

Universals Workshop

Friday April 2, 2021

12:00 pm – 1:30 pm

Dr. Julie Hochgesang, Gallaudet University

Title: Documenting the language use of ASL communities

Abstract:

My presentation is focused on the methods I have been using for documenting the language use of the ASL communities in North America. I first describe some of the motivations that drive my documentation work with ASL communities - ethics of working with signed language communities; that there's no single ASL community but rather ASL communities; the lack of conventionalized written system for ASL. I briefly touch upon some of the documentation projects I've done in North America and focus on how I've represented ASL use, especially as textual representation. I then introduce the ASL Signbank (Hochgesang, Crasborn & Lillo-Martin, 2017-2021), the principles used to develop it (including the phonological coding and the relations between signs), and how it's used in annotation. I briefly discuss a couple of issues that require revisiting how categories are to be applied, and even decided upon on. While we've used existing theories or theoretical assumptions to build the ASL Signbank and guide our annotation practices, the creation of the ASL Signbank and using it to actually annotate our data (ASL videos), in turn, also inform our understanding of ASL. The work I do is because of the ASL communities and I consider myself a member of these communities. I try my best to honor the language and communities by documenting it with care and rigor and thinking about the power of representation and accessibility.