

Signed languages are generally believed to exhibit a greater amount of iconicity compared to spoken languages. In my talk I will argue that at the lexical level iconicity emerges and functions similarly in languages of both modalities.

I will present an annotation system for signed languages that captures iconicity on a sub-lexical level. Each phonological parameter of a sign (Location, Handshape, Movement) can have its own iconic motivation, either representing itself (absolute iconicity) or something else (relative iconicity). On the basis of 300 signs of Spanish Sign Language (LSE) and 300 signs of American Sign Language (ASL) annotated according to this system, I will show that the perception of iconicity by signers and non-signers is modulated by systematic contrasts of sub-lexical iconic features.

At the end of my talk I will show that the main difference between signed and spoken languages with respect to iconicity lies in the proportion of absolute iconicity, but not relative iconicity.