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NOTICE

Title: Mexican Sign Language Grammar.

Language: Mexican Sign Language

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Description: Computer printout; a 52-page descriptive grammar; includes examples with capital letter English glosses; also includes pages 2 through 47 of a copy bearing numerous annotations.

AVISO

Mexican Sign Language Grammar
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Contents

1.   Introduction

Mexican Sign Language is the primary language of the majority of the Deaf in Mexico. It is a relative of American Sign Language since both languages are descendants of French Sign Language. Although a number of grammatical descriptions of American Sign Language have been written, up until now no grammatical description of Mexican Sign Language has been available.

This work is intended to remedy that situation. It is a descriptive grammar. No attempt has been made to deal with any issues of linguistic theory. The terminology used has been pretheoretical as much as possible.

The way in which the examples are presented is intended to be consistent with much of the current work in signed language linguistics. Since no orthography for signed languages has gained wide acceptance and recognition, the examples are transcribed with capital letter English glosses. Normally one English word in the capital letter gloss corresponds to one sign. If two English words correspond to one sign, they are separated by dashes. Thus the following example consists of three signs rather than four:

(1) FELIPE INDEX$_2$ CARE-ABOUT.

   "Felipe cares about you."

Subscript numbers and letters are used to indicate agreement morphology. These subscripts are placed at the end of the gloss in most cases. The fact that a particular subscript is located at the end of a gloss says nothing about the effect of the agreement morphology on the articulation of the sign; most morphology in Mexican Sign Language is nonconcatenative and it is simply necessary to have some kind of convention for the placement of the subscript. If a verb shows agreement with two arguments, the subscripted number or letter for object agreement is placed at the end of the gloss, and the subscript for subject agreement is placed at the beginning. Again, this is not intended to imply concatenative morphology. It is simply a convention borrowed from much of the literature on American Sign Language.

(2) FELIPE $_x$GIVE$_1$ PEN.

   "Felipe gave me a pen."

Fingerspelled words are indicated by placing a dash between each of the letters.

(3) INDEX$_y$ NAME C-O-N-S-T-A-N-T-I-N-O.

   "He's named Constantino."

In compounds or in any word where there is concatenative morphology, the concatenated elements are separated by a plus.

(4) POSS$_2$ BROTHER+FEMININE SHORT.

   "Your sister is short."

Nonmanual features such as facial expressions are indicated with a one or two letter code and a dotted line over the capital letter glosses, indicating the duration of the nonmanual feature. For example, c-------- indicates the nonmanual features associated with commands and requests.

```
      c---
(5) SIT.
      "Sit down!"
```

Other conventions for indicating nonmanual features followed in this paper include n------ for the nonmanual features associated with negation, q------ for those associated with most questions, cq----- for those associated with certain kinds of content questions, and if--- for those associated with conditional constructions.

In most cases the English glosses will indicate fairly unambiguously which sign is intended, since there will usually not be more than one possibility. When there is more than one sign that might correspond to a particular English gloss, it will usually not be crucial which one the reader imagines to be intended. However, in a few cases the choice of how to gloss a sign was not easy to make, and it may be helpful to note that the sign glossed BE-HOME is the sign used for the Spanish verb *estar* "to be" in signed Spanish, and that the sign glossed THERE-IS is the sign used for the Spanish verb *hay* "there is, there are" in signed Spanish. Also, the sign which is cognate with ASL "no" is glossed NOT, and the sign glossed NO is the Mexican gesture of shaking the upward pointed index finger from side to side with the palm forward.

Frequent reference will be made to "signed Spanish". This term is used for any signing heavily influenced by Spanish, and particularly the variety of signing most typical of people who knew Spanish before they learned to sign, e.g. most hearing sign language interpreters and teachers, as well as many of the Deaf who were educated orally and did not learn to sign until they reached adolescence or adulthood. "Mexican Sign Language" will be used to refer to signing which is more typical of the native signers whose grammar is not nearly so influenced by Spanish. There is of course a continuum between prototypical signed Spanish and prototypical Mexican Sign Language. Many signers can code-switch, using more Spanish-influenced grammar when signing with some people, and using more "pure" Mexican Sign Language grammar when signing with other people. Of course, no language is ever truly "pure" when those who use it have had regular contact with any other language. It is doubtful whether very many people's signing in Mexico could be said to be totally free from Spanish influence, just as it is doubtful whether any of the Deaf follow Spanish grammar in every respect while conversing with other Deaf.

At any rate, my primary concern in this paper is to describe a variety of signing that has relatively little Spanish influence, since this is what has not yet been described in the literature. Plenty of Spanish grammars exist for those who want to know about Spanish word order.

I have relied mostly upon the intuitions of one native signer. The advantage of this approach is that I was given precise, consistent grammaticality judgements which were obviously not heavily influenced by Spanish grammar. The biggest disadvantage of this approach is that the resulting grammatical description does not fully take into account the enormous variation in grammaticality judgements that surely exists in Mexican Sign Language and in any language. Occasionally in writing this paper I was able to make reference to grammaticality judgements that varied from those of the native signer I worked with most, but I did this sparingly and with trepidation.

2. Morphology

2.1 Verbal agreement morphology

Verbal agreement morphology in Mexican Sign Language is quite distinct from verbal agreement morphology in Spanish. As is normal for signed languages, Mexican Sign Language verbal agreement is indicated by the direction of the movement of the hands. The direction often corresponds to the real-world location of referents, and thus verbal agreement morphology is not arbitrary in its phonological form, as it would be in a spoken language.

2.1.1 Verbs agreeing with one argument

There is a class of verbs which show agreement with one argument by the direction of movement of the hands. For example, the end point of the movement of the verb TELL corresponds to the direct object of the verb, the person told.

(1) FELIPE TELL$_1$.

"Felipe told me."

TELL$_1$

(2) FELIPE TELL$_2$.

"Felipe told you."

signer   TELL$_2$ addressee

(3) FELIPE TELL$_x$ JULIO.

   "Felipe told Julio."

x (an arbitrary direction)
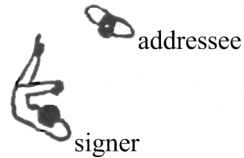
addressee

signer

TELL$_X$

In example (3) above, the direction of movement was an arbitrary choice, since the direct object, Julio, was not physically present. If Julio had been physically present in full view of the signer and the addressee, it would have been necessary to articulate the sign in Julio's direction rather than choosing an arbitrary direction, as in (4):

(4) FELIPE TELL$_y$.

   "Felipe told him (Julio)."

y (the actual direction of Julio)

Julio

addressee
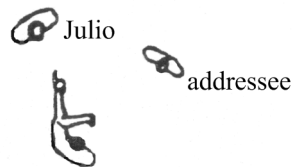
TELL$_Y$

Note from example (4) that Julio's name is not signed, since with the directional agreement it is completely unambiguous that Julio is the person told. TELL is a verb which agrees with only one argument directionally. A few other verbs fall into this class, such as CALL.

(5) FELIPE CALL$_1$.

   "Felipe got my attention."

(6) FELIPE CALL$_i$ CALL$_j$ CALL$_k$ CALL$_l$ CALL$_m$.

"Felipe got everybody's attention."
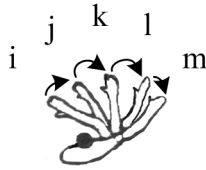
$$\text{CALL}_\mathbf{i}\ \text{CALL}_\mathbf{j}\ \text{CALL}_\mathbf{k}\ \text{CALL}_\mathbf{l}\ \text{CALL}_\mathbf{m}$$

Verbs differ in how a plural object is indicated. The verb CALL is simply repeated in different directions, as in (6) above. TELL with a plural object has first a movement towards one of the objects and then a sweeping movement to include the rest.

