

Word Order and Informative Functions (Topic and Focus) in Spanish Signed Language (LSE) Utterances

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is two-fold: firstly, to address the issue of word order in declarative utterances in LSE (Spanish Signed Language), and secondly, to analyse the function of the informative component (topic and focus) at utterance and discursive level in this language (given that research carried out to date in certain sign languages has revealed that this component plays a key function in utterance organisation).

The conclusions of our study indicate that the following three word order options are possible: SOV, SVO and topicalisation of object and space-setting (at the start of the utterance). These orders may also vary at discourse level if the signer adopts a spatial organisation of events. As for the other item of the informative element, the focus, it has an emphatic value (information and contrastive focus) and is expressed by means of two types of binary structures: (a) a divided question-answer structure, and (b) a structure whose initial element expresses surprise, followed by the focalised element. From a discursive perspective, both topic and focus have several functions: the topic establishes the discursive theme, has an anaphoric function, and provides cohesion in the listing of elements; the focus structure is used with the function of conjunction (in particular, to introduce purpose, causal, and result clauses).

Key words: Word Order in LSE, Informative Component, Topic, Focus, Discursive Topic, Discursive Focus, LSE, Spanish Signed Language.

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“It is necessary to point out that things are not merely things; they are also systems that form a single unit combining separate parts; they are no longer individual objects, but instead are inextricably linked to their environment and cannot be fully understood unless they are included within a context. As for living beings, they communicate with each other and their environment, and these communications form part of their organisation and their very nature” (Morin, Edgar. 1999. *La mente bien ordenada*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2007).

1. Introduction

Since Greenberg (1963) published his well-known research into the classification of oral languages in accordance with the predominant order of sentence constituents, descriptions of languages have tended to determine and include their basic structure within this universal typological parameter (for an overview, see Comrie, 1981; Hawkins, 1983: chap.1; Tomlin, 1986; Brennan, 1994; Jung Song, 2001, Givón, 2001, amongst others). We

are therefore faced with a basic SVO word order for both Spanish and English, although the former does have a more flexible organisation in relation to the structure referred to, while the latter offers fewer possibilities of varying this order.

However, other typological studies have drawn attention to the fact that certain languages do not organise basic sentence elements around the syntactic relation between subject and verb; instead, sentences are based on the grammaticalisation of the pragmatic functions of topic and comment. This is the case of Chinese (Liejiong and Langendoen, 1985), Maya languages (Aissen, 1992) and the languages of the Philippines (Shibatani, 1991). Other languages use both organisational types as basic structures. As a result, among other authors, Li and Thompson (1976: 459ff.) put forward a classification made up of four basic types of languages, based on whether the sentence organisation hinges on the prominence of subject or topic: 1) subject-prominent languages; 2) topic-prominent languages; 3) subject- and topic- prominent languages; and 4) languages in which neither subject nor topic are prominent.

In this paper, our goal has been to carry out research on declarative utterances in LSE, an aspect of its grammar not analysed as yet. Our initial hypothesis was that the informational component played an important role in the organisation of this language; thus, our main purpose was to analyse this issue both at utterance and discourse level. Within the framework of this initial perception, we also proposed to find which of the four typological universals mentioned before were present in this language and to explain whether they have any relationship with its gestural nature, as some researchers on signed language suggest.¹

2. Word Order in Signed Language Research

With reference to signed languages, early research into this issue dates back to the 1970's, dealing essentially with ASL, although by the 1980's work had begun on the description of other signed languages. All research carried out to date reflects two main theoretical and methodological tendencies: on the one hand, there are those who focus on syntactic criteria, thereby resulting in the identification of the functions of subject, object, etc. in the signed sentence, whilst others believe that the signed chain reflects an order based on

¹ One of the anonymous reviewers has explained to us how the term *oral language* is being replaced in the Deaf-English speaking community by *spoken language*, in order to move toward the standard of *written*, *spoken* and *signed* terms. In the Spanish deaf community this controversy does not exist, so the traditional term *oral language* is still the most used. In this paper we will consider them synonymous terms.

pragmatic (topic or theme/comment) and/or semantic considerations (animate/inanimate; still/moving objects, figure and ground, etc.).

However, in recent years, this area of research has been enriched with natural data from discourse corpora, as well as by studies on cohesion. This leads to the finding that in signed languages one also needs to consider the role of space in word order. We will refer to this issue again at the end of this section.

