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## Interrogative constructions in creoles and sign languages

In this talk, I will explore potential commonalities in creoles and sign languages with regard to interrogative constructions. One question is whether similar cognitive constraints in creolization and sign language evolution may have given rise to similar linguistic structures. To be able to demonstrate significant commonalities between them, it is not enough to only look at features which are widespread in both types of languages, but at the same time the features should be rare in non-creoles/non-sign languages world-wide.

Interrogative constructions is one of the best researched topics in sign languages. There are not only language specific studies (e.g. Herrero 2009; Morgan 2006; Šarac et al. 2007), but also cross-sign typological work which relies on a large number of different sign languages world-wide (Zeshan 2004, 2005 on 35 sign languages). The creole data comes from the *Atlas of pidgin and creole language structures* (Michaelis et al. 2013), which covers 59 creoles.

I will look at (i) polar (yes/no) and (ii) content (wh-) questions. In polar questions, creoles heavily rely on intonation, whereas substrates and lexifiers often show different marking strategies (e.g. question particles or interrogative word orders). Moreover, compared to the world-wide distribution of intonational marking in polar questions, creoles show a much higher proportion of "intonation only" marking than other languages of the world.

In sign languages, polar questions are typically encoded with non-manual markers, as for instance eyebrow raising, eyes wide open, head forward position (often also in combination, see Zeshan 2004). Non-manual markers are often equated with intonation in spoken languages as they are also suprasegmental entities. It is now interesting to see that sign languages, too, strongly rely on non-manual markers to signal polar questions (only few sign languages show question particles).

Therefore in sign languages and creoles, "intonation" seems to be the most prominent strategy to mark polar questions, potentially pointing to similar cognitive constraints during creolization and sign language emergence.

However, the situation in content questions looks quite different. Creoles show either fronted or non-fronted (in situ) wh-phrases, i.e. they appear either initially in the sentence (English *What did you do?*) or in some other position, e.g. in a preverbal focus position, or in situ (lit. 'You did **what** today?'). There are clear areal patterns in that non-fronted wh-phrases mostly occur in Africa, South Asian and Melanesian creoles. However, sign languages show more diverse patterns in the placement of the wh-phrase. Besides the possibility to front it, many sign languages allow for a sentence-final position of the wh-phrase, that is at the very right edge of the sentence (CAKE EAT NOT **WHO** 'Who did not eat the cake?', Cecchetto 2012). Interestingly, this rightward placement strategy is unattested in creoles and is extremely rare in non-creoles (cf. Dryer 2005), and seems therefore to be a quirk in sign languages.

Given these facts, there is reason to be cautious also about the cognitive explanation of the similarities in polar questions, and one may want to reexamine the evidence from polar questions.

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