(7) FELIPE TELL$_{i,j,k,l,m}$.

"Felipe told everybody."
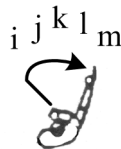
$$\text{TELL}_\mathbf{i, j, k, l, m}$$

2.1.2 Verbs agreeing with two arguments

A large class of verbs shows agreement with two arguments directionally. Some of these verbs are transitive, and in that case the verb agrees with the subject and direct object. Other verbs in this class are ditransitive, and those verbs agree with the subject and notional indirect object.

As with the class of verbs discussed in the previous section, the endpoint of movement indicates object agreement. Agreement with the subject is indicated by the beginning point of the movement. If the subject happens to be physically present and in view of the signer and addressee at the time of utterance, the identity of the subject will be unambiguously indicated by the starting point of the verb, and the subject noun phrase may be freely left out.

The verbs HELP and GIVE are typical of this class:

(1) FELIPE $_x$HELP$_1$.

"Felipe helped me."

x (an arbitrary direction)

$_x$HELP$_1$

(2) $_x$HELP$_1$.

"He (Felipe) helped me."

x (Felipe's actual direction)

$_x$HELP$_1$

(3) $_1$HELP$_2$.

"I helped you."
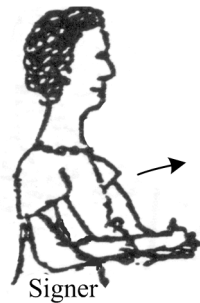
$_2$HELP$_2$

Signer   Addressee

(4) $_2$GIVE$_1$ PEN.

"You gave me a pen."

$_2$GIVE$_1$

Signer   Addressee
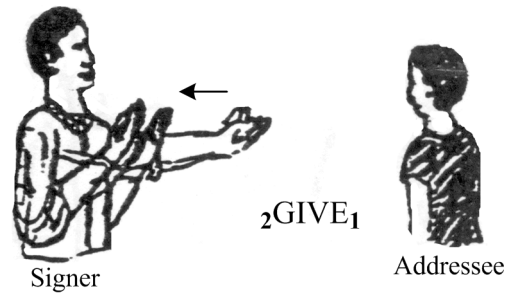
(5) $_2$GIVE$_x$ PEN.

"You gave him (Felipe) a pen."

Filipe

Addressee

X (filipe's actual direction)

Signer
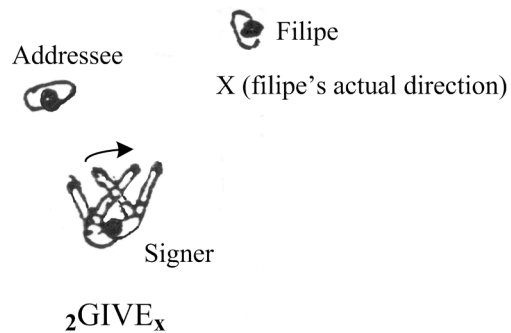
$_2$GIVE$_x$

(6) $_1$GIVE$_x$ JULIO PEN.

"I gave Julio a pen."

X (an arbitrary direction)

Signer

$_1$GIVE$_x$
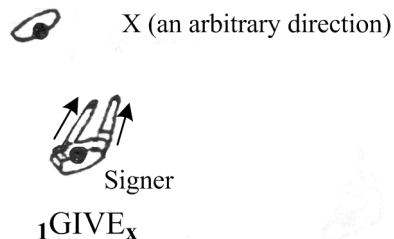
2.1.3 Verbs agreeing with no arguments

Many verbs do not show any kind of morphological agreement with any of their arguments. This class of verbs includes all intransitive verbs and many transitive verbs. In the following examples, the form of the verb remains the same regardless of the identity of the subject or direct object.

(1) INDEX$_1$ EAT RICE.

"I eat rice."

(2) INDEX$_2$ EAT RICE.

"You eat rice."

(3) INDEX$_X$ SLEEP.

"He is sleeping."

(4) YESTERDAY INDEX$_1$ SLEEP WELL.

"Yesterday I slept well."

(5) YESTERDAY JULIO SLEEP WELL.

"Yesterday Julio slept well."

(6) MOSQUITO STING FELIPE.

"A mosquito stung Felipe."

(7) MOSQUITO INDEX$_1$ STING.

"A mosquito stung me."

2.2 Derivation of verbs involving classifier hand shapes

2.2.1 Classifier hand shapes

A number of hand shapes are used primarily for the derivation of verbs. These hand shapes are known as classifier hand shapes. The same sort of thing exists in other signed languages, and much of what is known as "mime" in signed languages involves the use of classifier hand shapes. The classifier hand shapes each indicate a particular semantic class, such as "people", "4-legged animals", "things one rides on like a horse or donkey", etc. Verbs that incorporate a classifier hand shape have as part of their denotation that someone or something of that classifier's semantic class is an argument of the verb. The classifier hand shapes vary on what kinds of verbs they may be used to derive.

The following list of classifier hand shapes is not exhaustive. The abbreviations for classifier hand shapes are used in the capital letter glosses with which I have transcribed examples sentences. The choice of a particular abbreviation for a classifier is sometimes arbitrary, although when the hand shape corresponds to a letter in the fingerspelling alphabet, that letter is generally used in the abbreviation. The range of verb types that a classifier hand shape may be used to derive are listed here.

CL:2   CL:C   CL:CC

CL:1   CL:DH   CL:VL

CL:SQ   CL:44   CL:Y   CL:F

.

	Abbreviation	Semantic class	Verb types derivable
(1)	CL:2	"person"	verbs of position verbs of movement
(2)	CL:C	"cup or glass"	verbs of giving verbs of manipulation verbs of position
(3)	CL:CC	"bowls, etc."	verbs of giving verbs of manipulation verbs of position
(4)	CL:1	"person"	verbs of position verbs of movement
(5)	CL:DH	"donkey, horse, etc."	verbs of position verbs of movement
(6)	CL:VL	"vehicles"	verbs of position verbs of movement
(7)	CL:SQ	"square things"	verbs of position

```
(8)  CL:44  "line of people"       verbs of position
                                    verbs of movement

(9)  CL:Y   "telephone or bottle"  verbs of position
                                    verbs of manipulation
                                    verbs of giving

(10) CL:F   "tea cup"              verbs of manipulation
                                    verbs of giving
```

2.2.2 Verbs of giving

A ditransitive verb may be derived by using a classifier hand shape appropriate to the object given and using a motion according to the same rules that any ditransitive verb would follow, i.e. from the subject and towards the recipient.

The meaning of a verb derived thus is simply "give" with the qualification that the item given must be of the sort that the classifier hand shape would normally indicate. Not all classifier hand shapes are used to derive verbs of giving. Those that are have been indicated in the chart in the previous section. Some examples of verbs of giving include GIVE-CL:C "give something in a cup", GIVE-CL:CC "give something in a bowl", and GIVE-CL:Y "give something in a bottle".

```
(1)  ₁GIVE-CL:C₂ COFFEE.
```
$(1)\ \ _1\text{GIVE-CL:C}_2\ \text{COFFEE.}$

   "I give you coffee."

$(2)\ \ _1\text{GIVE-CL:CC}_2\ \text{A-V-E-N-A.}$

   "I give you oatmeal."

