another narrative, the signer narrates an accident between a truck and a motorbike by clashing both hands with each other in reduced scale, as shown in Figure 46.

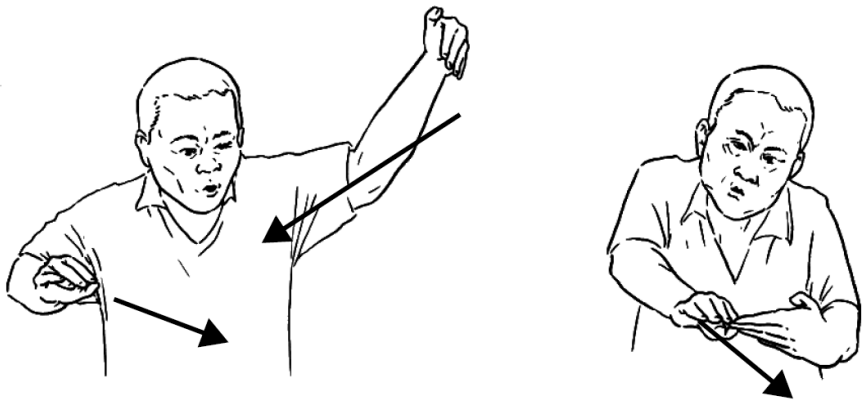


Figure 46. Representation of two referents (a truck and a motorbike) with entity classifiers in reduced scale perspective in Kata Kolok (in de Vos 2012, 280)

In Kata Kolok, the classifier representing a person is the whole hand in a vertical position, all fingers up. When doing the walking movement, the forearm moves vertically up and down (de Vos 2012a, 101). Kata Kolok classifiers vary in orientation and movement but within a smaller set of handshapes when compared to other macro-community sign languages (Marsaja 2008). Therefore, such a description of Kata Kolok's signing perspectives, suggests that time depth may be especially important to the development of narrative devices related to signing perspectives.

However, the differential use of perspectives in distinct village sign languages may be influenced by the **type of elicitation materials**. Stamp and Sandler hypothesise that the elicitation material can limit the spontaneity of signing expression (2021, 15). Also, Nyst points out that cartoons are not part of signers' lives in Adamorobe – nor are films for that matter, I must add. In the current study, I did not use any elicitation materials to collect signing productions as naturally as possible.

To sum up, we see that the real scale perspective is present when sign language first emerges, whether in an individual or a community, while the other perspectives appear over time depending on the size of the deaf population and their interaction patterns – or even the age of the signer learning a language that uses multiple perspectives. In the young sign language of ISN in Nicaragua, signers rarely use classifiers in the reduced scale perspective in their narratives (Pyers & Senghas 2007, 292). In contrast, Kata Kolok – which is similar in the number of signers and language age to the sign language of Adamorobe – uses the reduced scale perspective often. Again, this is not the case in the not-so-old micro-community sign languages of the

Al-Sayyid Bedouin tribe and the city of Kufr Qasem, in Israel, where the real scale perspective is preferred.

It is possible, then, to conclude that the development of linguistic structures, particularly of narrative devices, depends not only on the age of the language but also on the size of the community (Stamp & Sandler 2021). Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that the type of elicitation materials can influence the authenticity of the signers' productions.

The overall focus of this thesis is on narratives of personal experience in three sign languages, collected only by asking a question, without any elicitation material. Two of the sign languages are villages of different time depths, and one is an emerging school-based sign language of about 20 years (see Chapter 1 for more details). Thus, comparing the three languages is relevant to understanding how community size, language age and interaction patterns between deaf peers influence the development of narrative devices.

This subsection reviewed in the literature the four signing perspectives analysed here. First, each of the signing perspective types was described (§5.2.1). Then, previous studies on signing perspectives in personal experience narratives (§5.2.2) and emerging and village sign languages were presented. In the following section, I pose the research questions specific to Study 2.

5.3 Research question

The three sign languages studied here have different sociolinguistic backgrounds. Two are used by micro-communities (AdaSL and LaSiBo) and one by a macro-community (LGG). One is very old (AdaSL) and two are very young (LaSiBo and LGG). What does this predict about the types of signing perspectives that may be used in personal experience narratives in each community?

Studies of emerging sign languages show that signers prefer using the real scale perspective, except for the macro-community ISL, where more than one perspective occurs. It is important to remember that ISL – and the two village sign languages of Israel – are about 90 years old, while ISN, the other macro-community sign language, is about 40 years. Out of this set of emerging sign languages, the one with both a larger community and a deeper time depth, ISL, shows the faster development of signing perspectives. In village sign languages, the surge of the reduced scale perspective does not seem to be time-dependent. Although its occurrence in AdaSL may be questionable, it has developed in Kata Kolok, which has a similar community size and language age.

The fact that the three sign languages have distinct backgrounds may show which factors determine how different signing perspectives develop, whether the size of the community, time depth of the language or frequency of social interactions between deaf peers.

To seek it, this study poses the following research question:

To what extent do signers of the three sign languages produce signing perspectives to enhance their narratives? The hypothesis is that signers in all languages will prefer to use the real scale perspective. Also, the reduced scale is not predicted to appear in languages with a shallow time depth – i.e., those in an earlier stage of language development – regardless of the size of the community and number of interactions. Specifically, this means that I would not expect a reduced scale perspective to be found in either LaSiBo or LGG. Moreover, the use of reduced scale has yet to be fully attested in AdaSL (across multiple signers), but based on the longer time depth, the prediction is that it would be used.

To answer the research question and test the hypotheses, I will analyse the signing perspectives in the personal experience narratives in the three West African sign languages. The following section focuses on the methods for the analysis of the four types of signing perspectives.

5.4 Methods for the analysis

With the research question in mind, I revisit the methods used in the analysis of the signing perspectives previously described in subsection 2.5.4. As in Study 1 on the narrative structure, the remaining three studies on narrative devices are based on the same data of personal experience narratives: 17 in AdaSL, 12 in LaSiBo and 16 in LGG.

The analysis for the present study is based again on coding in ELAN annotations. Five ELAN tiers are shared with other studies – translation, glosses for the right and left hand, role and eye gaze – and three others are specific to Study 2 – perspectives and classifiers for each hand. Table 26 provides further details on the tiers, namely the type of annotation and a brief description.

Table 26. Overview of ELAN tiers for Study 2

Parent tiers ↳ Children tiers	**Controlled vocabulary**	**Brief description**
Translation	text	Free translation
RH gloss LH gloss	text	Narrow translation
Eye gaze	- gaze on the audience - character's gaze - gaze at the hands	Identifies the narrator's role Identifies the character's role Identifies the reduced scale
Role	- narrator - overt constructed actions - partially overt constructed actions	Specifies the signer's role type
Character ↳ RH character ↳ LH character ↳ face ↳ body	text	Specifies who the character is in different articulators
↳ gaze at referent		Identifies who or what the character is looking at
Perspective	- real scale - multiple - simultaneous - reduced scale	Specifies the signing perspective type
RH classifier LH classifier	- entity - handling - body part	Specifies the classifier type in signing perspectives

I followed a set of criteria to distinguish the perspectives from one another (in the **perspective** tier), as follows.

(1) In the **real scale perspective**, i.e., to determine if the signer is embodying a character using life-sized constructed actions, the signer should have a character's gaze (in the eye gaze tier) and play the role of a character. The character can be fully embodied as an overt constructed action (in the role tier) by involving as many articulators as needed (RH and LH, face and body in the character tier). Otherwise, the enactment can be combined with narrations as a partially overt constructed action (in the role tier). In this case, only part of the articulators acts as a character (in the character tier), while the other part, usually the hand(s) plays the narrator by using

lexical signs (identifiable in the gloss tiers). The enacted character may use handling classifiers, since they are life-sized, whereas narrations – in the narrator's role or combined with a partially overt constructed action – may use entity or body part classifiers, in both scales (in the classifier tiers), as long as they are not representing another character (assigned to multiple perspectives) or the same character in reduced scale (assigned to simultaneous perspectives).

