

Martine Zwets

## Locating the difference

A comparison between Dutch pointing gestures and pointing signs in Sign Language of the Netherlands

This dissertation investigates similarities and dissimilarities between pointing signs in Sign Language of the Netherlands and pointing gestures in spoken Dutch. A corpus of pointing signs was compared to a corpus of pointing gestures, which revealed that form as well as basic function is similar in the two modalities. Pointing is best described as the extension of one or more selected fingers that project a line into space, indicating a location. All pointing is directed at a location, whether or not this location is occupied by something, and whether or not the location or the object occupying the location is the intended referent of the pointing. As for the interpretation of pointing, three constraints play a role in determining the intended referent: referents are sought in the surrounding space of the sender and the addressee, referents are more likely to be objects than locations, and linguistic information is crucial in the interpretation of pointing. A distinction between pointing signs and pointing gestures was found in those cases where pointing to an empty location was used to refer to an absent object. Such a pointing can be either pointing to an imaginary object in a mental or narrative space, in which case the location is motivated, or it can be pointing to an empty location in order to localize a discourse referent for the purpose of future reference. In this case the location is not motivated. There is a difference between pointing in sign language and spoken language for this function.

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