$(3)\ \ _2\text{GIVE-CL:Y}_x\ \text{FELIPE.}$

   "You give Felipe something in a bottle."

2.2.3 Verbs of manipulation

Verbs of manipulation, i.e., putting down, picking up, setting on a shelf, etc. may be derived by using an appropriate classifier hand shape together with a motion that looks like the kind of manipulation denoted by the verb. Not all classifier hand shapes can be used to derive a verb of manipulation. Those that can be used in this way are the same ones that can be used to derive ditransitive verbs. Verbs of manipulation derived with classifier hand shapes are extremely iconic, i.e., there is a very direct relationship between the form of the verb and its meaning, and it would be tempting to refer to such verbs as "pure mime" if it were not for the fact that the classifier hand shapes and the rules for deriving verbs from them vary from signed language to signed language, and therefore have an element of arbitrariness and are part of the linguistic conventions of the language.

(1) INDEX$_1$ SET-DOWN-CL:C.

"I set down my cup."
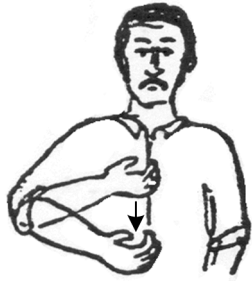
SET-DOWN-CL:C

(2) INDEX$_x$ PICK-UP-CL:CC.

"She picks up the bowl."
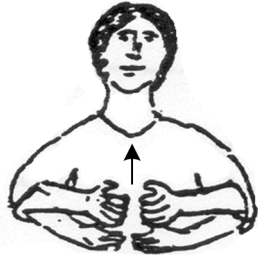
PICK-UP-CL:CC

(3) INDEX$_y$ HANG-UP-CL:Y.

"She hangs up the phone."

HANG-UP-CL:Y

(4) DRINK-CL:F.

   "I drank tea."

DRINK-CL:F

2.2.4 Verbs of position

Certain classifier hand shapes may be used to derive verbs that indicate positions of persons or objects. The classifier hand shape used depends on the semantic category of the subject. The position of the dominant hand in the signing space or relative to the non-dominant hand normally indicates the position being predicated of the subject.

(1) POSITION-CL:CC$_x$ POSITION-CL:CC$_y$ POSITION-CL:CC$_z$.

   "Three bowls were sitting in a row."
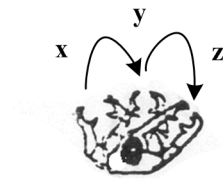
POSITION-CL:CC$_x$ POSITION-CL:CC$_y$ POSITION-CL:CC$_z$

The classifier CL:2 may be used to derive a variety of verbs with meanings related to use of the legs, position of the legs, or position of the whole body. The two extended fingers each act the part of one of the legs, and the palm side of the fingers represents the back of the legs.

(2) STAND.

"He stood there."

STAND

(3) SIT.

"He sat there."

SIT
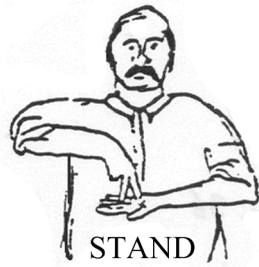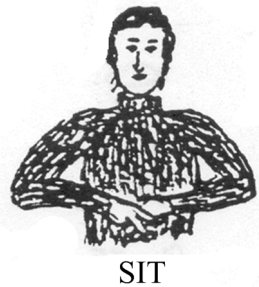
(4) KNEEL.

"He was kneeling."

KNEEL

The non-dominant hand may be in a classifier hand shape and serve as a position relative to which the dominant hand is located.

(5) DONKEY RIDE-ON-BACK.

"He was sitting on a donkey."

RIDE-ON-BACK

The non-dominant hand in the classifier hand shape CL:1 may indicate a location for a human referent while the dominant hand gives the referent's name.

```
(6)  (weak hand)   CL:1------
     (strong hand) J-U-L-I-O.
```

"Julio was there."

(fingerspelling)
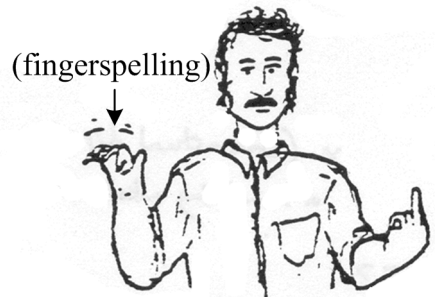
(Weak hand) CL:1
(Strong hand) J-U-L-I-O

2.2.5 Verbs of movement

Verbs which indicate movement may be derived using certain classifier hand shapes, with the category of the thing moving indicated by the classifier hand shape of the dominant hand, and the type and direction of movement indicated by the movement of the same hand. These verbs are very similar to the verbs of giving in the principle of their derivation. The difference is in the argument structure of the derived verbs, since the verbs of giving are ditransitive and the verbs of movement are intransitive.

```
(1) GO-CL:VL.
```

"He was driving along."
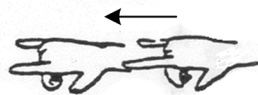
GO-CL:VL

The two extended fingers of the hand shape CL:2 move to indicate movement of legs, while the whole hand is moved to indicate the direction of travel.

```
(2) FELIPE WALK-CL:2.

    "Felipe was walking along."
```
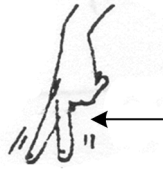

WALK-CL:2

```
(3) FELIPE JUMP-CL:2.

    "Felipe jumped."
```
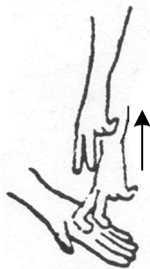

JUMP-CL:2

Sometimes the weak hand is in a classifier hand shape which indicates an object that the strong hand's movement is relative to.

```
(4) FELIPE GET-ON-CL:2.

    "Felipe got on the bus."
```


GET-ON-CL:2

```
(5) FELIPE GET-OFF-CL:2.

    "Felipe got off the bus."
```
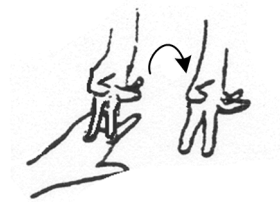
GET-OFF-CL:2

2.3   Fingerspelling and initialization

2.3.1 Fingerspelling

The fingerspelling alphabet may be used to borrow words from written Spanish, and is most often used for place names and personal names. It has also influenced the morphology through the derivational process of initialization, to be discussed in the next section. For more on fingerspelling, see Serafín and Llano 1991 and Serafín and Llano 1992.

2.3.2 Initialization

New words of any category may be derived by combining a hand shape from the fingerspelling alphabet with a movement and location which is often from a previously existing sign. The hand shape corresponds to the first letter in a Spanish word. The movement and location are usually borrowed from a sign which has a meaning related to the meaning of the derived sign. Initialization is most productive in a few semantic areas, including place names, formal religious language, and name signs. However, there are initialized signs from a wide variety of semantic areas.

In example (1), the sign for the name of the city Guadalajara combines a movement and a location used in many other names of cities with the G hand shape from the fingerspelling alphabet.

```
(1) GUADALAJARA

    "Guadalajara"
```

GUADALAJARA

In example (2), a name sign for a man whose Spanish name is Julio is derived by combining the hand shape used for the letter J with a movement and a location like those in his cousin's name sign.

(2) JULIO

   "Julio"

JULIO

In example (3), the sign for "Monday" combines the L hand shape (from the Spanish *lunes*) with the same movement used in the signs for the other days of the week.

