

Iconicity, scope, and the grammar

Sign language communicates meaning not only through a combinatorial grammar but also through iconicity -- structure-preserving mappings between form and meaning. How do iconicity and the grammar interact? The simplest possible answer is that they interact very little: both communicate meanings, but these meanings are combined intersectively at the level of discourse, like distinct propositions. I will argue that this simple hypothesis is incorrect: at least some iconic meanings are not combined via intersection, and iconic meaning must in general be integrated throughout grammatical composition. I will argue that an illuminating way to think about iconicity is in terms of semantic scope: like logical operators, iconic meanings can take scope at different levels in a logical form. Depending on where the iconic meaning takes scope, it may have different effects on the overall meaning of a sentence, sometimes seeming to disappear completely. I motivate this perspective with data from two different domains: first, iconic modifications of verbs, including pluractional verbs; second, the use of loci to organize discourse referents.