2.1. The Syntactic Perspective

When considering the group of researchers focusing on the syntactic approach, particularly worthy of mention are the studies carried out by Fischer (1975), Friedman (1976) and Liddell (1980), all basing their work on ASL. Fischer posits that SVO is the basic structure of this language, although historical evidence indicates that about a century ago this structure could have been SOV; indeed, testimonies of the day claim that this was the order used in French Signed Language (o LSF), from which it originates. By contrast, Friedman, who based his claims on the numerous exceptions to this basic SVO structure, defends the hypothesis that sentence order is relatively free, despite the fact that there is a clear preference for placing the verb at the end (op. cit. 142). This is refuted by Liddell, who corroborates Fischer's proposition with a highly detailed empirical analysis. However, this author also accepts that there are numerous exceptions to the basic SVO structure (for example, locative structures, which include classifier predicatives).

As for other signed languages, Amaral *et al.* (1994:123ff.) have shown that SVO is the basic order for Portuguese Signed Language (or LSP), although OSV is also frequent (they fail to specify whether there is any kind of pause between O and S). In his research project into Japanese Signed Language, Nakanishi (1994) notes that the basic order is SOV, although OSV also occurs frequently. However, this same author also observes that in the case of Taiwanese Signed Language (apparently from the Japanese Signed Language family), the predominant order is SVO. Finally, mention should also be made of Quinto's work (1999) into Mexican Signed Language (or LSM), which reveals that the basic order is SVO, although SOV and OSV also occur, albeit less frequently (the latter option has no separation mark between O and S);² that of Massone and Curiel (2004) into LSA (or Argentinian Signed Language), where the basic, unmarked order is SOV; and that of Oviedo (2003), and Milkovič

² In a more recent study, Cruz Aldrete (2008) also confirms this order for LSM.

et al. (2006) into Colombian and Croatian signed language respectively, where in both cases the basic word order is SVO.

2.2. The Semantic and Pragmatic Dimension

The group of researchers who opted for a pragmatic approach includes authors such as McIntire (1982), Deuchar (1983), Coerts (1994), Bouchard and Dubuisson (1995), Janzen (1999) and Rosenstein (2004). Others, such as Volterra *et al.* (1984) and Cuxac (2000), also draw attention to the semantic factors involved in this order. These will be referred to below.³

In contrast to the hypotheses put forward by Fischer and Liddell, the study carried out by McIntire (1982), using discourse in ASL, claims that *topic* and *comment* are predominant in this language, to the detriment of the notions of *subject* and *object*. McIntire reviews those situations in which Liddell accepts the SVO structure and notes that they are few and far between: transitive verbs in reversible sentences and verbs that fail to openly mark semantic relations. In the remaining cases, there is a tendency to topicalise the first nominal element in the sentence, with formal markers such as the raising of the eyebrows, prolonging the sign or moving the head. Deuchar (1983: 71ff.) also agrees that the topic/comment structure determines word order in British Signed Language (or BSL); essentially, the object is topicalised through the use of certain formal markers, several of which coincide with those mentioned by McIntire.

Volterra *et al.* (1984) consider that the most frequent structure in Italian Signed Language (LSI) is that in which, both in the case of reversible and non-reversible structures, the agent (an identified subject) precedes the verb and the patient (the direct object). Consequently, word order can be either SVO or SOV, although the latter option only occurs in non-reversible sentences or those in which the agent of the action is clear. In locative structures, the tendency is to present the semantic features on a scale headed by the most perceptive and immobile element, followed by the less perceptive and more mobile element. There is also a structure termed *split syntax*, characterised by the division of the sentence chain into two; the result is a sentence such as SEATED CHILD, MOTHER COMB (him), which is apparently used by deaf persons who have received a markedly oralist education. Finally, and regarding the degree of relevance of pragmatic functions, these authors also

³Kendon (2004: 59), in his excellent historical review of studies into gestures, mentions that the psychologist Wundt (1832-1920) had already explained that word order in sign languages and the signed languages of North American Indians was not governed by a fixed order; instead “[it] is determined by those aspects that are more prominent or most determinate in the idea-configuration: these are placed first”.

observed a tendency towards topicalisation of the object in OSV structures, with a pause between the object and the rest of the structure. Therefore, Volterra and her team stress the predominance of the semantic features *agent* versus *patient*, *animate* versus *inanimate*, and *mobile* versus *immobile* in the signed chain, and the pragmatic functions of topic/comment in sentence organisation in LSI.