(3) MONDAY

   "Monday"
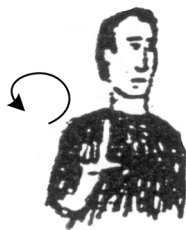
MONDAY

The movement and location of an initialized sign does not always have an obvious source in the movement and location of another sign. The sign for "name" has an N hand shape, corresponding to the first letter of the Spanish word *nombre*, yet the movement and location have no obvious source in any other sign.

(4) NAME

   "name"
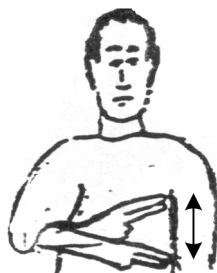
NAME

Initialized signs are far more frequent in Mexican Sign Language than in American Sign Language, and there is no obvious negative social attitude towards initialization in the Deaf community.

2.4   Compounding and other kinds of derivation

2.4.1 Compound interrogative time words

Several compound time words are in use, each with WHEN as the first word in the compound.

```
(1)  WHEN+DAY
     "what day"

(2)  WHEN+YEAR
     "what year"

(3)  WHEN+YEAR+DAY
     "on what date"
```

This process is not productive, and the following are not possible:

```
(4)  *WHEN+WEEK
      (in what week)

(5)  *WHEN+MONTH
      (in what month)

(6)  *WHEN+HOUR
      (at what hour)

(7)  *WHEN+MINUTE
      (at what minute)
```

The compound time words behave syntactically exactly like WHEN, except that they cannot be used as subordinating conjunctions, only as interrogative words.

2.4.2 Agentive nominalizations

Agentive nominalization may be formed from verbs by zero-derivation, i.e., without changing the phonological form of the verb in any way. For example, the sign for "to cook" and the sign for "person who cooks" are identical.

There is also a suffix which may be used to create from a verb a sign which is unambiguously an agentive nominalization. This suffix is signed either with just the dominant hand in an R hand shape or with both hands in that hand shape, and involves a movement of the dominant hand downwards onto the base hand. The orientation of the hands varies from signer to signer. If the base hand is not in the R hand shape, it is loosely open and palm

down. Although this suffix is sometimes used by the Deaf, it is only one of the options they might choose. Hearing signers tend to rely on this suffix exclusively for creating agentive nominalizations.

```
(1)  SAVE+AGENTIVE

     "savior"
```

A third way to create agentive nominalizations from verbs is by compounding. The first member of the compound is a noun refering to a person, especially MAN or WOMAN. Thus the syntactic category of these compound words is identical to the syntactic category of the first member of the compound, as it was with the compound time words discussed in the previous section.

```
(2)  MAN+SELL

     "salesman"

(3)  WOMAN+COOK

     "woman who cooks"
```

2.4.3 Reduplication

Reduplication in Mexican Sign Language might be described as the compounding of a word with itself. It could perhaps be better characterized as repetition of a syllable, but since there is no generally agreed-upon phonetic definition of a syllable for signed languages, I will not attempt to argue for that. At any rate, the only place an empirical difference between the two hypotheses would show up would be in the reduplication of polysyllabic words, and clear cases of polysyllabic words are hard to find in Mexican Sign Language, especially with the lack of a phonetic definition for the syllable.

Reduplication processes should be distinguished from repetition of a movement which is part of the basic form of certain signs. This kind of repetition is certainly a lexical characteristic of individual words, since many signs cannot be repeated or would undergo a change in meaning if repeated. Many signs involve an optional repetition of a movement. This optional repetition is a lexical characteristic of particular signs, since not all signs allow this.

```
(1)  MAN      or     MAN+MAN

     "man"              "man"

(2)  HAVE      or     HAVE+HAVE

     "have"             "have"

(3)  BE-HOME

     "be home"

(4)  *BE-HOME+BE-HOME

      (be home)
```

```
(5)  OWNER

     "owner"

(6)  *OWNER+OWNER

       (owner)
```

A change in meaning is involved when certain words denoting amounts of time are reduplicated. This predictable change of meaning marks this repetition of signs as a true morphological process, in contrast to the repetitions in examples 1-3, which involve no change in meaning.

```
(7)  DAY

     "day"


(8)  DAY+DAY

     "day after day"

(9)  YEARS-AGO

     "years ago"

(10) YEARS-AGO+YEARS-AGO

      "years and years ago"
```

A number of verbs normally signed with one hand may be reduplicated with an alternating motion of the two hands. These verbs all seem to denote the act of ingesting something or taking something in, and the reduplicated version means to perform the same act voraciously or gluttonously.

```
(11) EAT       or    EAT+ALT-REDUP

     "eat"           "eat gluttonously"

(12) DRINK-CL:Y           or    DRINK-CL:Y+ALT-REDUP

     "drink from a bottle"       "get drunk"

(13) LEARN    or    LEARN+ALT-REDUP

     "learn"        "learn voraciously"
```

2.4.4 Feminine forms

There is a feminine suffix, which consists of a downward movement of an open hand, palm down. This suffix is not a part of an agreement system such as Spanish has and is not attached to adjectives. It is only used with a small class of nouns, mostly kinship terms. Thus, it is clearly derivational rather than inflectional, in contrast with the Spanish feminine suffix.

(1) BROTHER+FEMININE

    "sister"

(2) GRANDFATHER+FEMININE

    "grandmother"

(3) MALE-COUSIN+FEMININE

    "female cousin"

(4) HUSBAND+FEMININE

    "wife"

2.4.5 Miscellaneous suffixes used in signed Spanish

A number of suffixes are rarely used by most Deaf people except on occasions when they are signing something word for word that is written in Spanish. These suffixes are not ordinarily used in conversations between Deaf people and are a marginal part of the language.

SPANISH SUFFIX	PHONOLOGICAL FORM
-ado, -ido	Palm to side D hand shape moves down onto a palm-down, fist base hand.
-al, -ial	Palm-down L hand shape moves down onto a palm-down, fist base hand.
-ción	C hand shape with the palm to the side moves down onto a palm-down, fist base hand.
-ito, -ita	F hand shape with the palm to the side moves down onto a fist base hand with the palm to the side.
-oso, -osa	The O hand shape with the palm forward moves down onto a palm-down, fist base hand.

2.5 Pronouns and deixis

There are two coexisting pronoun systems in Mexican Sign Language. One is based on the Spanish pronoun system and is based on the Spanish oppositions of person, number, case, and formality. Many of the pronouns in this system are rarely or never used except in signed Spanish. The other system is far more typical of signed languages and is also far more commonly used. In this system, deixis and directionality play a large role. The deictic pronouns point out a referent's actual or conventional location in the signing space, and in this way indicate their reference unambiguously. This contrasts with a typical spoken language pronoun like "you" or "she",

which can be ambiguous in its reference. Most of the discussion which follows will deal with the directional pronoun system, and the pronouns of the other system will only be mentioned briefly at the end.

2.5.1 Present referents

People or things which are present and visible to both signer and addressee may be indicated by using the pronouns INDEX and POSS, to be described below, and articulating the sign in the direction of the actual location of the referent, as described in the discussions of each of the pronouns below.

2.5.2 Absent referents

Referents who are not present and visible to the conversants may also be referred to using the pronominal handshapes INDEX and POSS, but an arbitrary direction is chosen by the signer for each absent referent. Once a location has been established by the signer for a particular referent, that referent may be repeatedly referred back to by using INDEX or POSS in that direction. The same arbitrarily established direction will be the direction of that referent for purposes of verb agreement as well.