I also note that the real scale perspective includes lines in constructed dialogues, whether they refer to self-talk or are addressed to someone. However, these particular instances are analysed later in Study 3 on role shift and constructed dialogue.

(2) In **multiple perspectives**, the signer plays a partially overt character's role (in the role tier), since part of the articulators, usually the hand (in the RH or the LH character tier), represents an additional character with whom the embodied character interacts. Because signers are representing multiple perspectives by more than one character, they should have either a character's gaze (in the eye gaze tier) or a gaze at referent (in the character tier) which is directed at the narrated interactive partner. The additional character in the interaction can be represented by life-sized classifiers, whether handling or entity or by a body part classifier (in the classifier tier).

(3) In **simultaneous perspectives**, the signer plays again a partially overt character's role (in the role tier) with a character's gaze (in the eye gaze tier). In contrast to multiple perspectives, here the hand(s) (RH or LH character tier) represents the same character as the embodied one, but on a reduced scale. For that purpose, signers use a model-sized classifier, whether an entity or a body part (in the classifier tier).

(4) In a **reduced scale perspective**, the signer plays the narrator (in the role tier) and may have his gaze on the audience. However, it can also be the case that the gaze is at the hands (in the gaze tier) looking at the display of model-sized elements in the signing space. These elements are expressed by reduced scale classifiers, whether entity or body part (in the classifier tier).

Proportion of narrative time per perspective. After distinguishing the perspectives and whether the character was fully overt or partially overt in the real scale perspective, I calculated the time used by the signers in each perspective type and calculated the time as a percentage of the whole narrative for a better understanding of the distribution in signing perspectives per narrative and consequently per language (see §2.5.4 for more details).

Of course, in some of the moments throughout the narratives, signers also convey events neutrally as narrators (**neutral narration**), as explored in Study 1. The time spent in neutral narration was not the main focus of Study 2 because the goal is to examine perspectives as enhancing devices. However, to understand the total time

dedicated to the perspectives in the narratives, the proportion of neutral narrations, which involve mostly lexical signs, is calculated for a general overview of the preferences in the narration styles per language. Yet, the relevance of neutral narration as a proportion of narrative time is later considered alongside the other perspectives.

Table 27 shows the duration of each perspective type and of neutral narrations in narrative LGG_06 to make clear how their proportional distribution was calculated. This narrative has a total time of 39 seconds and 24 milliseconds (00:39:24). Here, the signer dedicated 15 seconds and eleven milliseconds to neutral narrations, thirteen seconds and five milliseconds (00:13:05) to the real scale perspective, two seconds and 38 milliseconds (00:02:38) to multiple perspectives, five seconds and 49 milliseconds (00:05:49) to simultaneous perspective, and four seconds and 47 milliseconds (00:04:47) to the reduced scale perspective. Thus, considering the total time of the narrative, narration styles were distributed proportionally in 33% of neutral narrations, 33% in the real scale perspective, 7% in multiple perspectives, 15% in simultaneous perspectives and 12% in the reduced scale perspective. The time told in the real scale was further divided into overt and partially overt constructed actions. In this narrative, the signer uses over overt CA for five seconds and thirteen milliseconds (00:05:13) and partially overt CA for seven seconds and 52 milliseconds (00:07:52), this corresponds respectively to 13% and 20% of the total time of the narrative.

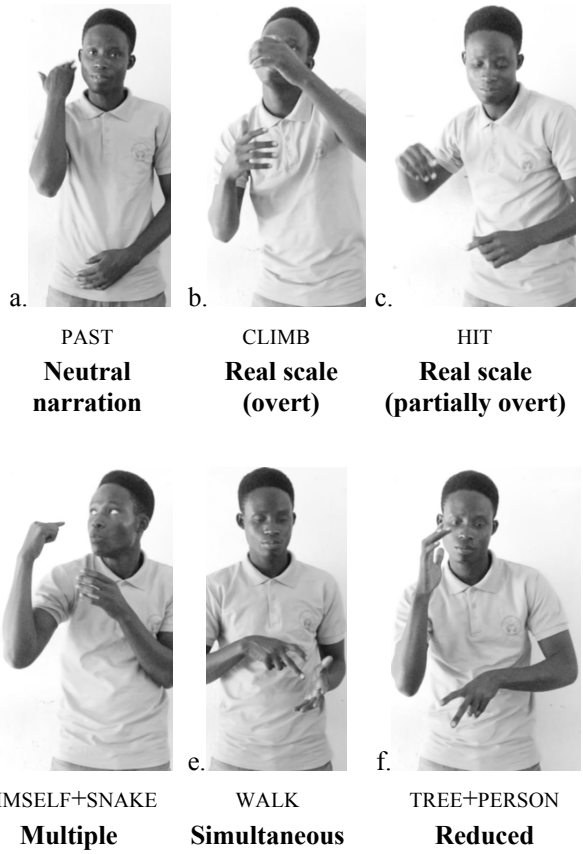
Table 27. Duration and proportional distribution of signing perspectives and neutral narrations in narrative LGG_06

Narrative LGG_06	Time	Proportion
Total time	00:39:30	100%
Real scale	00:13:05	**33%**
overt constructed action	00:05:13	13%
partially overt constructed action	00:07:52	20%
Multiple	00:02:38	**7%**
Simultaneous	00:05:49	**15%**
Reduced scale	00:04:47	**12%**
Neutral narration	00:13:05	33%

The examples in (52) from an LGG male signer illustrate each narration form. In (52a), the signer is in the narrator's role, with a neutral body position, looking directly at the audience and signing PAST to indicate when the narrated event occurred. In (52b), the signer is acting in overt CA as if climbing a tree. In (52c), he expresses a

partially overt CA by enacting the character looking at the snake while making the lexical sign for HIT. In (52d), the signer produces multiple perspectives by embodying the character looking at the snake while representing the snake with his right hand looking at him. In (52e), he is moving his head as if walking on a real scale while signing WALK on a reduced scale. Finally, in (52f), the signer explains the human character is walking by a tree.

(52) Examples of (a) neutral narration and signing perspective types: real scale in (b) overt CA and in (c) partially overt CA, (d) multiple, (e) simultaneous and (f) reduced scale in narrative LGG_06



After calculating the time in each perspective – and in neutral narrations – in each signer, and their proportions per narrative, I computed the average proportional durations per sign language, and, in LGG, also per gender.

Based on these methods, the summary results are presented next, followed by a descriptive analysis for each signing perspective. The descriptive analysis first details the real scale perspective concerning life-sized character enactments (§5.5.1); then multiple perspectives displaying more than one character at a time (§5.5.2); followed by simultaneous perspectives representing the same character in both scales (§5.5.3); and finally the reduced scale perspective involving the manipulation of model-sized entities in the signing space (§5.5.4). Within each one of them, a description is provided per language.

5.5 Descriptive analysis of signing perspectives

Having defined the methodological approach for this study, signing perspectives are now presented in terms of their proportional distribution per language. The involvement of articulators in distinguishing roles and the type of classifiers to refer to story elements will be detailed further when relevant to each perspective type in the following subsections.

The summary results in Table 28 show that signers of all three sign languages use the real scale perspective in personal experience narratives far more than the other perspective types. This conforms to my expectations based on previous research in sign languages, child language acquisition and gesture research about real scale as being foundational.

However, another hypothesis was not supported. I predicted that the reduced scale would take time to emerge, regardless of community size and interactions; however, signers of the oldest language, AdaSL, were not found to use any reduced scale, while one group of signers in the youngest language, LGG men, were the only group that were documented as using reduced scale. This may indicate that interaction patterns are more important than time depth (comparison with AdaSL) or community size (comparison with LGG women).