Coerts (1994) carried out research into Dutch Signed Language (DSL) similar to those explained above. This author describes word order phenomenon from a functionalist perspective, and considers that there is no place for subject and object categories in this language. In this sense, she (op. cit. 52ff.) states that the first argument of a verbal structure in a declarative statement is always the agent of the verbal action. Nevertheless, the second argument (the object) may appear embedded within the structure or at the start of it, constituting, in the latter case, the theme (or topic) of the message. In verbal structures expressing location and state, the locative semantic function may appear at the beginning of the chain, as in the case of the theme or topic, thereby forming what Coerts refers to as the *setting* or contextual framework of the message.⁴ The conclusions drawn by Bouchard and Dubuisson (1995) with regard to Quebec Signed Language appear to be along the same ideas as those of Coerts. These authors believe that the apparently free order observed in many examples in this language is deceptive, when considered from the *ground/figure* parameter that appears to govern the order of elements in facial-gestural type languages. In the case of French Signed Language, Cuxac (2000:179ff.) rejects the need to classify the elements into syntactic categories, as the actantial functions of the agent, patient and action are predominant. Other relevant factors in word order are the semantic feature of *localisant-localisé* (a kind of ground and figure), as well as topicalisation (or thematisation) of the object.

The last two studies we will refer to stress the importance of topic/comment structures. Janzen (1999), in keeping with the ideas put forward by McIntire (1982), defends the claim that ASL organises the sentence around the topic/comment structure, along the lines of oral languages with topics. This topic structure is expressed by a number of formal markers (present in other signed languages): slight raising of the eyebrows and gentle movements of

⁴An example of a setting is given in italics in the following sentence: “*table sweet*, girl eat-Cl.sweet” (Coerts, 1994: 52), which is also typical of oral languages. According to Hopper and Traugott (1993: 172ff.), it is a common syntactic structure in Chinese (in other languages, such as English, it is only used in informal registers).

the head (Janzen, 1999: 275). Janzen also believes that the topic structure is a key factor in the organisation of discourse in ASL, functioning as a text-cohesion marker (1999, 2007; see also Janzen and Schaffer, 2002).

Finally, Rosenstein's research (2004) into Israeli Signed Language (or ISL) situates this language fully within the typology of topic-based languages, as the subject and object categories appear to hold no particular relevance. This author uses a number of syntactic and semantic-pragmatic tests to show that sentence organisation in ISL is based on the mentioned topic/comment structure.

2.3. The Spatial Perspective

Those authors who have defended the semantic-pragmatic perspective in the description of clause structure order in signed languages have been the most inclined to use real discourse data in their research. This kind of data has led to confirmation that discursive organisation in signed language also determines the order inside utterances.

The best known case refers to the phenomena occurring in a narrative in which a signer places loci around his/her articulation space to position its referents or participants. The linguistics of signed languages has provided several explanations for this issue, some of a syntactic and others of a pragmatic-cognitive nature (for an overview of this controversy, see Vermeerbergen, 2006; Liddell, 2000a; and Morales-López *et al.*, 2005). One of the first cognitive-discursive interpretations is that offered by Liddell (1998, 2000b, 2003), and Liddell and Metzger (1998), based on the theory of mental models (Fauconnier, 1997).

These authors distinguish between two uses of *space* in the development of discourse. The first is known as *real space*, which represents a person's conceptualisation of his/her current environment during the communicative act. In this space, the signer uses the various deictic units in order to give explicit gestural instructions to the recipient on how to project these units onto specific semantic structures (Liddell, 2003:91). This phenomenon occurs in discourse in both signed and oral languages (McNeill, 1992), although unlike in the case of gestural signs, in oral ones the language is unable to articulate words and indicate entities at the same time, for physiological reasons (Liddell, 2003:139). This last author defines the second use of space as *surrogate space*. In this space the signer is part of a mixed real space (in the sense put forward by Fauconnier, 1997), either by acting as the narrator of what is being told or by representing one or more of the various participants in the action being narrated (a "constructed action", according to Winston, 1992; and Metzger, 1995). This use of

space is also present in oral language dialogue, on account of the concurrence of oral signs, paralinguistic features and gestures (McNeill, 1992). However, in signed languages the various meanings of the mixed mental space are solely transmitted by gestures, not only those with an expressive function, but also grammaticalised gestures (person deixis, verbs, lexical signs articulated in the corresponding locus, etc.).

In two later papers, Dudis (2004 and 2007) delves into this possibility of signed languages to depict different real events three-dimensionally. He offers a detailed description of these possibilities, and concludes that this phenomenon's productivity arises from the simultaneous capacity of the human body, hands and facial expression to be partitioned off from one another, even though they are integrated, in order to show different parts of a scene and other perspectives which will enrich a description. In this way, depiction is not only a lexical issue but also a grammatical phenomenon.