2.5.3 Pronominal hand shapes

Singular referents other than possessors are referred to with the pronoun INDEX. The hand shape is that used for the number 1, with the extended index finger pointing in the direction of the referent.

x (the direction of
a refernt)
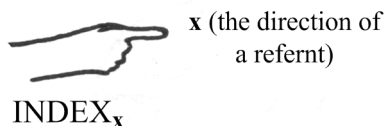
INDEX$_x$

The possessive pronoun POSS is done with the P handshape. Each form of the sign starts with the palm down and the index finger pointing to the side, and rotates on the axis of the forearm, the middle finger moving toward the referent.

x (the direction
of a referent)

POSS$_x$
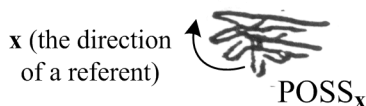
The P handshape is also used for dual pronouns, though the orientation and movement are different. The palm is oriented toward the signer's body, and the hand moves back and forth at the wrist between pointing at one referent with the index finger and at the other referent with the middle finger. The hand shape used for the number 3 is also used for pronouns that refer to three people, and the hand shape used for the number 4 is used for pronouns that refer to four people. In both of these cases the extended fingers are pointed up, the palm is in, and the hand moves in a horizontal circle.

The 5 hand shape is used for pronouns that refer to groups of unspecified size, and moves in a circle, palm down.

Handshapes for initialized pronouns will be discussed later.

2.5.4 Reflexive pronouns

Reflexive pronouns may be signed in either of two ways. A sequence of the singular possessive pronoun corresponding to the person in question followed by the sign VERY-SAME may be used. Otherwise, a single sign containing the same hand shape and motion as VERY-SAME is used which differs from VERY-SAME in that the fingers flick in the direction of the referent, and in that the hand is held at chest level rather than mouth level.

x (an arbitrary direction)

VERY-SAME$_x$

(1) FELIPE CARE-ABOUT POSS$_X$ VERY-SAME.

"Felipe loves himself."

(2) FELIPE CARE-ABOUT VERY-SAME$_X$.

"Felipe loves himself."

2.5.5 Initialized pronouns

A number of initialized pronouns exist, some of which are used only in signed Spanish. All correspond to Spanish pronouns, though a few of them are sometimes used by Deaf people conversing with each other. There are no initialized third person pronouns, and sometimes Spanish pronouns are fingerspelled in signed Spanish. The initialized pronouns are listed here:

SPANISH	USE BY DEAF	DESCRIPTION
yo	common	Y hand shape against chest, palm in.

nosotros nos nuestro	fairly common	N hand shape starting at one shoulder, circling horizontally to other shoulder, palm down.
mí	rare	Fingerspell M-I while the fingerspelling hand lands on chest, palm to side.
me	rare	Fingerspell M-E while the fingerspelling hand lands on chest, palm to side, or M hand shape touches chest, palm to side.
tú tu	rare	Fingerspell T-U, but with the extended middle and index fingers of the U hand shape toward the addressee rather than up.
usted	rare	U hand shape with the extended middle and index fingers toward the addressee.
ustedes	rare	U hand shape with the extended middle and index fingers toward addressees, moving from one side of the group of addressees to the other.

Generally speaking, hearing signers use initialized pronouns more than Deaf signers.

3.   Syntax

3.1   The noun phrase

Noun phrases, in addition to the obligatory head noun, may contain a possessor noun phrase or determiner, a number, and adjectival modifiers.

(1) POSS$_1$ TWO DOG UGLY

   "my two ugly dogs"

The following phrase structure rules and linear precedence statements sum up the facts that will be presented in prose, and my only purpose in presenting the rules in this way is to make all the rules visible at a glance

on one page. The readers should feel free to skip over these rules and pass immediately on to the prose descriptions if they are so inclined. The phrase structure rules do not indicate anything about the linear order of constituents; they only indicate immediate dominance relations. Linear precedence restrictions on sister constituents are handled by separate linear precedence rules. If there is no linear precedence rule that mentions two sister constituents, then there is no restriction on the order of those constituents with respect to each other.

Phrase Structure Rules

```
NP -> N", (NP[POSS])

NP -> N", (Determiner)

N" -> N', (Number)

N' -> N, (Adjective)
```

Linear Precedence Rules

```
NP[POSS] < N"

Determiner < N"

N < Adjective
```

3.1.1 Adjectival modifiers

Adjectival modifiers in a noun phrase generally follow the head noun. Further investigation would be needed to find out whether the adjectival modifier in a noun phrase is an adjective phrase, which can contain an intensifier (words like VERY), or simply an adjective. The possibility of an intensifier would be the only test to show whether these adjectival modifiers are adjective phrases or just adjectives, since there are no other modifiers possible in an adjective phrase in Mexican Sign Language.

```
(1)  DOG WHITE
     "a white dog"

(2)  BEAR UGLY THREE
     "three ugly bears"

(3)  *UGLY BEAR THREE
      (three ugly bears)
```

There are some set phrases influenced by Spanish in which an adjective precedes a noun. Also, two-word noun phrases consisting of only an adjective followed by a noun are acceptable to some signers.

```
(4)  GOOD DAY.
     "Good morning."
```

```
(5) GOOD LATE.

    "Good afternoon."

(6) GOOD NIGHT.

    "Good evening, good night."

(7) ??WHITE DOG

      (a white dog)
```

3.1.2 Possessors

Possessors in Mexican Sign Language are bare noun phrases rather than prepositional phrases as they are in Spanish. The fingerspelled Spanish preposition *de* is used only in signed Spanish.

Possessor noun phrases normally precede the head noun.

```
(1) FELIPE FRIEND

    "Felipe's friend"

(2) POSS₂ SON

    "your son"

(3) WHO HOUSE

    "whose house"
```

Postnominal possessors are possible, and show up frequently in religious language. This is probably due to influence from Spanish, since in Spanish a prepositional phrase with *de* follows the noun.

```
(4) KINGDOM GOD

    "the kingdom of God"

(5) KINGDOM D-E GOD
    reino   de  Dios
    kingdom of  God

    "the kindom of God" (signed Spanish)
```

3.1.3 Numbers

Numbers in a noun phrase may be either prenominal or postnominal.

```
(1) THREE BEAR

    "three bears"
```

```
(2)  BEAR THREE
     "three bears"
```

Numbers cannot occur further from the head of their noun phrase than a possessor.

```
(3)  POSS₂ TWO SON
     "your two sons"

(4)  POSS₂ SON TWO
     "your two sons"

(5)  *TWO POSS₂ SON
      (your two sons)
```

A number may not occur closer to the head noun than an adjectival modifier.

```
(6)  THREE BEAR UGLY
     "three ugly bears"

(7)  BEAR UGLY THREE
     "three ugly bears"

(8)  *BEAR THREE UGLY
      (three ugly bears)
```

3.1.4 Determiners

Few determiners are used by the Deaf in conversation. The Spanish definite articles may be fingerspelled when reading a document in Spanish word for word, but are not normally used in any other context. Definite reference may be unambiguously indicated by using a pronoun. Noun phrases without any determiner may be ambiguous between definite reference, indefinite specific reference, and indefinite nonspecific reference. The determiner THAT is not used within a noun phrase by Deaf signers as often as it is by hearing signers, but if it is used it must be prenominal.

```
(1)  THAT BEAR
     "that/this bear"

(2)  *BEAR THAT
      (that/this bear)
```

3.1.5 Relative clauses

I have not encountered anything in the signing of native signers which behaves syntactically like a relative clause; that is, I have not found anything that behaves like a clause embedded within a noun phrase. The sorts of meaning that are expressed in Spanish or English using relative clauses may be expressed quite unambiguously in Mexican Sign Language without relative clauses. The more Spanish-influenced signers sometimes use relative clauses which follow the Spanish pattern. There is one set phrase used in prayers by many signers that contains a relative clause, but this phrase is clearly borrowed from Spanish. It is the first line from the Lord's Prayer, and follows the Spanish wording exactly except for the lack of the definite article.

```
(1)  FATHER OUR      WHAT BE-HOME IN     HEAVEN

     Padre   nuestro  que   estás    en el   cielo
     father  our      that  are      in the  heaven

     "Our Father in Heaven"
```

The structure in this example is not productive for all signers. At least one native signer accepts this phrase but rejects other relative clauses with identical structure.