Table 28 relates with each proportion the actual number of narratives and the total times of all narratives per perspective – and neutral narrations – in each language and for the two genders in LGG. It is made clear how strikingly higher the proportion of neutral narration in LaSiBo signers is and how they are using these perspective strategies so much less. In contrast, there is a high variability in perspectives used by male LGG signers.

Table 28. Proportional distribution of signing perspective types in the three sign languages

Perspective	AdaSL			LaSiBo			LGG					
							men			women		
Real scale	**17**	**11:17:44**	**75%**	**10**	**03:11:42**	**41%**	**8**	**02:09:23**	**46%**	**6**	**02:18:31**	**50%**
overt CA	16	02:14:42	15%	10	01:59:46	26%	8	00:30:08	11%	4	00:30:45	11%
partially overt CA	17	09:03:02	60%	10	01:11:56	15%	8	01:39:15	35%	6	01:47:46	39%
Multiple	**9**	**00:22:16**	**2%**	**4**	**00:04:39**	**1%**	**6**	**00:22:10**	**8%**	**2**	**00:07:19**	**3%**
Simultaneous	-	-	-	-	-	-	**5**	**00:17:24**	**6%**	**2**	**00:03:29**	**1%**
Reduced scale	-	-	-	-	-	-	**6**	**00:32:00**	**11%**	-	-	-
Neutral narration	**15**	**03:27:55**	**23%**	**11**	**04:35:26**	**58%**	**7**	**01:24:50**	**30%**	**7**	**02:05:28**	**46%**
TOTALS	**17**	**15:07:55**	**100%**	**12**	**07:51:47**	**100 %**	**8**	**04:45:47**	**100 %**	**8**	**04:34:47**	**100 %**
	Narratives	Time	Proportion	Narrative	Time	Proportion	Narrative	Time	Proportion	Narrative	Time	Proportion

As expected, the analysis shows a difference between female and male LGG signers, especially in the use of other perspectives than the real scale, which is reflected in the Table above. This prompted me to go back and analyse the data in terms of differences by gender in AdaSL and LaSiBo, too; however, I found no differences of the sort in those two languages. For this reason, I report the findings as **four distinct populations**: AdaSL, LaSiBo, LGG men, and LGG women. Examples of each perspective type are provided in the following subsections.

Next, I focus first on the analysis of the real scale perspective, corresponding to life-sized constructed actions, which can be fully or partially overt, in the three sign languages.

5.5.1 Real scale perspective

The section above shows that all three sign languages have the real scale perspective. As the most intuitive type, signers are predicted to make use of life-sized constructed actions, which imply manipulating space on a real scale through character enactments. In this perspective, character embodiment can be expressed fully, with overt constructed actions (CA), or combined with side information given by the narrator, as partially overt (CA).

Regarding the real scale perspective, the emphasis of this study is on the character's role since the narrator part, which involves mainly the use of lexical signs and classifiers, has been discussed in Chapter 3, especially concerning the eye gaze directed at the audience. An exception is made in the reduced scale perspective (in §4.4.2.), where more has to be said about the narrator's role within a specific perspective type involving mostly model-sized classifiers. AdaSL is described first, followed by LaSiBo and then by LGG.

Real scale perspective in AdaSL narratives

In the AdaSL narratives about animal attacks, signers dedicated most of their storytelling time to the real scale perspective, expressed by life-sized character enactments, i.e., constructed actions, or CA (75%). These were mostly combined with narrations involving lexical signs and classifiers, designated in this study as partially overt constructed actions (60%). In contrast, in all AdaSL narratives collected for this study, little time was spent on full enactments, called here overt constructed actions (15%). The description of the findings begins with the latter and proceeds next to the possible combinations observed in the partially overt CA.

In the overt CA, signers typically enact characters with their whole bodies, expressing emotional states with their facial expressions, and directing their eye gaze as reliving past events. For instance, in (53), the AdaSL signer acts as if warding off wasps off her face and body with her hands, while her facial expression shows distress (Narrative ADA_05).

(53) Overt constructed action to express BODY-WARD-OFF(BEES) in AdaSL

During moments of overt CA, signers can also act as if manipulating some life-sized referent with their hands, with handling handshapes as shown in (54a–d). For instance, in (54a), while moving her shoulders to enact a character that limps and expresses

pain with her face, the signer acts as if holding someone with her left hand (Narrative ADA_11a). In (54b), the signer acts as if bringing someone from one place to another. He looks at the (invisible) victim (his father) whilst the hands grab him from one place to the other (Narrative ADA_13). Finally, in (54c), the signer acts as if throwing a stone at a snake. While the hand holds an invisible stone and throws it at the imaginary snake, she looks in that direction and expresses affliction through her facial expression (Narrative ADA_09).

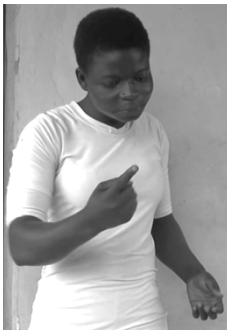
(54) Overt constructed actions with handling handshapes to express (a) LIMP+HOLD, (b) BRING (SOMEONE) and (c) THROW(STONE) in AdaSL

a.  b.  c. 

In partially overt constructed actions, representing the large majority of occurrences in AdaSL narratives, the body, including the eye gaze and facial expressions, enacts a character, while the hands produce lexical signs and classifiers. These combinations of real scale character embodiments with side narrations are illustrated next, first in combinations with lexical signs, in (54a–d) and then with classifiers (54a–b).

In (55a) the signer narrates that the character is looking for something while moving the body and directing the eye gaze accordingly as the character. The same is observed for the lexical signs WALK, in (55b), and SHOOT, in (55c). Finally, in (55d), only the eye gaze is in the character's role, expressing surprise. In this case, the lexical sign for SNAKE is combined with a [o] shaped mouth movement (see Chapter 7 for similar examples of such a mouth movement). I should note here that the lexicalised signs in (55a–b) are based on entity handshapes.

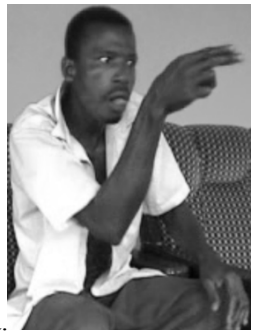
(55) Partially overt constructed actions with lexical signs to express (a) LOOKING-FOR, (b) WALK, (c) SHOOT and (d) SNAKE in AdaSL

a.  b. 

c.  d. 

In AdaSL, most classifiers used in combination with partially overt constructed actions refer to body parts, as shown in (56a–b). In (56a), the signer enacts himself as a snake by putting the tongue out while simultaneously using his hand to represent the snake's tongue (Narrative ADA_14). In another example, the signer enacts the snake with her facial expression while the arm and the fist represent the snake (56b) (Narrative ADA_09).

(56) Partially overt constructed actions with body part classifiers to express (a) TONGUE (SNAKE) and (b) HEAD(SNAKE) in AdaSL

a.  b. 

Importantly, these body part classifiers are life-sized, if they were model-sized these instances would be assigned to simultaneous perspectives, i.e., to the representation of the same character in both real and reduced scales.

Most narratives in AdaSL embody characters in a real scale perspective using life-sized constructed actions, which include handling handshapes. The large majority of the occurrences in this perspective combine real scale enactments with side narrations, especially by adding lexical signs, but also body part classifiers, in partially overt constructed actions. This indicates that signers in a community of about 30 deaf people using a very old sign language (see §1.4 for more details) have developed the necessary narrative skills to combine information by the narrator with the emotional intensity of character embodiments. Also, the fact that classifiers used in the real scale perspective are typically life-sized confirms an idiosyncratic preference in this language. The following subsection focuses on the real scale perspective in LaSiBo narratives.

