

Agent-backgrounding in Catalan Sign Language (LSC)

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This paper examines backgrounding strategies for human agents in Catalan Sign Language, that is, constructions featuring human agents that are non-referential. We identify and analyze four types of agent-backgrounding strategies: subjectless constructions, indefinite pronouns, the impersonal axis, and general nouns. Extending on previous work, we offer a description and a semantico-pragmatic analysis of each construction.

Keywords:: backgrounding, Catalan Sign Language (LSC), impersonal axis, indefinite pronoun, impersonal reference, R-impersonals, generic human nouns

1. Introduction

The present paper examines backgrounding strategies for human agents in Catalan Sign Language (*llengua de signes catalana*, LSC), understood as constructions featuring human agents that are non-referential. We used the Jena-Paris R-Impersonals questionnaire (see Section 5 of the Introduction) to elicit a range of strategies used in LSC in contexts that are cross-linguistically typical for pronouns and noun phrases that background human agents. Building on previous work, we focus on four types of agent-backgrounding strategies: empty subject constructions, indefinite pronouns, the impersonal axis, and lexical subjects.

2. Methodology

The data used in this study is based on elicitation sessions from two native deaf signers (one woman and one man), in their early 50s living in the area of

Barcelona. We used the R-impersonals questionnaire, in written language, as a starting point to elicit a representative range of possible constructions used for agent-backgrounding. The questionnaire probes a number of contrasts that are known to be relevant cross-linguistically in the distribution of different impersonal human subjects. In order to minimize transfer effects from the questionnaire language (written Spanish) to the language under examination (LSC), we provided a wider context for each example and proceeded using the following four steps. In step 1, we provided the context in LSC. In step 2, we showed the target sentence in written language. In step 3, we asked the informants to provide the most natural way of rendering the target sentence and recorded the possible options. In follow-up sessions (step 4), we discussed the recorded signed videos. The sentences were modified when needed, and new examples with different strategies were added and discussed. In step 2, it was made clear to the informants that the target written sentence should be seen as a metalanguage (Matthewson 2004): the instruction to the informants was to consider the target sentence as an input from which they should aim to find the most natural equivalent in LSC for the given context. It was explained that they did not need to use the same pronoun/noun phrase as in the written version. The follow-up sessions in step 4 are crucial, as they allow detaching the LSC examples from the written questionnaire in Spanish to control for transfer of Spanish structures into the LSC examples. The final output for the present study came out of the discussions of the signed versions of the sentences after this final step.

Based on the questionnaire, we elicited the following strategies used for agent-backgrounding/unknown human agents:

- (1) Nominal strategies
 - a. No lexical subject
 - b. Lexical subjects
 - i. Generalized noun: $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}+++}$
 - ii. Determiner + generalized noun: $\text{ONE}_{\text{up}} \text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$
 - c. Pronouns
 - i. Indefinite pronoun: ONE_{up} ‘one/someone’
 - ii. Indefinite pronoun: $\text{WHO}^{\wedge}\text{SOME}_{\text{up}}$ ‘someone’
 - iii. 3rd person plural: IX3pl ‘they’
- (2) Inflectional strategies
 - a. Impersonal axis
 - b. Agreement verbs agreeing with an empty high locus

3. Backgrounding strategies

In what follows, we discuss four agent-backgrounding strategies in LSC used in R-impersonal contexts in more detail: constructions without a lexical subject (Section 3.1), two indefinite pronouns (Section 3.2), the impersonal axis (Section 3.3), and lexical subjects (Section 3.4).

3.1 No lexical subject

Barberà & Cabredo Hofherr (2017a) show that there are at least two distinct constructions without a lexical subject in LSC. In the “high locus construction”, an empty subject combines with an agreement verb that shows agreement with an empty locus in a high location. In the “non-agreeing central construction”, a plain verb is articulated without a lexical subject in a central location.

The two constructions are clearly distinct. The high locus construction forces a human interpretation of the agent while the non-agreeing central construction also allows anticausative readings and readings with inanimate causes (Barberà & Cabredo Hofherr 2017a: 779–780, henceforth B&CH).¹

(3) *High locus construction*

POT FLOWER **BREAK**_{3up}.

‘They/someone broke the vase.’