3.2   The adjective phrase

Intensifiers may either precede or follow the head adjective in an adjective phrase.

```
(1)  MUCH HAPPY

     "very happy"
```

```
(2)  HAPPY MUCH

     "very happy"
```

3.3   The prepositional phrase

Prepositions precede their complements.

```
(1)  IN GUADALAJARA

     "in Guadalajara"
```

```
(2)  *GUADALAJARA IN

      (in Guadalajara)
```

3.4 Basic clause structure

3.4.1 Subjects

Subjects precede their verbs. Those signers who are more Spanish oriented are often more tolerant of postverbal subjects, since they are possible in Spanish.

(1) FROG GO-AWAY.

"The frog went away."

(2) *GO-AWAY FROG.

(The frog went away.)

3.4.2 Direct objects

Direct objects normally follow their verb.

(1) INDEX$_1$ WANT PENCIL.

"I want a pencil."

(2) *INDEX$_1$ PENCIL WANT.

(I want a pencil.)

(3) CHILD EAT A-V-E-N-A.

"The child ate the oatmeal."

(4) *CHILD A-V-E-N-A EAT.

(The child ate the oatmeal.)

(5) FELIPE HAVE MONEY.

"Felipe has money."

(6) *FELIPE MONEY HAVE.

(Felipe has money.)

The verbs THROW and PUT appear to be exceptional in this regard, though perhaps the item thrown or put is something other than a direct object in this language. The object thrown or put may not appear after the verb according to the intuitions of at least one native signer, although it may according to the intuitions of at least one non-native Deaf signer.

(7) INDEX$_2$ EGG THROW.

"You threw eggs."

```
(8) INDEX_X TABLE BOOK PUT.
```

"He put the book on the table."

```
(9) *INDEX_X TABLE PUT BOOK.
```

(He put the book on the table.)

```
(10) *INDEX_2 THROW EGG.
```

(You threw eggs.)

3.4.3 Indirect objects

Indirect objects follow their verbs, and if both the direct and indirect object are overt (a rare situation) the indirect object is closer to the verb.

```
(1) _1GIVE_X FELIPE PEN.
```

"I gave Felipe the pen."

```
(2) _2GIVE_X JULIO MONEY.
```

"You gave Julio the money."

3.4.4 Pronominal object clitics

The first and second person object pronouns normally precede the verb, unlike ordinary objects, which always follow the verb.

```
        n--------------------------
(1) INDEX_2 NOT INDEX_1 CARE-ABOUT.
```

"You don't love me."

```
(2) POSS_2 MOM INDEX_2 CARE-ABOUT.
```

"Your mom loves you."

The term "clitic" is normally used to refer to an element that in some ways seems to be best analysed as a word, and in some ways seems to be best analysed as an affix. It has been traditional to call object pronouns in Spanish, French, and other languages clitics if they follow ordering rules distinct from normal object noun phrases, since it is generally unclear whether they should be called words or affixes. I have chosen to follow this precedent by calling these Mexican Sign Language pronouns clitics. The clitic rules of Spanish and Mexican Sign Language only partly line up. The Spanish clitics precede a tensed verb but follow an infinitive. In a sentence like "The bear wants to eat me," Spanish would allow the clitic pronoun either before the verb that means "want" or after the verb that means "eat".

```
(3)  El  oso  me   quiere   comer.
     the bear 1.DO= want-3s eat-INF

     "The bear wants to eat me."

(4)  El  oso  quiere   comerme.
     the bear want-3s eat-INF =1.DO

     "The bear wants to eat me."
```

Spanish would not allow the clitic to precede the verb that means "to eat".

```
(5)  *El  oso  quiere   me    comer.
     the bear want     1.DO= eat-INF

     (The bear wants to eat me.)
```

This is, however, the normal order in Mexican Sign Language.

```
(6)  BEAR WANT INDEX₁ EAT.

     "The bear wants to eat me."
```

Furthermore, although Spanish allows clitics to precede the equi verb "want", Mexican Sign Language does not allow this.

```
(7)  *BEAR INDEX₁ WANT EAT.

       (The bear wants to eat me.)
```

Again, some signers are more tolerant of Spanish word order than others. The above judgements are from a native signer. Interestingly, the Mexican Sign Language clitic facts are closer to the facts in French than to the facts in Spanish (Mike MacKenzie, personal communication). One might speculate that when sign language was first brought over from France, the French hearing teacher signed with French syntax, and that this has had a lasting influence on Mexican Sign Language.

3.4.5 Predicate adjectives

Clauses with predicate adjectives do not use a copula, except in signed Spanish. The predicate adjective (or adjective phrase) follows the subject.

```
(1)  INDEXₓ HAPPY MUCH.

     "He is very happy."

(2)  FELIPE INTELLIGENT.

     "Felipe is intelligent."
```

3.4.6 Predicate nominals

Clauses with predicate nominals do not use a copula, except in signed Spanish. The predicate nominal follows the subject.

(1) FELIPE MAN.

   "Felipe is a man."

(2) INDEX$_y$ MANGO.

   "That is a mango."

3.4.7 Complements of equi verbs

The complement of an equi verb follows the equi verb.

(1) FELIPE WANT GO-AWAY.

   "Felipe wants to go away."

(2) *FELIPE GO-AWAY WANT.

   (Felipe wants to go away.)

3.4.8 Complement clauses

Complement clauses follow the verb of which they are the complement. Unlike in Spanish, no complementizer is used. There is a sign used in signed Spanish for the Spanish complementizer *que*, but in natural signing this sign is not used as a complementizer.

(1) INDEX$_1$ BELIEVE CHRIST RISE-FROM-THE-DEAD.

   "I believe that Christ rose from the dead."

(2) *INDEX$_1$ BELIEVE WHAT CHRIST RISE-FROM-THE-DEAD.

   (I believe that Christ rose from the dead.)

3.4.9 Conditional clauses

Conditional clauses must precede their consequent clauses. Conditional clauses are marked by a quick raising and lowering of the eyebrows between the conditional clause and the consequent clause, and optionally by the sign MAYBE at the beginning of the conditional clause. The sign IF may be used instead of the sign MAYBE in the Guadalajara variety of Mexican Sign Language.

```
                            if--
(1) INDEX₂ HAVE DOG, SHOULD FEED FOOD.
```

"If you have a dog, you should feed it."

```
                                 if--
(2) MAYBE INDEX₂ GO CHINA, INDEX₂ EAT RICE MUCH.
```

"If you go to China, you'll eat a lot of rice."

