In many sign languages around the world, some verbs can express grammatical agreement with not just one but two arguments, while other verbs do not express agreement at all. Moreover, and rather curiously, there is a remarkable degree of semantic overlap across sign languages between verbs that possess agreement properties. It has been suggested that iconicity has some part to play in this: in sign languages, there is the potential for aspects of verb meaning to be iconically represented in a verb's form.

In this dissertation, I investigate how semantics and morphosyntactic structure interact in constructions containing verbs with varying agreement properties in German Sign Language (DGS), using naturalistic dialogues between signers from the DGS Corpus as the primary data source.

I show that certain semantic properties - also known to govern transitivity marking in spoken languages - are predictive of verb type in DGS, where indeed systematic iconic mappings play a mediating role. The results enable the formulation of cross-linguistic predictions about the interplay between verb semantics and verb type in sign languages.

A subsequent analysis of a range of morphosyntactic properties of different verb types leads up to the conclusion that even ‘plain’ verbs, in fact, grammatically agree with their arguments. This in turn motivates a unified syntactic analysis in terms of agreement of constructions with verbs that do and do not overtly express it, thus presenting a novel solution to the typological puzzle that supposedly only verbs of a (partially) semantically definable subset agree in DGS and other sign languages.