(human agent only)



Figure 1. High locus agreeing construction featuring the verb **BREAK**_{3up} (B&CH 2017a: 779–780, example (33) & Figure 9)

1. This article follows the usual glossing conventions in the sign language literature, representing manual signs by the capitalized word corresponding to the translation of the sign. The abbreviations used in the glosses are the following (# is a placeholder for the loci in signing space corresponding to 1st, 2nd and 3rd person referents): IX# (index pointing sign); #-VERB-# (verb agreeing with subject and object); sub-indices mark localization in signing space: up (up); c (centre); lower indexed letters (a...) mark coreference relations; CL for classifier construction, followed by the kind of classifier (*ent* for entity classifier) and a rough meaning description. Reduplication of signs is indicated by +++.

(4) *Non-agreeing central construction*POT FLOWER **BREAK_c**.

‘The vase broke.’

- i. anticausative
- ii. inanimate cause
- iii. human agent



Figure 2. Non-agreeing central construction featuring the verb **BREAK_c** (B&CH 2017a: 779–780, example (32) & Figure 8)

In LSC, the high locus construction is a transitive construction and the null subject can therefore be analyzed as an R-impersonal strategy. The non-agreeing central construction, in contrast, is not an R-impersonal strategy but an argument reduction process more akin to a middle construction (in Keenan & Dryers’s (2007) sense), allowing different types of agents and anticausative interpretations. For a detailed discussion of the syntactic properties of these two subject-less constructions, see B&CH (2017a: 778–794).

B&CH (2017a) analyze the high locus construction as an R-impersonal strategy with the high empty locus corresponding to a null R-impersonal subject. Here, we examine the distribution of the high locus construction across the range of contexts given in the R-impersonals questionnaire (see the Introduction to this volume; Q1, Q2 etc. refer to the questions in the questionnaire). The most common types of context available for the high locus agreeing construction are vague existential contexts (Q2), i.e., episodic contexts lacking temporal specification (existential quantification over a time interval):

- (5) _{3^{sup}}TELL₁ ONE THEME SLEEP CAN’T-SLEEP.

‘They told me a story which didn’t allow me to sleep.’

As shown by the two examples below, the high locus construction in LSC also appears in anchored existential contexts (Q1: situations anchored to a specific point in time and space). The example in (6) includes a backwards agreeing verb

like STEAL (moving from object to subject), and the example in (7) includes a regular agreeing verb like BRING (moving from subject to object).

- (6) YESTERDAY UNIVERSITY BUILDING IN-FRONT BIKE IX₁ STEAL_{3up}.
‘Yesterday they stole my bike in front of the university building.’
- (7) TODAY MAIL_{3up} BRING TIME 8 MORNING.
‘today they brought the mail at 8 am.’

Corporate contexts (Q6 with designated subjects associated with the predicate) are also available for the high locus construction. The example in (8) features the regular agreeing verb TELL (moving from subject to object), and the example in (9) features the backwards agreeing verb TAKE (moving from object to subject).

- (8) _{3up}TELL₁ LIE MORE. IX_{3 up} I-V-A INCREASE REASON FOR INFORM THERE-IS SHOW.
‘They told another lie and this allowed them to justify the increase of the VAT.’
- ▶ (9) CLOTHES SECOND-HAND _{3up}TAKE+++.
‘They have taken away the second-hand clothes.’

Finally, locative universal contexts (Q7 characterized by the presence of a locative restricting the referent of the subject) are also available for the high locus construction. In (10) the backwards agreeing verb UNDERSTAND shows agreement with an empty locus in a high location.

- (10) SPAIN IX_{3up.a} IX_{2 2} UNDERSTAND-NOT_{3up.a}.
‘In Spain, they don’t understand us.’

3.2 Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns are one of the most frequent strategies to convey R-impersonal contexts in LSC (Barberà & Quer 2013). In particular, the pronouns WHO[^]SOME_{up} and ONE_{up} convey epistemic non-specificity: the referent is unknown to the signer. The two indefinite pronouns are both articulated in a high locus and co-occur with particular non-manuals, illustrated in Figure 3 and Figure 4, that include sucking the cheeks in and pulling the mouth ends down, sometimes combined with a shrug (Barberà 2016).

The most common environments in which both pronouns may be found are indirect evidential existentials (Q3), vague and anchored existentials (Q2 and Q1), and conditionals (Q11). In fact, WHO[^]SOME_{up} and ONE_{up} are not distinguished by the type of contexts in which they are found, but rather by their intrinsic semantic properties.