3.4.10 Purpose

Purpose clauses as an embedded constituent do not exist except in signed Spanish.   A native signer expresses the same idea by following the statement whose purpose is to be expressed with the question "What for?" and then follows that with another statement expressing the purpose, or a yes-no question about the purpose.

```
                         q-------
(1) INDEX₂ COME MEXICO.  WHAT-FOR?  WANT LEARN SIGN.
```

"You came to Mexico in order to learn sign."

```
                      cq-------   q------------------
(2) INDEX₂ COME.  WHAT-FOR?  WANT INDEX₁ BOTHER?
```

"Did you come in order to bother me?"

3.4.11 Goal obliques

Goal obliques may either precede or follow the verb.

```
(1) INDEX₂ MEXICO COME.
```
    "You came to Mexico."

```
(2) INDEX₂ COME MEXICO.
```
    "You came to Mexico."

```
(3) FELIPE BOOK TABLE PUT.
```
    "Felipe put the book on the table."

```
(4) FELIPE BOOK PUT TABLE.
```
    "Felipe put the book on the table."

3.4.12 Time obliques

Obliques of time (time in the sense of the occasion of an event) are located either immediately before the verb or at the beginning of a sentence. They can also go at the end of a sentence, though that is not nearly so

common. I have seen no examples of a prepositional phrase being used as a time oblique. Time obliques that indicate a number of units of time ago have the structure, Number + Unit of Time + BEHIND. The unit of time used for years in the past is different from the sign YEAR, and is glossed as YEARS-AGO here.

    (1)   PASS+BEFORE INDEX$_1$ LIVE TOLUCA, IN TOLUCA.

              "I used to live in Toluca."

    (2)   INDEX$_1$ PASS+BEFORE LIVE TOLUCA, IN TOLUCA.

              "I used to live in Toluca."

    (3)   FUTURE WISH GO-AWAY CHINA.

              "In the future I wish to go away to China."

    (4)   THREE YEARS-AGO BEHIND STUDY CHINESE.

              "Three years ago I studied Chinese."

    (5)   LIVE IN GUADALAJARA THREE YEARS-AGO BEHIND.

              "I lived in Guadalajara three years ago."

The most common location for obliques of time is at the beginning of a sentence. Time obliques indicating elapsed time (how much time has to go by or went by before an event) also appear at the beginning of a sentence.

    (6) ONE MONTH, AFTERWARDS GO IN CHINA.

         "You're going to China a month from now."

    (7) FIVE MINUTE, AFTERWARD GO.

         "After five minutes I'll go."

3.4.13 Duration obliques

Obliques of duration immediately follow the verb. Obliques of duration differ from time obliques semantically. Time obliques indicate when an event occurs, whereas duration obliques indicate how long the event lasts.

    (1) FELIPE WAIT LONG-TIME BUS.

         "Felipe was waiting a long time for the bus."

    (2) WAIT MINUTE.

         "He waited just a minute."

    (3) FELIPE WAIT 5 MINUTE BUS.

         "Felipe waited 5 minutes for the bus."

3.4.14 Location obliques

Location obliques may be either noun phrases or prepositional phrases, and may either follow or precede the verb.

    (1) INDEX$_1$ GUADALAJARA OVER-THERE LIVE.

        "I lived over in Guadalajara."

    (2) LIVE IN VERACRUZ.

        "I lived in Veracruz."

    (3) HOUSE STAY.

        "They're staying home."

    (4) LIVE GUADALAJARA, IN GUADALAJARA.

        "I lived in Guadalajara."

It is very common, as in (4) above, to use a noun phrase location oblique and immediately follow it with a prepositional phrase whose object is the same noun phrase. I have only encountered the prepositional phrase location obliques postverbally.

3.4.15 Instrument obliques

Instrument obliques are bare noun phrases and precede the verb.

    (1) FELIPE HAMMER BREAK EGG.

        "Felipe is breaking eggs with a hammer."

    (2) FELIPE BOOK BREAK EGG.

        "Felipe is breaking eggs with a book."

3.4.16 Manner obliques

Manner obliques may either precede the verb or go at the end of the sentence.

    (1) JULIO QUICKLY SIGN.

        "Julio signs quickly."

    (2) JULIO SIGN QUICKLY.

        "Julio signs quickly."

3.4.17 Negation

Clauses may be negated by drawing the eyebrows together and shaking the head sideways for the duration of the clause. Often a sign like NOT or NO is used too, and sometimes a combination of the two signs is used. NOT precedes and/or follows a verb. If it precedes a verb, it also precedes any object clitics that may precede the verb. NO only appears sentence finally.

```
        n------------
(1) NOT HAVE MONEY.

    "I don't have any money."

        n---------
(2) UNDERSTAND.

    "I don't understand."

        n------------------
(3) DOG NOT INDEX₁ OBEY.

    "The dog doesn't obey me."

        n----------------
(4) NOT ₓSEEᵧ NOT NO.

    "He didn't see it."

        n------------
(5) UNDERSTAND NO.

    "I don't understand."
```

3.5   Conjunction and disjunction

3.5.1 Conjunction

Conjunction of noun phrases is often done by simply juxtaposing the noun phrases without any special word to mark them as conjoined.

```
(1) MAN WOMAN

    "a man and a woman"
```

The conjunction AND may also occur between the conjoined noun phrases.

```
(2) JULIO AND FELIPE

    "Julio and Felipe"
```

Which option is used depends on whether the meaning is clear enough from the context without the conjunction AND.

Conjunction of clauses is no different from conjunction of noun phrases except in that there are more conjunctions that might be used, such as BUT.

```
(3) FELIPE LAUGH AND JULIO CRY.
    "Felipe laughed and Julio cried."

(4) FELIPE LAUGH BUT JULIO CRY.
    "Felipe laughed but Julio cried."
```

3.5.2 Disjunction

Disjunction of noun phrases may be done either by placing the conjunction OR between the noun phrases or by simply juxtaposing the noun phrases with a slight pause between them.

```
(1) BUS OR METRO OR COLLECTIVE-TAXI
    "bus, subway, or collective taxi"

(2) BUS, METRO, COLLECTIVE-TAXI
    "bus, subway, or collective taxi"
```

Which option is used depends largely on whether the context makes it clear that disjunction rather than conjunction is meant.

OR is used for the disjunction of any other kind of constituent.

```
(3) ₓHELP₁ OR ᵧHELP₁.
    "He'll help me or she'll help me."
```

3.6   Questions

3.6.1 Yes-no questions

Yes-no questions are formed like statements except that the head is tilted back slightly and the eyebrows may be slightly raised.

```
    q-----
(1) READY?
    "Are you ready?"
```

```
         q---------
(2)  HAVE WIFE?

     "Do you have a wife?"

         q-----------
(3)  INDEX₂ DEAF?

     "Are you deaf?"
```

3.6.2 Alternative questions

The alternatives in an alternative question are given with or without OR, and the sign WHICH-ONE may be used either before or after the noun phrases or sentence containing them. Those noun phrases, or the sentence containing them, are signed with the same head tilt and facial expression used in yes-no questions. The sign WHICH-ONE is usually signed with the head tilted back a little further and the eyebrows drawn together.

```
         q---------
(1)  MAN WOMAN?

     "Are you a man or a woman?"

         q-----------------   cq--------
(2)  INDEX₂ SIGN OR ORAL, WHICH ONE?

     "Were you trained with sign or orally?"

         q------------------------------   cq--------
(3)  GO HOME BUS, COLLECTIVE-TAXI, METRO, WHICH-ONE?
     "Are you going home by bus, collective taxi, or metro?"

     cq-------   q-----------------
(4)  WHICH-ONE, LIKE COFFEE, WATER?

     "Which would you prefer, coffee or water?"
```

3.6.3 Content questions with interrogative pronouns

I have found no strong evidence for fronting or backing of interrogative pronouns, and there is no difference from statements in the order of subject and verb, except in Spanish-influenced signing. The head is tilted back slightly and the eyebrows may be raised, as in yes-no questions. Aside from the tilting of the head and expression of the face, the primary difference between this kind of question and a statement is the use of an interrogative pronoun.

```
         q--------------
(1)  WHO ₓGIVE₁ PEN?

     "Who gave me the pen?"
```

```
        q---------
(2) WHO HOUSE?

    "Whose house?"

        q------------------
(3) TOMORROW WHAT CLOCK?

    "What time tomorrow?"

        q-----------------------------
(4) WHEN+YEAR+DAY INDEX₂ GO U.S.A.?
```
(4) WHEN+YEAR+DAY INDEX$_2$ GO U.S.A.?