Real scale perspective in LaSiBo narratives

After observing that signers in AdaSL use the real scale perspective combined with additional narrations most of the time in their narratives, I now turn to the analysis of this perspective in LaSiBo narratives. LaSiBo signers use preferably the real scale perspective (41% of the time) as do signers in AdaSL. However, contrasting with AdaSL, LaSiBo signers use more full character embodiments, i.e., overt constructed actions (26%), rather than combining them with additional information given by the narrator in partially overt constructed actions (15%).

Except for one signer who told her stories only in neutral narration, the remaining five LaSiBo signers produced more than in AdaSL the most intuitive type of character embodiment, in overt constructed actions, by involving the whole body and hands as part of a character. For instance, in (57a), the signer leans down and holds her leg and her facial expression shows pain as a reaction to a snake bite (Narrative LAS_01a). In (57b), the signer involves the whole body in his overt constructed action by moving his arms and legs. Similarly, the signer in (57c) jumps backwards to express fear.

(57) Overt constructed actions to express (a) LEG-PAIN, (b) WALK and (c) SCARED in LaSiBo

a.  b. 

c. 

While in the example above, the signer grabs her leg, it can also be the case where LaSiBo signers use handling handshapes. In (58a), the signer leans down to tie an invisible bandage on her leg where a snake had bitten her to prevent the poison from spreading (narrative LAS_06a). Also, in (58b), the signer picks up an imaginary stone, almost touching the ground, and throws it at an invisible snake (Narrative LAS_02b). In the last example, in (58c), the signer is holding a glass and preparing a medicine drink to protect him from snakes.

(58) Overt constructed actions with handling handshapes to express (a) LEG-TIE, (b) THROW (STONE) and (c) PUT-IN-GLASS in LaSiBo

a.  b. 

c. 

I observed that during these moments, LaSiBo signers often extend their enactments to a very large signing space, like leaning down, in (58a) or touching the ground, in (58b). These enactments are larger than the extent of the signing space in the AdaSL narratives. It has the effect of mapping even more closely real-life actions, like pantomimes.

Inversely to AdaSL, LaSiBo signers accompanied character enactments with lexical signs on only a few occasions. In the character role expressed by body movements and eye gaze, the signer in (59a) acts as if asking everyone for money while using the lexical sign for BEG. Similarly, the signer in (59b) acts as if looking for the whereabouts of the snake, while using the lexical sign LOOK-FOR and then, in (59c) as if cutting the snake.

(59) Partially overt constructed actions with lexical signs to express (a) BEG, (b) LOOK(SNAKE) and (c) CUT in LaSiBo

a.  b.  c. 

Recall that, in the village of Bouakako, only six deaf people use sign language for at most the last 50 years (see §1.5 for more details). Hence, with much fewer deaf signers and a much shorter language time depth, LaSiBo presents the reverse proportions in the forms of constructed actions to the ones in AdaSL. In LaSiBo narratives, signers produce more overt character embodiments than in AdaSL. In addition, the signing space used in the real scale perspective is larger than in AdaSL since it can involve the ground and moving the legs. Finally, in partially overt constructed actions, signers seem to combine character embodiments only with lexical signs. Contrasting with AdaSL which presented body part classifiers, no signs of the sort were found in such additional narrations in LaSiBo.

In the face of these distinct results in the two villages, how then is the real scale perspective in a school-based sign language? To understand this, I now look at LGG.

Real scale perspective in LGG narratives

Having seen how the real scale perspective is expressed in AdaSL and LaSiBo, I now focus on the 20-year-old macro-community LGG. Here, I present the results separately per gender since, unlike the deaf people in the villages, the differences between male and female LGG signers were more significant.

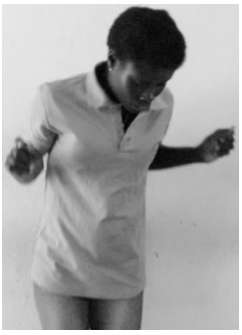
In the same way as AdaSL and LaSiBo, the real scale was the most used perspective in LGG narratives, quite evenly in both men (46%) and women (50%), except for two women who told their narratives solely in neutral narration. This means that LGG signers have a similar proportion of real scale perspectives to LaSiBo (41%).

However, as AdaSL (with respectively 60% and 15%), LGG presents more partially overt construction actions (35% in men and 39% in women) than overt ones (11% in

the two genders). Although all men expressed both overt and partially overt constructed actions, this was not the case with women. Aside from the two women that told their narratives only with neutral narrations, two others did not produce overt embodiments at all, only partially overt ones. This is to say that in real scale character embodiments, LGG signers preferably combined their character enactments with additional information. Curiously, they present fewer occurrences of overt constructed actions when compared with the other groups. I recall that, in opposition, LaSiBo signers used such a form of full character embodiments the most in comparison to the other languages.

Although in a smaller proportion, both genders use life-sized character enactments, in overt constructed actions, by involving the whole body and the hands to directly represent actions. In (60a), the signer acts as if warding off an invisible snake that had fallen from a tree over him, while his facial and bodily expressions show fear (Narrative LGG_04). In (60b), the signer also expresses fear when facing the snake but she reacts by slightly jumping backwards.

(60) Overt constructed actions to express (a) WARD-OFF and (b) SCARED in LGG

a.   b. 

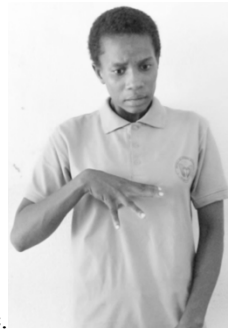
In such full embodiments, signers can also perform actions while holding something. For instance, the signer in (61a) is acting as if throwing rocks at a snake on the ground (Narrative LGG_03). Also, in (61b), the signer holds a big imaginary snake and lifts it, showing an effort by puffing her cheeks (Narrative LGG_11).

(61) Overt constructed actions with handling handshapes to express (a) THROW(STONE) and (b) HOLD(SNAKE) in LGG

a.  b. 

Apart from these, LGG signers combine, in a larger proportion, character embodiments with additional information. In these partially overt construction actions, LGG signers use lexical signs, as in AdaSL and LaSiBo. To illustrate this, the signer in (62a) embodies the character holding a bag on his shoulder and spotting a snake on the ground while signing LOOK, which is also directed downwards. In (62b), he signs SCREAM while calling out for help in distress. In (62c), the signer embodies a character looking at a snake in the ground and shows fear with her facial expression as she signs SCARED. This is similar to the example in (62d), but here she signs HIT instead.

(62) Partially overt constructed actions with lexical signs to express (a) SEE, (b) SCREAM, (c) SCARED and (d) HIT in LGG.

a.  b.  c. 

d. 

Apart from lexical signs, men and women in LGG also add entity classifiers to their character enactments, like, in (63a), where the signer acts as if walking with a hoe – represented by his arm and index finger in a hook handshape – on his shoulder. In (63b) the signer spills water – represented by her wide open hands – on the snake.

(63) Partially constructed actions with entity classifiers representing objects (a) AXE and (b) WATER in LGG.

a.  b. 

Recall that LGG has been used for 20 years in the city capital of Guinea-Bissau where there is a growing deaf community, with approximately 500 deaf people. Thus, similarities with AdaSL indicate that not only language age but community size seems to play an important role in developing narrative skills. As was observed in AdaSL, LGG signers, in both genders, preferred using the real scale perspective, combining often constructed actions with lexical signs. In sum, the fact that LGG is used by a macro-community meeting daily on school premises and around the city's neighbourhoods (see §1.6 for more details), may justify the differences concerning LaSiBo found in this perspective.

After wrapping up the real scale perspective analysis in the three languages, I now move on to the following perspective, involving multiple characters at the same time, which also occurred in the three sign languages though in a very small proportion.

5.5.2 Multiple perspectives

The present subsection analyses multiple perspectives, where the signer enacts more than one character at the same time. Signers can embody one character while their hand represents another. Signers of all three sign languages have produced it. The analysis begins with AdaSL narratives, followed by LaSiBo's and then by LGG's.