Both pronouns pattern with indefinite pronouns, not with existential readings of dedicated R-impersonal pronouns like French *on* ((13) and (14)), as they do not



Figure 3. Indefinite pronoun WHO^{SOME}_{up}



Figure 4. Indefinite pronoun ONE_{up}

allow generic readings (11) or corporate readings (12) (see Sections 4.1 and 4.2 in B&CH 2017b: 94–99).

- (11) a. LLEIDA ONE_{up} SNAIL EAT.
 b. LLEIDA WHO^{SOME}_{up} SNAIL EAT.
 ‘In Lleida, there is someone who eats snails.’
 → not generalizing over people associated with Lleida
 (B&CH 2017b: 95, example 14)
- (12) a. WHO^{SOME}_{up} RAISE TAXES.
 b. ONE_{up} RAISE TAXES.
 ‘Someone raised taxes.’
 (B&CH 2017b: 95, example 13)
- (13) À Lleida on mange des escargots. [French]
 in Lleida *on* eats DET.INDEF snails
 ‘In Lleida, people eat snails.’
 → generalizing over people associated with Lleida
- (14) On a augmenté les impôts. [French]
on has raised DET taxes
 → generalizing over the group of people associated with raising taxes

The pronouns WHO^{SOME}_{up} and ONE_{up} differ with respect to their specificity profile. As shown in detail by Farkas (2002) and von Heusinger (2002) semantic specificity encompasses a range of diverse semantic properties. Following Farkas (2002), we distinguish epistemic, scopal, and partitive specificity. Both WHO^{SOME}_{up} and ONE_{up} are epistemically non-specific indefinite pronouns: the referent has to be unknown to both the signer and the addressee (B&CH 2017b: 94).

- (15) a. ONE_{up} HOUSE ENTER STEAL_{3up}.
 b. WHO^{SOME}_{up} HOUSE ENTER STEAL_{3up}.
 ‘Someone broke into the house.’

With respect to scopal and partitive specificity, the two pronouns differ. WHO^{SOME}_{up} is interpreted as scopally non-specific, co-varying with adverbs and event pluralities (16a), while ONE_{up} is scopally specific: the referent of ONE_{up} is constant across event-pluralities (16b) (see Sections 4.3 and 5.3 in B&CH 2017b).

- (16) a. BUILDING IX POSS OFFICE DANGER. WHO^{SOME}_{up} STEAL_{3up} MONEY.
 ‘The building of my office is very dangerous. They (always) steal money.’
 → the stealing event has happened many times, potentially different agents
 b. BUILDING IX DANGER. IX₁ POSS OFFICE ONE_{up} STEAL_{3up} MONEY.
 ‘The building of my office is very dangerous. Someone stole/steals money.’
 i. single referent for the agent and the stealing event is punctual
 ii. single referent for the agent and stealing event is iterated (same unknown agent in multiple events) (B&CH 2017b: 101, example 42a/b)

The two pronouns also differ with respect to partitivity: while the referent of ONE_{up} is interpreted partitively, as belonging to a salient group (17b), WHO^{SOME}_{up} does not impose a partitive interpretation (17a) (Section 5.4 in B&CH 2017b).

- (17) BUILDING IX FIRE FIREMEN ARRIVE.
 ‘The building was on fire. The firemen arrived.’
 a. WHO^{SOME}_{up} CL_{ent} ‘go up roof’.
 ‘Someone (fireman or person from the street) went onto the roof.’
 b. ONE_{up} CL_{ent} ‘go up roof’.
 ‘One (of the firemen) went onto the roof.’
 (B&CH 2017b: 101–102, example 43a/b)

WHO^{SOME}_{up} and ONE_{up} pattern with indefinite pronouns like English *someone* as they do not allow generic interpretations in simple sentences (such as unrestricted universal contexts and locative universal contexts) and do not give rise to corporate readings in corporate contexts. Like indefinite pronouns, they allow generalizing readings in *if/when*-clauses:

- (18) ONE_{up} MOMENT HOSPITAL GO, ALWAYS THINK RESULT WORST.
 ‘When someone_j is admitted to the hospital, s/he_j always fears the worst results.’
- (19) WHO^SOME_{up} EXAM DONE, LEAVE CAN.
 ‘When someone finishes the exam, s/he can leave.’