    "When did you go to the U.S.A.?"

```
        q---------------
(5) HOW COOK CHICKEN?

    "How do you cook chicken?"

        q--------------------
```
(6) HOW INDEX$_2$ LEARN SIGN?

    "How did you learn sign?"

The sign WHERE behaves in exceptional ways. It always immediately precedes a verb. If it is used with the verb BE-HOME, the WHERE + BE-HOME combination precedes the noun phrase whose location is being questioned, and means "Where is (noun phrase)".

```
        q-------------------
(7) WHERE BE-HOME FELIPE?
```
(7) WHERE BE-HOME FELIPE?

    "Where is Felipe?"

```
        q----------------------
```
(8) WHERE BE-HOME POSS$_1$ PEN?

    "Where is my pen?"

```
         q----------------------
```
(9) *WHERE POSS$_1$ PEN BE-HOME?

     (Where is my pen?)

(10) *WHERE POSS$_1$ PEN?

      (Where is my pen?)

The fact that the verb BE-HOME is not optional in this construction is another sign that it is exceptional, since a simple statement of location would not require any verb.

```
(11)  POSS₁ PEN HERE.

      "My pen is here."
```

If the sign WHERE is used with any other verb, it immediately precedes the verb, but the WHERE + verb combination is located in the same spot in the sentence where a verb would normally be in a statement.

```
      q------------------------
(12)  FELIPE WHERE LIVE BEFORE?

      "Where did Felipe live before?"

      q------------------------
(13)  INDEXᵧ WHERE GO TOMORROW?

      "Where is she going tomorrow?"
```

3.6.4 Content questions without interrogative pronouns

There are a number of question words that may appear by themselves as complete utterances, and are syntactically more like interjections than pronouns, though some of them are used like Spanish interrogative pronouns in signed Spanish. When these signs are used, the head is generally tilted back more than is necessary for a normal content or yes-no question, and the eyebrows are drawn together rather than raised.

```
      cq-------------
(1)  WHO/WHAT-IS-IT?

      "Who's that?" or "What is it?"

      cq--
(2)  WHY?

      "Why?" i.e., "What is the cause?"

      cq-------
(3)  WHAT-FOR?

      "What for?" i.e., "What is the purpose?"

      cq--------
(4)  WHICH-ONE?

      "Which one?"
```

The sign WHO/WHAT-IS-IT may be signed in the direction of any visible referent to ask in a general way for information about that referent.

```
     cq--------------
(5) WHO/WHAT-IS-IT_X?
```

"What about that one?" (asking about x)

x (the actual direction of something asked about)

WHO-WHAT-IS-IT$_x$?

       All of these question interjections are frequently used before or after questions to emphasize the question, and can also be used before or after a statement or phrase to ask about the statement or phrase.

```
     q---------   cq-------------
(6) WHO LEND_2?  WHO/WHAT-IS-IT?
```

"Who loaned it to you?"

```
                      cq--  cq-------------
(7) INDEX_2 BREAK EAR.  WHY?  WHO/WHAT-IS-IT?
```

"How did you become deaf?"

```
     q----------------   cq-------------
(8) WHEN+YEAR BE-BORN?  WHO/WHAT-IS-IT?
```

"What year were you born in?"

```
    cq-------------             cq------------
(9) WHO/WHAT-IS-IT_X?  IN PURSE.  WHO/WHAT-IS-IT_X?
```

"What's in that purse there?"

       Another kind of content question without any interrogative pronoun is like a statement except that the questioned element of the sentence is simply left out, i.e. there is a gap instead of an interrogative pronoun. Also, the head tilt and facial expression are like those used in a yes-no question.

```
      q-------
(10) FROG DO?
```

"What's the frog doing?"

```
      q----------
(11) INDEX_2 YEAR?
```

"How old are you?"

```
        q-----------
(12) INDEX2 NAME?

     "What's your name?"

        q-----------
(13) INDEX2 WANT?

     "What do you want?"
```

3.7   Commands and requests

3.7.1 Commands

In a command, the second person subject is usually left out, and the head comes forward slightly. Frequently there is a forcefulness of movement which would not be present in a statement.

```
     c------    c-----
(1)  GET-UP!   STAND!

     "Get up!  On your feet!"

     c---
(2)  EAT!

     "Eat it!"
```

Commands may be made more polite by putting the sign PLEASE at the beginning of the sentence.

```
     c----------
(3)  PLEASE EAT.

     "Please eat."
```

3.7.2 Requests

A request is similar in communicative function to a command, since the idea is usually to get someone to do something. But requests are more polite and less forceful than commands, and are usually intended to give the addressee the option of not responding. Requests are often formed like commands except for the sign BE-ABLE before the main verb of the command.

```
     c--------------------
(1)  PLEASE BE-ABLE STAND.

     "Could you please stand?"
```

Requests, unlike commands, may have first person subjects, e.g. when the signer is requesting permission to do something. The signer simply signs PLEASE before signing what he or she would like permission to do, phrasing it as a statement. The head moves forward as in any other command or request.

```
       c-----------------
(2) PLEASE ₁SEEₓ BOOK.

    "Could I please see the book?"
```

3.8   Existentials

3.8.1 Noun phrase existentials

An indefinite noun phrase by itself may be used to assert the existence of something or introduce a referent into a discourse. No special facial expressions or movement of the head are associated with this construction.

```
(1)  THREE BEAR.

     "There were three bears."

(2)  BICYCLE TWO.

     "There were two bicycles."
```

3.8.2 The use of THERE-IS

The sign THERE-IS is used as a translation for Spanish *hay* "there is" in signed Spanish, but is also used some in Mexican Sign Language. In signing between Deaf people it is used primarily to assert the availability of something edible or drinkable. The item whose availability is asserted follows THERE-IS. The verb HAVE may be used in the same way. The special negative form THERE-ISN'T-ANY is most often used to assert that a food or drink item has run out or that it is not available in the house, or in the sense of "be here" for people.

```
(1)  THERE-IS WATER.

     "There's water."

     q-------------
(2)  THERE-IS COFFEE?

     "Is there coffee?"

(3)  THERE-ISN'T-ANY COFFEE.

     "There isn't any coffee."

     q-----------
(4)  HAVE COFFEE?

     "Is there coffee?"

     q------------
(5)  THERE-IS FELIPE?

     "Is Felipe here?"
```

```
(6) THERE-ISN'T-ANY.

    "He's not here," or "There isn't any here," or "We've
    run out of it."
```

Appendix: diagrams

Editor's note: A set of hand-drawn diagrams, referenced from various points, is part of this paper.

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