Multiple perspectives in AdaSL narratives

Besides the real scale perspective, AdaSL signers also use multiple perspectives, even if only 2% of the time in their narratives (in 9 of 17 narratives). I have to note that such a low percentage corresponds to several quick moments where the main character interacts with an animal or with a secondary character. It is also important to remember, as shown in Study 1, that AdaSL narratives are overall longer than those in the other sign languages.

Most instances in multiple perspectives are about animal attacks, such as snakes, wasps or lions. Here, signers typically enact the victims of the attacks, while their hand represents the animal striking. For instance, signers can express two characters simultaneously with the claw handshape standing for the mouth of a big snake biting on the character's leg, as shown in (64a–c), or of a lion biting on the character's head, in (64d).

(64) Multiple perspectives involving character embodiment and claw handshapes representing bites with body contact by snakes (a, b, c) and a lion (d) in AdaSL

a.  b. 

c.  d. 

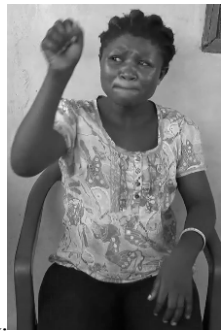
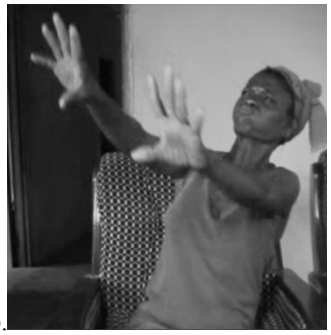
In other cases, while signers express the victim's distress, their hands can represent, at the same time, the animal sting. Again, the handshape can stand for small snakes stinging the victim's leg, as shown in (65a–b) or a wasp stinging the character's face, in (65c).

(65) Multiple perspectives involving character embodiment and handshapes representing stings with body contact by snakes (a–b) and wasps (c) in AdaSL

a.  b.  c. 

AdaSL signers, while enacting the victim, also use the hand to represent animals but without contacting the body as in the previous examples. In (66a), the hand stands for a big snake with its head held high as the victim looks at it with fear. In (66b), the hands act for wasps flying as the signer's facial expression combines the two characters: the puffed cheeks intensify the number of wasps, while she looks up at the swarm.

(66) Multiple perspectives involving character embodiment and handshapes representing a snake (a) and wasps (b) approaching without body contact in AdaSL

a.  b. 

Besides these examples of interactions with animals, there are other involving interactions with people. In (67), she is limping in pain while the hand acts as a secondary character helping out.

(67) Multiple perspectives involving character embodiment and a handling handshape representing another human character with body contact in AdaSL

In sum, although with an overall minimal percentage, multiple perspectives are used consistently across AdaSL signers to show interactions between the main character and the animal encountered or some secondary character at the same time. After presenting the analysis of the multiple perspectives in AdaSL narratives, I now move on to LaSiBo.

Multiple perspectives in LaSiBo narratives

Contrasting with the previous subsection where multiple perspectives in AdaSL narratives were illustrated with several examples, there are much fewer occurrences in LaSiBo (1%). They correspond to little examples because narratives in LaSiBo are overall much shorter than AdaSL's. Moreover, only four of the 12 narratives presented multiple perspectives. I only observed situations where the hand represents the snake biting the leg of the victim, as shown in (68a–d).

(68) Multiple perspectives involving character embodiment and claw handshapes representing snake bites with body contact in LaSiBo

a.  b. 

c.  d. 

These examples found in the twelve LaSiBo narratives express a very tiny proportion of the use of multiple perspectives. This may indicate the underdevelopment of such a device in LaSiBo. Next, I turn to the analysis of this perspective type in LGG.

Multiple perspectives in LGG narratives

In the previous subsections, it was observed that AdaSL and LaSiBo have a very small percentage of multiple perspectives, although AdaSL narratives, which are longer, present more occurrences than the much shorter ones in LaSiBo. How is it then in LGG? The examples found in the young school-based sign language correspond to slightly higher proportions in both genders (8% in men and 3% in women). Although all but two men produced multiple perspectives in their narratives, only two women expressed them. Nonetheless, they show a greater variety in the expression of multiple perspectives.

All LGG narratives are about snake attacks, so the interactions observed in multiple perspectives typically involve snakes. As in the two other sign languages, there are instances in LGG involving body contact between the character and the snake. For instance, in (69a), the signer is bitten on her leg by a snake which is represented by her hand. In (69b), the signer is sleeping under a tree when a snake falls over him. While signing that he was sleeping with the left hand, the right hand represents the snake falling on him, as he expresses his surprise with his face.

(69) Multiple perspectives involving character embodiment and handshapes representing snakes to express BITE(LEG) (a) and [SLEEP] FALL(SNAKE)-ON-ME (b) with body contact in LGG

a.  b. 

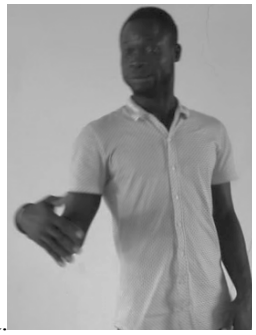
Interestingly, to convey a more dramatic effect, LGG signers also do the opposite of the previous examples by embodying the snake being handled by the human character(s). In (69a), the signer acts as if he was the snake being struck by rocks that are being thrown by the human character represented by the hands. Similarly, in (69b) she also embodies the snake but as being hanged in a hook – represented by the left hand – while held by the human character with the right hand.

(70) Multiple perspectives involving snake embodiment and handshapes representing the human character throwing rocks (a) and holding the snake (b) with body contact in LGG

a.  b. 

Other moments refer to character interactions without body contact. In (71a), the signer acts as if walking while the right hand represents the snake on the ground passing in front of him. When he sees it, he leans back. Similarly, in (71b), after being struck, the snake – represented by the signer's right hand – jumps in the air, while the character looks at it expressing surprise.

(71) Multiple perspectives involving character embodiment and handshapes representing the snake passing in front (a) and over the signer (b) without body contact in LGG

a.  b. 

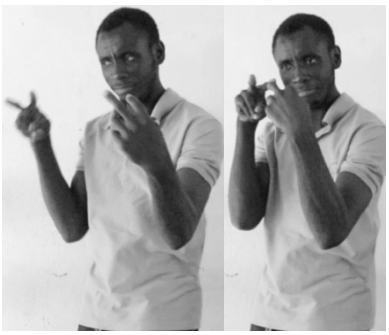
LGG male signers only typically encounter the snake on top of a tree. Here, while embodying the character grabbing the trunk or a branch, the other hand represents the snake, as shown in (72a–c).

(72) Multiple perspectives involving character embodiment holding on to the tree and handshapes representing the snake in front of them (a–c) without body contact in LGG

a.  b.  c. 

In a final example, the signer explains that he and the snake were looking at each other by using the body part handshapes representing the eyes in each, as shown in (73).

(73) Multiple perspectives involving character embodiment with handshapes representing the eyes of both the snake and the human character without body contact in LGG



Having described the use of multiple perspectives, it is possible to conclude that LGG signers present a larger variety of forms when compared to the other two sign languages, especially the men with a bigger proportion in the use of this perspective.

This may indicate that the frequency of social interactions may have developed this device.

I now move to the next subsection focusing on simultaneous perspectives, i.e., the representation of the same character simultaneously in real and reduced scales, which occurs only in LGG.

5.5.3 Simultaneous perspectives

So far, it has been observed that all three sign languages have a real scale and multiple perspectives, the first one in a much bigger proportion than the second. Simultaneous perspectives representing the same character occur only in LGG signers. In LGG, five deaf men and two deaf women produced real and reduced perspectives simultaneously for the same character, thus, with a more expressive percentage in men than in women (6% and 1%, respectively).