(B&CH 2017b: 99, example 32)

Summarizing, we have provided arguments that show that WHO^SOME_{up} and ONE_{up} are indefinite pronouns that differ with respect to their specificity profile: while both are epistemically non-specific, ONE_{up} is interpreted as scopally and partitively specific, and WHO^SOME_{up} is neutral with respect to scopal and partitive specificity (for a more detailed discussion see B&CH 2017b).

3.3 Impersonal axis

The use of the impersonal axis for backgrounded human reference in LSC was first described in Barberà & Quer (2013). The impersonal axis marks the lack of referential encoding of the discourse referents through locations established in signing space by means of agreeing verbs. The axis goes from a spatial location established between 1st and 3rd person to a location established between 2nd and 3rd person location (Figure 5).

- (20) IF _{1/3}INSULT_{2/3}, IGNORE.
 ‘If they insult you_{imp}, you’d better ignore them.’
 (Barberà & Quer 2013: 249, example (16))



a. Regular verb _{1/3}INSULT_{2/3}



b. Backwards verb _{2/3}SUMMON_{1/3}

Figure 5. Impersonal axis

In the impersonal axis structure, both arguments of the verb are two non-specified arguments and this is marked in the diagonal movement of the agreeing verb and in the initial and final locations. Examples (21) and (22) below show instances of R-impersonal objects. The contexts of the two sentences are general instructions given to students in a generalizing context. Because the audience of the two sentences are students, they cannot yet get to the examination stage (they first need to get the final degree). Therefore, the two sentences cannot trigger a deictic meaning. Both regular and backwards agreeing verbs may be inserted in a structure where the impersonal axis is used. As shown below, a regular agreeing verb like CALL (21) and a backwards verb like SUMMON (22) display an inverse pattern of path movement: while the regular verb moves from an unspecified subject location to an unspecified object location (22), the backwards verb moves from the unspecified object location to the unspecified subject location.



- (21) EXAMINATION EXAM $_{1/3}$ CALL $_{2/3}$, SURE $_{2/3}$ SELECT $_{1/3}$ WORK.
 ‘If they call you_{imp} for the public examination for sure you will get the job.’
- (22) EXAMINATION EXAM IF $_{2/3}$ SUMMON $_{1/3}$, SURE PASS.
 ‘If they summon you_{imp} for the public examination for sure you will get the job.’

Non-manual marking is a crucial component in the articulation of the impersonal axis. Examples with the impersonal axis (21) and (22) are expressed with a trembling side movement of the head starting before the articulation of the manual sign, a darting eyegaze non-aligned with the final end-point of the verb and sometimes with a lax articulation of the verb (example (21) corresponding to Figure 6).



Figure 6. $_{1/3}$ CALL $_{2/3}$, impersonal axis with impersonal reading

The impersonal reading found with the impersonal axis contrasts with (23), which is an instance of an episodic context with a deictic use of the 2nd person in which instructions are given to a particular individual. The deictic reading is triggered by the location of the object argument in the 2nd person spatial location and the non-manual marking includes a fixed eyegaze towards the spatial location assigned for the 2nd person and an alignment between the direction of the eyegaze and the final end point of the verb (see Figure 7 corresponding to (23)).

- (23) EXAMINATION EXAM₃CALL₂, SURE₂SELECT₃ WORK.
 ‘If they call you for the public examination for sure you will get the job.’



Figure 7. $_3$ CALL₂, deictic reading

That a spatial location is established between the $1/3$ and the $2/3$ locations is shown by the fact that a coreferential pronoun directed to the same $1/3$ location is found in the subsequent sentence in (24). Agreeing verbs directed towards the same location use it for coreference (25).

- (24) IF $1/3a$ INSULT $2/3$, BETTER IGNORE. REALITY ILL-MANNERED IX $1/3a$.
 ‘If they insult you_{imp}, you better ignore them. They are the ones who are ill-mannered, indeed.’
- (25) IF $1/3a$ INSULT EXPEL $1/3a$.
 ‘If they insult you_{imp}, they will be expelled.’

The impersonal axis in LSC is mainly found in vague existential contexts and in conditional contexts with a generic habitual reading and it is favored by an *if/when* structure.² As shown in example (26), the *if/when* structure of the impersonal axis is also found with locative universals in generic/habitual contexts where the locative expression functions as part of the restriction of the generic quantification (‘when you are a new student in this university’).

