Strong Pronominals in ASL and LSF[*]

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Abstract: We argue that some lexical constructions in ASL and LSF behave as if they were intrinsically focused even in the absence of overt focus. This behavior is displayed in ASL by a person classifier signed at the same time as a pointing sign indexing it, a strategy that seems to be available in LSF as well. But LSF also has a strong pointing sign *PI* which displays this behavior in the absence of a person classifier.

While languages with clitics such as French and Italian display a distinction between weak and strong pronouns (e.g. Cardinaletti and Starke 1999), the existence of this distinction in sign language isn't obvious, in particular because the *normal* pointing sign is related to a gesture that often accompanies *strong* pronouns in spoken language. Still, we argue that ASL (American Sign Language) and LSF (French Sign Language) display a related distinction: besides normal pointing signs (e.g. Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006, Schlenker 2017), they have strong pronominals that appear to be intrinsically focused and thus to associate with focus-sensitive particles even in the absence of prosodically marked focus.

Data were elicited from one native Deaf ASL and one native LSF signer, each the child of Deaf, signing parents. We used the playback method and transcription conventions described in Schlenker 2017, Schlenker et al. 2016, with quantitative acceptability judgments (7 = best, average score at the beginning of each example) and detailed inferential questions; the reference of each video and the number of judgments obtained – e.g. *ASL, 24, 75, 3 judgments* – are found after each numbered example, and raw data can be found in the Supplementary Materials.

Schlenker et al. 2016 investigated systematic paradigms involving *in situ* focalization in ASL and LSF, yielding in some cases embedded implicatures with scalar terms. With pronouns, (1)b shows that without focus (marked as the superscript $_F$), *ONLY* associates with all alternatives to the entire VP, whereas with focus on *IX-a* in (1)c, only alternatives obtained by replacing *IX-a* with other DPs are negated (see the Supplementary Materials for the consultant's description of means of focus marking, involving for instance raised eyebrows, forward tilted torso, longer hold times, faster motion…). Crucially, in (2)b the pronominal *CL-IX-a* yields the same meaning *as if* it were focused, but overt focus as in (2)c is unnecessary to obtain this interpretation. *CL-IX-a* is realized by signing the person classifier *CL* with the non-dominant hand, while pointing towards it with the dominant hand, as illustrated by the picture in (2)b. The result appears to be intrinsically strong. (Note that (1)-(2) are highly acceptable but that the consultant discerns an English influence due to *ONLY*; further paradigms should be investigated.)

(1) *Context:* The speaker is the director of the school. He tells a group of teachers what they are allowed to say or to put in writing after the students took an exam.

IX-1 RECENTLY CONVERSATION JOHN$_a$ MARY$_b$.
'I recently had a conversation with John and Mary.
a. ^{7} IX-1   ALLOW IX-a TELL IX-b BILL FAIL.
I allowed him to tell her that Bill failed.'
b. ^{7} IX-1   ONLY   ALLOW IX-a TELL IX-b BILL FAIL.
I only allowed him to tell her that Bill failed.'
=> the speaker only allows the following: John tells Mary that Bill failed
c. $^{6.7}$ IX-1   ONLY   ALLOW IX-a$_F$ TELL IX-b BILL FAIL.
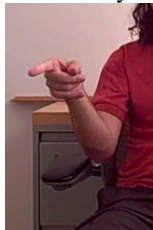I only allowed him$_F$ to tell her that Bill failed.'
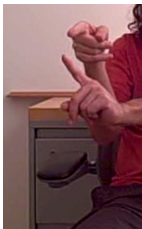=> the speaker disallows anyone other than John to tell Mary that Bill failed
(ASL, 24, 75; 3 judgments)

(2) IX-1 RECENTLY CONVERSATION JOHN$_a$ MARY$_b$.
'I recently had a conversation with John and Mary.

a. [7] IX-1   ONLY   ALLOW IX-a_____ TELL IX-a BILL FAIL.
I only allowed him to tell her that Bill failed.'

b. [7] IX-1   ONLY   ALLOW CL-IX-a_____ TELL IX-b BILL FAIL.
I only allowed him$_F$ to tell her that Bill failed.'
=> the speaker only allows the following: John tells Mary that Bill failed
c. [6.7] IX-1   ONLY   ALLOW CL-IX-a$_F$ TELL IX-B BILL FAIL.
I only allowed him$_F$ to tell her that Bill failed.'
=> the speaker disallows anyone other than John to tell Mary that Bill failed
([ASL, 24, 76]; 3 judgments)