The most used model-sized classifier was the inverted V handshape representing a reduced scale body part, the legs, as shown in (74a–c). Although it is a very common classifier in Western sign languages, it does not occur in either of the two village sign languages in this study. The WALK sign is the only one female LGG signers use in simultaneous perspective.

(74) Simultaneous perspectives involving character embodiment with the body part handshape for WALK (a–b) in LGG

a.  b.  c. 

In the examples below, while signing WALK in reduced scale, the left hand acts as if holding a bowl on his head, in (75a), or it stands for an axe being carried on the character's shoulder as an entity classifier, in (75b).

(75) Simultaneous perspectives involving character embodiment with the body part handshape for WALK and the other hand with the handling handshape for BASKET-ON-HEAD (a) and the entity classifier for HOE-ON-SHOULDER (b) in LGG

a.  b. 

Besides the classifier for one person walking, LGG signers also produce a classifier for many people walking. In (76a), the signer tells about the arrival of several hearing people coming from different directions arriving together to help out. While using the reduced scale classifier, the signer leans back and forward to simulate the character's reaction to the crowd's arrival. In (76b), the female signer explains that she was going with three friends to fetch water from a well. When she embodies the character by moving her head and shoulders in real scale, she produces a reduced scale classifier for several legs walking.

(76) Simultaneous perspectives involving character embodiment with the classifier for CROWD (a) and for MANY-PEOPLE-WALK(b) in LGG

a. 

b. 

As seen above, LGG signers did simultaneous perspectives in different ways, especially involving the classifier for WALK while enacting a character in real scale. This perspective type and the WALK classifier were observed only in LGG, in both men and women, not in the other two village sign languages. This confirms the lack of model-sized classifiers in AdaSL demonstrated in the literature and its absence in LaSiBo, probably due to its sociolinguistic characteristics.

The following subsection focuses on the last perspective type, the reduced scale perspectives, concerning precisely the use of model-sized classifiers, which again occurs only in LGG, and to be more exact, are only produced by men.

5.5.4 Reduced scale perspective

The previous subsections focused on the perspectives involving real scale constructed actions and combinations therein with lexical signs and classifiers. I recall that the real scale perspective is preferred by signers, in general, and AdaSL and LGG signers readily add classifiers. However, so far, only LGG signers, both men and women, presented classifiers on a reduced scale, namely in simultaneous perspectives. Now, the reduced scale perspective was found only in the narratives by male LGG signers (11%).

The reduced scale perspective occurred in six of the eight narratives by male LGG signers. In these cases, signers describe the referents' location in the signing space. In Chapter 3, on the study of narrative structure, it was observed that signers started by telling the when, where and who elements of the narrative in the first component, the orientation. Here, signers typically act as narrators. In addition, to describe exact locations, male LGG signers resort to the reduced scale perspective, usually making use of model-sized lexical signs and classifiers.

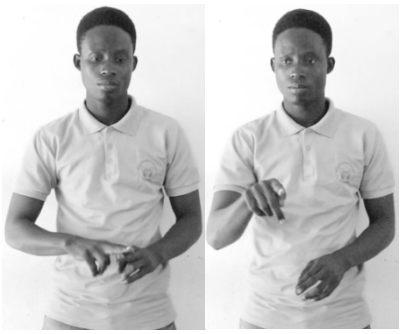
For instance, the signer in (77) places in the signing space the reduced scale lexical signs STAY and TREE to explain that he was by the tree (Narrative LGG_04).

(77) Reduced scale perspective with lexical signs in LGG

STAY TREE
'I was by the tree'

Another strategy observed in these LGG narratives is pointing within the model-sized setup to the referents' locations. In (78), the signer explains what his location was in relation to the rest of the group, by signing STAY HERE.

(78) Reduced scale perspective with pointing signs in LGG



STAY HERE
'I was staying here'

This same signer goes on to say that people spread out walking by the cashew trees, in (79a). Similarly, in (79b), another signer tells how he was passing by a tree (Narrative LGG_08).

(79) Reduced scale perspective with two model-sized classifiers in LGG

a.  

PEOPLE AROUND WALK-BY-TREE
'Each one went to a different tree.'

b. 

WALK-BY-TREE
'I was here passing by a tree.'

Finally, in (80), the signer tells about the character running away from the snake and climbing a tree to hide. Here, although the right arm represents a tree, the index and middle fingers depict someone's legs, as if sitting on the tree top. Thus, interestingly, he modifies the sign for TREE to add a human figure on top of it by turning the handshape of the tree foliage into a two-legged human classifier (Narrative LGG_01). Contrasting with the remaining occurrences of reduced scale, this one happens at the climax (see Chapter 3 for more details) rather than at the beginning, like the examples above.

(80) Reduced scale perspective with one model-sized classifier to represent two referents in LGG

ON-TOP-OF-TREE
'I hid on top of a tree'

To conclude, in addition to the other three perspectives, personal experience narratives told by deaf men in LGG present the reduced scale perspective as well, even if just in a small percentage within the narratives. This perspective was produced only by male LGG signers usually in the beginning to set up the story elements. This is curious since LGG is the youngest of the three sign languages, differing only in the size of the community, which is much larger. The fact that men produced and women did not implies that the frequency of social interactions may play a crucial role in the development of such perspective.

The analysis of the reduced scale perspective was the last one presented here in this study. The following section presents a synthesis of the results in all four perspectives in the three languages, recalling that AdaSL and LaSiBo show only the real scale and multiple perspectives.

5.6 Synthesis of the results

All three sign languages reveal that the real scale perspective is used much more often than the other perspectives. All three languages also contain multiple perspectives involving the representation of more than one character at the same time but in a much lower proportion. However, only LGG signers produced model-sized signs both in the simultaneous representation of the same character in two scales and the reduced scale perspective.

To have a clear picture of the actual use of the four perspectives within the whole of the narratives, it is crucial to look at them not only in relation to each other but also to the time spent by the signers in neutral narrations. Figure 47 shows that AdaSL signers produced far more real scale perspectives than those in the other two languages. It also makes clear that LaSiBo narratives present the largest proportion of overt constructed actions. Importantly, it brings to light the prominence of neutral narrations, mostly in LaSiBo signers (58%) and female LGG signers (46%) showing that least experienced language groups rely the most on such a narration type.