- (26) UNIVERSITY IX STUDENT BEGINNER ARRIVE, ALWAYS $1/3$ MOCK $2/3$.
 ‘In this university, when you are a new student, you are always mocked.’

2. The special conditions in which the impersonal axis is found show the particular properties of the structure, which are akin to the special use of personal pronouns used with an impersonal reading. In the elicited data, no instance of 1st person singular has been found with an impersonal use. However, in naturalistic data and more concretely the Aesop fables narrated in LSC, we found some examples of 1st person singular pronouns with an impersonal reading, which always occurred in a conditional context (Barberà & Costello 2017). As for the 2nd person pronoun, while LSE and TÍD (Costello 2015 and Kelepir et al. this volume) allow a lax articulation form used with an impersonal reading as long as it is inserted in a conditional context, no equivalent has been found so far in LSC in elicited or naturalistic data.

3.4 Lexical subjects

Lexical subjects are another frequent strategy to convey agent-backgrounding. Here we focus on two different constructions signaled by two different lexical elements: on the one hand, the generalized noun $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}+++}$ articulated as the reduplication of the sign PERSON localized in a high locus; and on the other, the noun phrase formed by the indefinite determiner ONE_{up} and the generalized noun $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ in its singular form, both associated with a high locus.

The generalized noun $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}+++}$ is available mainly in locative universal contexts (27) and in unrestricted universal contexts (28), as shown below. While in (27) the verb TALK_{up} agrees with the high locus, in (28) the verb STEAL agrees with the central locus where the classifier predicate for “people walking” has been localized.

▶ (27) IX BALEARIC-ISLANDS $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}+++}$ TALK_{up} CATALAN.
‘In the Balearic Islands, they speak in Catalan.’

(28) SAY AREA BARCELONA $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}+++}$ CL_{ent} ‘person-walk_c’ WATCH-OUT
 $\text{STEAL}_{\text{c}+++}$.
‘They say that in Barcelona, when people walk about, they watch out for stealing.’

The combination of indefinite determiner and generalized noun, ONE_{up} $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$, is mainly available in specific and vague existential contexts, inferred existentials, unrestricted universal contexts, conditionals, and *when*-contexts. (29) shows a conditional and generic context in which the determiner and the generalized noun trigger a partitive meaning (‘one of the persons playing in the quiz game’). Example (30) shows an unrestricted universal context. The general noun $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ is a functional element, rather than a common noun. Replacing $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ by a common noun like CHILD in this same context yields a specific meaning of the noun phrase, that is, it refers to a particular child and the determiner is associated with a low locus. Crucially, the sign CHILD is signed at a low locus.³

▶ (29) IF ONE_{up} $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ REPLIES BAD, ELIMINATE.
‘If someone (of the players) gives an incorrect answer, he/she is out.’

(30) ONE_{up} $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ TELL LIST-1-2-3 BAD, NEVER.
‘A person never realizes their own bad habits.’

Interestingly, in corporate contexts, which include designated subjects (Kärde 1943; Pesetsky 1995), the use of $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}+++}$ and ONE_{up} $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ triggers dif-

3. For detailed arguments in favor of analyzing the sign $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ as a functional element, see Barberà (2012) and Pfau & Steinbach (2013).

ferent readings depending on the type of predicate they occur with. With predicates that include a strong implicature that the subject is of a particular type, as in “raise the taxes”, both $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}^{+++}$ and $\text{ONE}_{\text{up}} \text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ trigger a corporate meaning with the implicature that a particular person in charge is responsible for that. When $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}^{+++}$ is used, the subject associated to the predicate cannot be paraphrased as “someone” or “people in general”, and it triggers the implicature of “the particular people at the ministry in charge of it”. When $\text{ONE}_{\text{up}} \text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ is used, there is a strong implicature that it is precisely the former Minister of Finances (Montoro, in Spain in 2017).

