



Logic and Iconicity: The Case of Sign Language Loci
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Thursday, May 7, 3:30-5pm
Neubauer Collegium
5701 S Woodlawn, First Floor Forum
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Colloquium organized by [The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language](#) and the [Department of Linguistics](#) with support from the [Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society](#).

Sign languages are known to display the same general grammatical properties as spoken languages ('Universal Grammar'), but *also* to make greater use of iconic mechanisms. In [Schlenker, Lamberton and Santoro \(2013\)](#), it was argued that loci (= positions in signing space corresponding to discourse referents) can have an iconic semantics, in the sense that certain geometric relations among loci (subset and relative complementation, as well as high/low position relative to the signer) are preserved by the interpretation function. We extend these results in two ways. First, we ask whether plural and height specifications of loci display the formal behavior of *phi*-features in remaining uninterpreted in focus- and ellipsis-constructions (as in the bound readings of, e.g., *Only Mary admires herself*, or of *Mary admires herself, and John does too*). Data from ASL and LSF show that plural and height specifications may indeed remain uninterpreted in these constructions, although we conclude that the *interpretation* of this fact is complex. Second, we ask whether the iconic analysis should be extended to instances of 'locative shift', i.e. cases in which a locus refers to a spatial location (e.g. Paris), another locus refers to an individual (e.g. John), but one may sometimes point towards the *spatial* locus to refer to the individual (e.g. because John lives in Paris). This is non-trivial since earlier cases that were discussed within an iconic semantics pertained to the *orientation* of loci, not to the *displacement* of loci in signing space. While one may initially wish to analyze these cases in terms of a (possibly non-standard) mechanism of agreement, we argue on the basis of new data that an iconic analysis is more promising. We conclude that pronouns in sign language must be analyzed within a *formal semantics with iconicity*, one in which grammatical, logical and iconic constraints interact within a unified framework.

Relevant readings:

[Schlenker, Lamberton and Santoro \(2013\)](#) (*Linguistics & Philosophy*)
[Schlenker 2014](#) (*Natural Language Semantics*)

Free and open to the public. ASL-English interpreting will be provided. Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this event should contact Laura Tharsen at ltharsen@uchicago.edu.