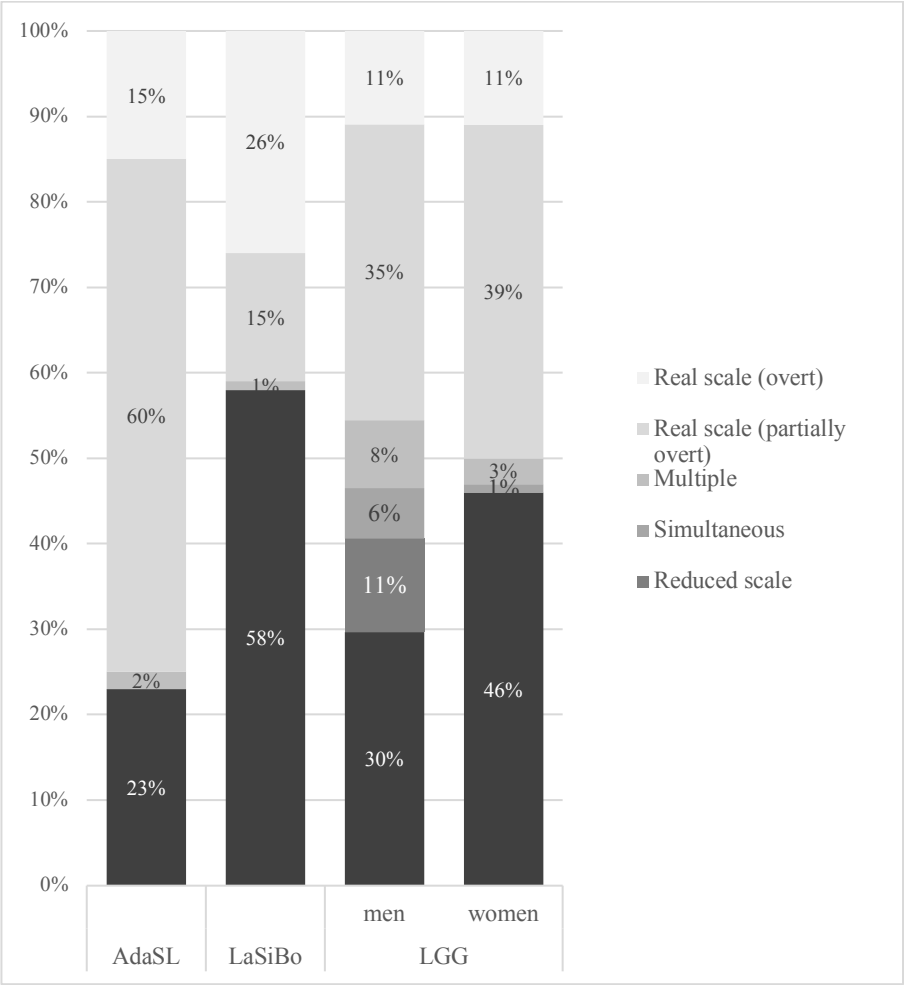


Figure 47. Proportion of the four perspectives and neutral narrations in the four groups: AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG per gender

When looking at the real scale perspective individually in each of the three sign languages, it becomes evident that this is the preferred perspective by all signers. What is striking in this perspective is that LaSiBo signers favour overt constructed actions, within a typically larger signing space, contrasting with the other groups who use more partially overt constructed actions instead. Moreover, while all signers combine their character embodiments with lexical signs, differences surface when it comes to classifiers. Body part classifiers were also typically added in this perspective by AdaSL signers and entity ones by LGG's, unlike LaSiBo signers who do not tend to

use classifiers in this form of combined embodiments. This clearly shows a tendency from life-sized to model-sized representations that may be dependent on socialisation since it is observed in male LGG signers and not in AdaSL.

The analysis of this first perspective as the most used in the three languages draws attention to individual preferences in each language, namely of partially overt constructed actions in AdaSL and overt ones in LaSiBo. AdaSL uses overwhelmingly partially overt constructed actions as an alternative enhancing device to neutral narrations, by using life-sized classifiers especially to represent animal body parts. Such a distinction demonstrates that combining neutral narrations with a straightforward embodiment develops over the practice of storytelling that exists in the deaf group of Adamorobe, but apparently not with the one in Bouakako.

In LGG, even if, at first sight, there are no significant differences in the real scale perspective between genders, the fact that women use much time in their narratives with neutral narrations makes them more similar to LaSiBo. The biggest difference between men and women in LGG is that, instead of using neutral narrations as women do, men diversify the use of perspectives, expressing all four of them, especially those involving model-sized referents. The fact that men use all four perspectives is again proof that the acquisition of narrative skills is motivated by intensive socialisation practices.

Although the proportion of multiple perspectives is small in the narratives of all three sign languages, male LGG signers show a relatively higher percentage. Multiple perspectives most commonly expressed the embodied characters being attacked by animals represented by the signers' hands, which implied contact between hand and body. LaSiBo had fewer occurrences, and male LGG signers most of them.

AdaSL and LGG signers expressed multiple perspectives in other ways besides having their hands representing animal bites. Their hands may also represent an animal's body part without any physical contact with the signer. In addition, LGG signers, both men and women, embodied the snakes being handled by the human characters. Finally, male LGG signers alone produced multiple perspectives representing a different character in each hand.

In the remaining two perspectives, both men and women express simultaneous perspectives in LGG, but only men produce the reduced scale one. Simultaneous representations of the same character with a life-sized enactment are usually combined in LGG with the two-legged handshape for WALK. Additionally, while signing WALK men may produce a classifier with the other hand as part of the constructed action. Similarly, when displaying model-sized elements within the signing space, men place lexical signs on specific locations or point at them or use classifiers, including with the two hands.

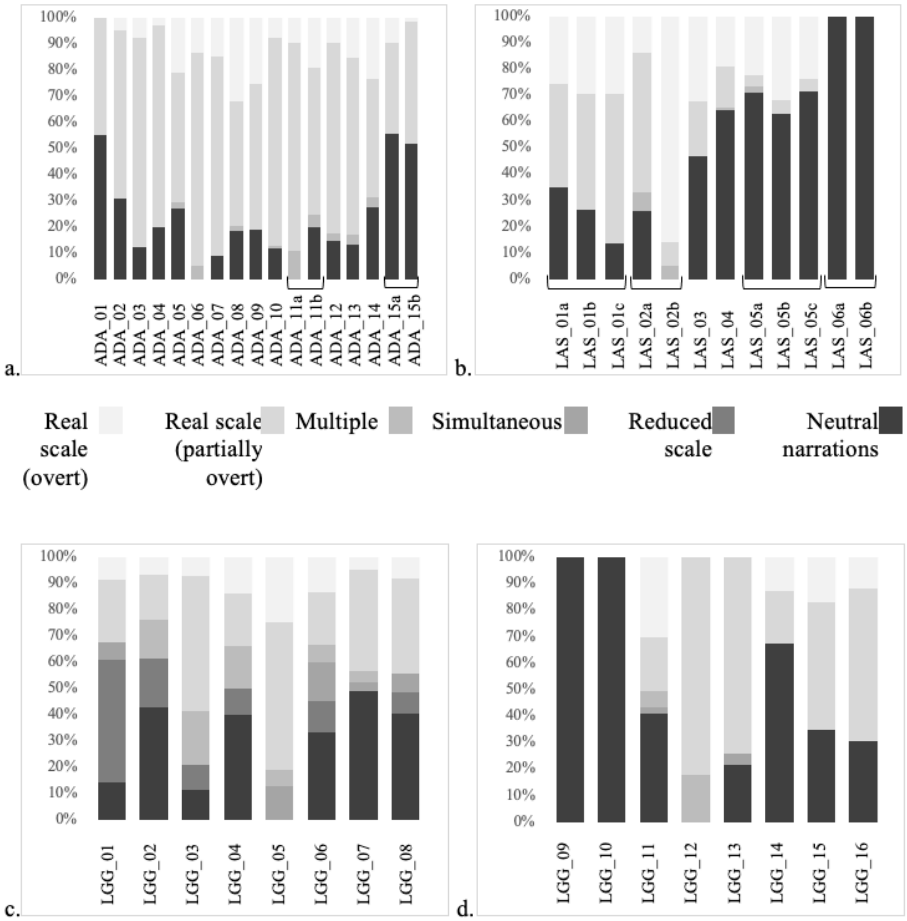


Figure 48. Proportion of the four perspectives and neutral narrations in each of the four groups, with square brackets indicating the same signers: (a) AdaSL, (b) LaSiBo, (c) male LGG, (d) female LGG signers

Looking first at the graphic shape of AdaSL narratives as a whole, in Figure 45a, it becomes evident that AdaSL signers are quite consistent in using, in general, more partially overt constructed actions in the real scale perspective and less neutral narrations.

Figure 45c shows that four of six LaSiBo signers produce their narratives mostly in neutral narrations and also with more overt than partially overt constructed actions (LAS#03–#06). One of these signers, LAS#06 tlls her two narratives only neutrally, i.e., without expressing any constructed actions. Still, this deaf woman corresponds to the one married to the hearing man fluent in LaSiBo and friends with the other deaf

woman in the village and the deaf man who is the best friend of her husband. In contrast, narrative LAS_02a relies mainly on partially overt CA. This narrative and the three ones produced by LAS#01 bear a bigger resemblance to the narratives in AdaSL. However, the only factor that seems to link these two signers is the fact that they are the younger siblings of older deaf brothers.