In LSF, a simplex pronominal produced with the labialization *PI* appears to be strong. This *PI* pronoun doesn't just involve a pointing sign but also a movement of the index finger, first held by the thumb and then released towards its target (see the video in (3)c); it is sometimes translated as 'celui-ci' ('this one'), but it also has uses as a relativizer (Hauser 2016, Hauser and Geraci 2017). In (3)a, without focus *ONLY* appears to associate with the verb, while with focus on *IX-b* in (3)b we obtained (for reasons we don't understand) conflicting judgments, with association with one or both pronouns (here and throughout our LSF data, focus seems to be primarily marked by eyebrow raising). The interesting observation lies in (3)c-d: *ONLY* associates with *PI* irrespective of whether *PI* is focused (by way of eyebrow raising).

(3) YESTERDAY IX-1 1-MEET MARIE$_b$ PIERRE$_a$. ONLY IX-1 WANT
'Yesterday I met Marie and Pierre. I only want(ed)
a. [7] IX-b b-HELP-a IX-a.
her to help him.'   (video of *IX-b*: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Mz-VKVeYNKR1RKUlI3SEdydGc/view?usp=sharing)
=> the speaker doesn't want any action other than helping
b. [7] IX-b$_F$ b-HELP-a IX-a.
her$_F$ to help him.'
c. [7] PI-b b-HELP-a IX-a.
her$_F$ to help him.'   (video of *PI-b*: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Mz-VKVeYNKVGNZZzVlT2VNUWM/view?usp=sharing)
d [7] PI-b$_F$ b-AIDE-a IX-a.
her$_F$ to help him.' ([LSF, 57, 2482]; 2 judgments)
(b), c, d => the speaker doesn't want anyone other than Marie to help Pierre
b yielded conflicting inferences: the speaker doesn't want (i) anyone other than Mary to help Pierre (1 judgment); (ii) anyone other than Mary to help anyone other than Pierre (1 judgment)

(4)c-d shows that the same semantic result (suggestive of a strong pronominal) can be obtained by using the ASL strategy discussed at the outset, with a person classifier simultaneously signed with a pointing sign, as shown by the video in (4)c. And (5)c-d shows that in this case we can also replace the pointing sign with *PI* (video in (5)c), which yields a similar semantic result.

(4) YESTERDAY IX-1 1-MEET MARIE$_b$ PIERRE$_a$.
'Yesterday I met Marie and Pierre. I only want(ed)
a. [6.7] ONLY IX WANT   IX-b b-HELP-a IX-a.
him to help her.'
=> the speaker doesn't want any action other than helping

    b. [7] ONLY WANT   IX-b$_F$ b-HELP-a IX-a.
    him$_F$ to help her.'
    c. [6.3] ONLY IX   CL-IX-b b-HELP-a IX-a.
    him$_F$ to help her.'   (video of *CL-IX-b*: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Mz-VKVeYNKaEg5dHd3MjZzaUU/view?usp=sharing)
    d. [6.7] ONLY IX   CL-IX-b$_F$ b-HELP-a IX-a.
    him$_F$ to help her.'
    b, c, d => the speaker doesn't want anyone other than Marie to help Pierre
    (LSF, 57, 2492; 3 judgments)

(5) YESTERDAY IX-1 1-MEET MARIE$_b$ PIERRE$_a$.
    'Yesterday I met Marie and Pierre. I only want(ed)
    a. [6.7] ONLY IX-1 WANT   IX-b b-HELP-a IX-a.
    him to help her.'
    => the speaker doesn't want any action other than helping
    b. [7] IX-1 ONLY WANT   IX-b$_F$ b-HELP-a IX-a.
    him$_F$ to help her.'
    c. [7] IX-1 ONLY WANT   CL-PI-b b-HELP-a IX-a.
    him$_F$ to help her.'   (video of *CL-PI-b*: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Mz-VKVeYNKanBJRVl1LVhpZDQ/view?usp=sharing)
    d. [6.7] ONLY WANT   CL-PI-b$_F$ b-HELP-a IX-a.
    b, c, d => the speaker doesn't want anyone other than Marie to help Pierre
    him$_F$ to help her.' (LSF, 57, 2498; 3 judgments)

Supplementary Materials

Raw ASL and LSF data can be found at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Mz-VKVeYNKXzFQbXBoU0RteGs/view?usp=sharing

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