- (31) a. $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}^{+++}$ TAXES RAISE.
 ‘They raised the taxes.’
 → corporate meaning: the particular people working at the ministry being in charge of it
- b. $\text{ONE}_{\text{up}} \text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$ TAXES RAISE.
 ‘One person (namely Montoro) raised the taxes.’
 → corporate and specific meaning

However, this is not the case with corporate contexts involving a predicate where the implicature of a designated subject is not so strong. The predicate “take the second-hand clothes” gives rise to a corporate meaning when featuring a null pronoun (32a). Yet, when a lexical subject is used, such as $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}^{+++}$ and $\text{ONE}_{\text{up}} \text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}$, the sentence may be ambiguous between a corporate meaning and an unrestricted meaning (32b, 32c). Therefore, the readings may possibly vary depending on the kind of predicate, rather than on the kind of impersonal context. Note that this holds not only for episodic uses of corporate readings, as shown in (32), but also for generic uses of corporate, such as ‘Here they deliver the mail at 8am.’

- (32) a. CLOTHES SECOND HAND TAKE_{3up}^{++}.
 ‘They took away the second-hand clothes.’
 → corporate meaning
- b. $\text{PERSON}_{\text{up}}^{+++}$ CLOTHES SECOND HAND TAKE_{3up}^{++}.
- i. ‘They (people from the relevant company) took away the second-hand clothes.’
 → corporate meaning
 - ii. ‘They (someone unspecified) took away the second-hand clothes.’
 → unrestricted meaning

- c. ONE_{up} PERSON_{up} CLOTHES SECOND HAND TAKE_{3up}++.
- i. Someone (from the relevant company) took away the second-hand clothes.
→ corporate meaning
 - ii. Someone (unspecified) took away the second-hand clothes.
→ unrestricted meaning

In anchored existential contexts and inferred contexts, when the determiner and generalized noun ONE_{up} PERSON_{up} is used, an evidential reading arises. The sentence is only felicitous if the person talked about has been seen, although not recognized. These cases are illustrated in (33) and (34).

- (33) HEY ONE_{up} PERSON_{up} IX-LOC KNOCK IX-LOC.
'Hey! One person (I have seen but I don't know) is knocking on the door.'
- (34) ONE_{up} PERSON_{up} TOUCH_c ALREADY.
'Someone (I have seen from far away) has already touched it.'

Finally, according to our informants, a different order of the determiner and the generalized noun does not convey a different meaning (in contrast with Italian Sign Language, in which the order is relevant, see Mantovan 2017). The determiner in both a prenominal and postnominal position gives rise to the same non-specific and unknown meaning, as long as it is associated with a high locus and co-occurs with the particular non-manuals associated with epistemicity (which include sucking the cheeks in and pulling the mouth ends down, sometimes combined with a shrug). In some contexts, the determiner, besides being associated with a high locus, may also have a trembling movement.

- (35) ONE_{up} PERSON_{up} / PERSON_{up} ONE_{up} MOMENT PREGNANCY BEGIN, ALWAYS
THROW UP.
'When someone is at the beginning of a pregnancy, they always throw up.'

4. Conclusions

Extending previous work, this paper focuses on four types of agent-backgrounding strategies in LSC and describes the semantico-pragmatic properties of each construction. First, in the high locus construction an empty subject combines with an agreement verb that shows agreement with an empty locus in a high location. It is a transitive construction, and the null subject can therefore be analyzed as an R-impersonal strategy. Second, the two indefinite pronouns, WHO^SOME_{up} and ONE_{up}, may be found in most of the impersonal contexts, but they differ with respect to their specificity profile: while both are epistemi-

cally non-specific, ONE_{up} is interpreted as scopally and partitively specific, while WHO[^]SOME_{up} is neutral with respect to scopal and partitive specificity. Third, the impersonal axis marks the lack of referential encoding of the discourse referents through locations established in signing space by means of agreeing verbs. The axis goes from a spatial location established between 1st and 3rd person to a location established between 2nd and 3rd person location. In the impersonal axis structure, both arguments of the verb are two non-specified arguments and this is marked in the diagonal movement path of the agreeing verb, in the initial and final locations, and in the particular non-manual marking associated with it. Last but not least, lexical subjects are another frequent strategy when conveying agent-backgrounding. Here we have focused on two different constructions involving two different lexical elements: on the one hand, the generalized noun PERSON_{up}+++ articulated as the reduplication of the sign PERSON localized in a high locus; and on the other, the noun phrase formed by the indefinite determiner ONE_{up} and the generalized noun PERSON_{up} in its singular form, both associated with a high locus. The main difference between the two forms is that the use of ONE_{up} PERSON_{up} in corporate contexts triggers a specific meaning for the referent, while this is not the case with PERSON_{up}+++ , where a corporate meaning is conveyed.

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