In LGG narratives told by deaf men, the greater consistency that becomes evident in Figure 45c is that they produce, besides the perspectives involving constructed actions, the ones implying the use of reduced scale classifiers. Of the eight narratives, five (LGG#02, #04, #06–#08) show a higher proportion of neutral narrations balanced in the remaining of their narratives with a diversity of perspective uses. This is the most striking aspect distinguishing narratives told by male LGG signers from those told in the other language groups. Such diversity corroborates the importance of socialisation to develop narrative skills. In other words, a multitude of interaction partners and frequent opportunities to watch stories being told and to experience storytelling will polish the ability to tell compelling narratives.

As shown in 45d, LGG narratives told by deaf women display higher variability between each other when compared to the other groups, probably reflecting different socialisation habits. Worth highlighting is LGG_11 as the narrative that resembles most of the ones produced by men. Of all the female signers, LGG#11 expresses a higher variety of perspectives, namely all but the reduced scale. It also corresponds to the second longer one produced by women. To understand LGG_11 being more similar to narratives by deaf men may be justified by the possibility that this female signer in particular socialises more than their peers outside of school.

All in all, when looking at the results for developmental patterns in narrative devices it seems that younger languages rely more on neutral narrations – when comparing LaSiBo and LGG to AdaSL. Constructed actions would gradually gain space within the narratives as it is the most prominent perspective in all groups. However, the combination of real scale enactments with narrations would probably require time to refine, as AdaSL signers use partially overt constructed actions in a much larger proportion. Lastly, the diversification of perspectives may be stimulated by interaction patterns, namely by a greater variety of partners and frequency of exchanges, as made clear in narratives produced by men in LGG.

5.7 Discussion

This study confirms the real scale as the most ready-to-use perspective, as observed in non-signing gesturers or children acquiring language (e.g., McNeill 1992). Life-sized enactments are also the first representative device to appear in deaf children when beginning to use sign language (e.g., Lillo-Martin & Quadros 2011),

homesigners (e.g., Morford & Kegl 2000) and emerging sign languages (e.g., Stamp & Sandler 2021). This seems to justify the larger expression of overt constructed actions in LaSiBo, as a young family sign language, which was also observed in KQSL, used by 100 deaf people.

The appearance of classifiers seems to require time since they only appear later on in the development of sign language in deaf children (c.f., Slobin 2003) and in the emergence of sign language (c.f., Pyers & Senghas 2007 for the Idioma de Señas de Nicaragua). Additionally, the influence of signed interactions has been proven to stimulate their use in homesigners in contact with other deaf people (c.f., Morford & Kegl 2000). However, the present study demonstrates that social interactions rather than time seem to be crucial to the emergence of classifiers, due to their greater expression in LGG narratives produced by men than in the much older AdaSL.

In what concerns the use of entity classifiers in AdaSL it is important to clarify that they occur often to represent life-sized referents, but no model-sized handshapes were observed in the narratives collected for this study. This confirms previous findings by Nyst (2007) of what seems to be a linguistic particularity of this language. In contrast to AdaSL, signers of Kata Kolok, which is also a very old language used by a deaf community of similar size, use consistently and frequently reduced scale classifiers. In the end, languages might just differ in a typological way when it comes to classifiers, as suggested by Morgan (2020, 66) about the lack of a reduced scale classifier system.

What about multiple perspectives? The interaction between two characters in multiple perspectives is easily produced by representing someone else's hand with our hand contacting our body, like representing being punched in the face (Dudis 2004). Even non-signers use multiple perspectives with gestures (Dudis 2014). Thus, signers of all three sign languages studied here were able to express the act of being bitten by an animal in this way, with the hand representing the animal's mouth. However, when this interaction occurred without body contact, usually involving looking at the entity represented by the hand (Dudis 2004), both AdaSL and LGG signers expressed it but not LaSiBo signers. I should note here that all classifiers observed in this perspective were life-sized. It is, then, safe to assume that higher use of multiple perspectives in LGG, especially in men, may be influenced by the size of the deaf community. This study presents similar results to the ones obtained by the Israeli team, where the three sign languages (two in villages, ABSL and KQSL, and the national ISL) with similar time depths show that the community size is crucial for the development of the sign language. This has been demonstrated by the fact that the three sign languages of Israel, with approximate time depths, express it the more frequently the greater number of signers who use it (c.f., Stamp & Sandler 2021).

Interestingly, the partial or full personification of an animal – the device of anthropomorphism common in deaf literature (e.g. Sutton-Spence 2021) – was observed only in AdaSL and LGG, suggesting that it is a more elaborated practice in storytelling. This is also indicated by the expressive use of the reduced scale perspective by male LGG signers.

To conclude, this study answers the research question by making clear the extent to which the signers of the three sign languages produce signing perspectives to enhance their narratives. Here, the hypothesis that signers use preferably the real scale perspective is confirmed. However, against what was expected, the reduced scale appeared only in the youngest of the three sign languages, LGG, revealing that, more than age, the community is crucial to this aspect. The variability in perspectives used by male LGG signers indicates more enhanced narrative skills. This contrasts with the high proportion of neutral narration in LaSiBo narratives. Also, the fact that female LGG signers use multiple and simultaneous perspectives but not the reduced scale perspective demonstrates that they do not completely let go of embodiment. Such a leap forward would take something additional in linguistic structure and conventional form to accomplish, like more frequent socialisation. Finally, by being present in the three sign languages, including LaSiBo, the use of multiple perspectives proves that life-sized representations of characters precede the scalar reduction of referents. In the end, it was also confirmed that AdaSL signers, at least in these narratives, do not use the reduced scale. For not being a time-dependent feature, as it occurs in LGG, this analysis supports the idea that the lack of a classifier system is typological.

In the end, the comparison between micro and macro community sign languages points to the importance of the frequency of social interactions in developing narrative devices. At the same time, the language time depth also has an important influence on that development. All aspects considered the frequency of interactions between deaf peers brings to light differences between the performances of deaf men and women in the school-based sign language of Guinea-Bissau. Such a difference brings the narration style of female LGG signers closer to LaSiBo signers. Again, the critical differentiating factor, here, resides in the interaction practices that are shown to be crucial for that development.

5.8 Conclusion

It is crucial to keep in mind the distinct sociolinguistic backgrounds of the sign languages in this study when comparing them. Despite being used in West African villages, AdaSL has emerged for several generations, while LaSiBo is still in its first generation. LGG is the youngest of the three and, in contrast, is used by a large deaf community (see Chapter 1 for more details).

The results concerning the four perspectives in the three sign languages show that all three sign languages favour the real scale over the other perspectives. Other than the real scale, AdaSL and LaSiBo narratives present only multiple perspectives, involving the interaction between the embodied character and a hand playing another element. Apart from a bigger proportion of the real scale, male LGG signers use the remaining three perspectives quite evenly. When playing characters on a real scale, signers perform their actions overtly with their whole bodies or in combination with lexical signs or classifiers. LaSiBo presents a higher proportion of overt constructed actions and very few classifiers. AdaSL and LGG signers do use classifiers but of different kinds. AdaSL presents more body part classifiers while LGG favours entity classifiers, including model-sized ones.

The fact that the older sign language, AdaSL, uses overwhelmingly partially overt constructed actions may indicate that signers have refined over time the need to narrate with the will to turn their stories more compelling. On the contrary, LaSiBo narratives are told mostly as neutral narrations, which is also the case in narratives told by deaf women in LGG. The fact that they interact less than men in LGG may pattern their narratives in the same way. This seems to indicate that less intense habits of socialisation with deaf peers due to a short language time depth and few interactive partners may slow down the development of such enhancing narrative devices. The significant differences between male and female LGG signers indicate that the frequency and variability of communicative interactions may be crucial to developing narrative devices, such as the simultaneous and reduced scale perspectives.

This chapter concludes the second study. The next one presents the third study about narrative devices which are also part of the evaluation component proposed by Labov (1972), namely about constructed dialogues.