Rectification constructions are form/function associations (constructions in the sense of Goldberg, 1995) which include a rejection of an accessible claim/assumption X (=satellite) and a substitutive alternative claim Y (=nucleus), optionally mediated by an explicit connector of substitution. For example, the ‘not X, but Y’ rectification construction includes an explicit satellite (‘not X’), a nucleus (‘Y’) and an explicit connector of substitution (‘but’).

I will first introduce the semantic, syntactic, and prosodic components of rectification constructions in general. I will then present 17 different rectification constructions, dividing them up according to their evolutionary point of departure. Finally, I will offer a grammaticalization path for each rectification construction, relying on a diachronic analysis.

It is widely assumed that the gestures used in day-to-day conversations become the raw material for the creation of new words in sign languages (e.g., Janzen & Shaffer, 2002; Wilcox, 2004; de Vos, 2012). However, there are very few accounts of this transmission. It is not known which gestures are more likely to enter a sign language, for example. Are all of the distinct, unambiguous, and portable gestures (emblems) used by hearing people recruited into a sign language? Or do some emblems retain their status as gestures? Understandably, most studies tend to start from the point of view of the sign language and work backwards to locate the etymological roots in hearing gestures (e.g., Marsaja, 2008; Nyst, 2007). At the same time, non-grammaticalized gestures used by deaf signers may be overlooked because they are not considered part of the sign language. Here we present two lines of research that investigate how gestures are recruited for use in sign languages.

Emblems and the KSL Lexicon:
Comparing Datasets from Gesturers and Signers
Hope Morgan
The project described in this talk widens the scope of investigation to compare both domains – hearing gesture and deaf signing – in one particular ethnic group, the Luo of western Kenya. This project compares a study describing 71 gestures collected in western Kenya in 1970-72 from four ethnic groups (Creider, 1977) with the author’s own corpus of 30+ hours of video with 25 Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) signers (Morgan fieldwork, 2011-2012) and the KSL Lexical Database (Morgan 2017).

Results show that in everyday interactions, nothing from the gestural repertoire is lost, though when gestures become signs, they become more specific semantically and are subject to syntactic and phonotactic constraints. Yet not all gestures turn into signs. Only 33 out of 53 Luo gestures listed by Creider have a lexical counterpart. For those that are lexicalized, further grammaticalization can occur, as demonstrated in the case of a gesture glossed as “no more, with disastrous implication”, which has diverged in both form and meaning into two common KSL signs: the perfective FINISH and the intensifier HARASH.

Overall, this study reveals that patterns of grammaticalization in sign languages reach into the gestural substrate and suggest that a full account of sign language origins should involve an analysis of hearing gesture.

Gestural Analogues and the Origins of Signs in San Juan Quiahije Chatino Sign Language
Kate Mesh

The projects presented here investigate gestural analogues – signs that share their form with conventional gestures – in San Juan Quiahije Chatino Sign Language (SJQCSL), a language emerging in an indigenous community in southern Mexico.

The first study, performed in collaboration with Dr. Lynn Hou (University of California, Santa Barbara), considers five such gestural analogues with negative meanings (Mesh & Hou, under review). We find that the gesturers and signers map a core set of negative meanings to the five forms. However, deaf signers alone have begun to map new meanings to the forms, as well. We propose that the changes introduced by the deaf signers may result from how they learn the meaning of the analogues, since they receive the gestures in the absence of the speech that often accompanies them.

A second study, performed in the same community, investigates which local pointing practices are integrated into SJQCSL (Mesh, 2017). Speakers in Mesoamerica share the practice of raising the height of the pointing arm to reflect the distance of the target – the higher the arm, the farther away the
target, with a near-vertical point used to indicate the farthest targets (Levinson, 2003). SJQCSL Signers share the “up is far” principle, but they do not share speakers’ additional distance-marking practices, including pointing with extended arm and an open handshape. The divergence in signers’ and gesturers’ pointing forms may be due to the fact that arm extension and handshape already bear a distinct set of meanings in SJQCSL.

The findings from these combined studies suggest that signers do not simply “adopt” gestures into their languages wholesale. Rather, signers recruit features of gestures that are accessible to them, and adapt these features as they integrate them into emerging phonological, morphological, and syntactic systems.

References

Mesh, K., & L. Hou. (Under review). Negation in San Juan Quiahije Chatino Sign Language: The Integration and Adaptation of Negative Emblems.