Janzen (2004, 2006 and 2008) considers that this three-dimensional spatial component of signed languages also has consequences for clause structure in general, because, as he points out (2008: 122), “[this] challenge[s] a more traditional notion of clause structure that depends on a linearly ordered string of lexical items”. Based on his ASL data, space is encoded in two different perspectives in narrative discourse: *static space* and *mentally rotated space*.

In static space the signer moves from locus to locus around the periphery of the space, viewing the scene from these designated loci; whereas in mentally rotated space the signer shifts the mentally conceived scene so that the vantage points of referents located around the space come into line with the more central viewpoint of the signer herself (Janzen, 2008: 126-7). This second case coincides with the *blend*, a type of mental space already considered by Dudis (2007: 8ff.) –see also Liddell and Vogt-Svendsen (2007), for the diversity of mental space blends in a narrative in Norwegian Signed Language.

These two ways of conceptualizing space also have concrete grammatical consequences; the most evident for Janzen (2007: 178) is that a message requiring two clauses in a verbal language can be explained in just one in a signed language. Authors such as Pietrandrea and Russo (2007: 36), and Cuxac and Sallandre (2007), consider that these simultaneous possibilities of space show how Peircean imagic iconicity is very much present

in signed languages.⁵ From a cognitive perspective, Wilcox (2004: 141) holds the opinion that the enhanced potential for this iconicity is based on the presence of articulators that visible manifest the same grounded archetypes that underline our conceptual abilities –objects moving in space within our field of vision.

We end here the summary of research on the phrase order of utterances in signed languages. In the next section, we will focus on the explanation of the information component, in particular the notions of topic and focus.

3. The Informational Component in the Linguistic Tradition.

The *information structure* refers to the fact that certain formal properties of sentences cannot be understood without considering the linguistic and situational contexts in which they occur (Lambrecht 1994: 2). In this sense, the linear order of sentences is not only organised by syntactic dependencies, but, as Chafe also states (1974, 1987), by the speaker's assumptions about his/her interlocutor's degree of consciousness (see also Prince, 1981).

The syntactic functions specify the perspective from which a state of affairs is presented in a linguistic expression (Dik 1997: 26). The basic syntactic dependency of a sentence is the relation between subject and predicate, which may possess specific formal characteristics (for example, in the case of Spanish and other Romance languages, person and number concordance between subject and predicate).

However, the fact that information structure exists reveals that the study of sentence organisation does not end with syntactic dependency; one also needs to pay attention to the pragmatic component. If we turn once again to Lambrecht, information structure is “[the] component of sentence grammar in which propositions as conceptual representations of states of affairs are paired with lexical-grammatical structures in accordance with the mental states of interlocutors who use and interpret these structures as units of information in given discourse contexts” (op. cit. 5). One of the dimensions of information structure is the difference between *topic* and *focus*, two categories which, according to this author, represent the speaker's assessment of relative predictability versus the unpredictability of the relations between propositions and their elements in given discourse situations.

⁵ For Napoli and Sutton-Spence (2010), the maximum in this simultaneity relies on the equivalent of four propositions.

By *topic* (or *theme*, in the terminology used by Halliday, 1967, 1995; Jiménez-Juliá, 1986), different authors are referring to the element that forms the starting point for the information contained in a sentence, even though it may not necessarily be placed in front position (Li, 1976; Dik, 1978, 1997; Siewierska, 1991; Shibatani, 1991; Sornicola, 1999; Real Academia Española (or RAE), 2009; among others). In Lambrecht's view (op. cit. 118; 151), the topic of a sentence is the thing which the proposition expressed by the sentence is *about* or which is *the centre of interest*, and is therefore the most predictable element of the utterance.

In languages such as English, where the subject is a major grammatical category, the unmarked topic coincides with the subject, while *left-detachment* and *right-detachment* (or *antitopic*) constructions are used for the marked topic. However, in other languages such as Chinese or Japanese, the topic may be an unmarked externalised element in the sentence (Shibatani, 1991: 97), as the first part of the topic-comment axis. According to Shibatani, as a result “[a topic sentence depicts] an ‘experiential judgment’, whereas a topicless sentence depicting a witnessed event or state involves ‘perceptual judgment’” (op. cit. 100).

Spanish has a clear subject/predicate structure due to the fact that, as we have already mentioned, the concordance of the subject and verb sets the subject apart from other syntactic functions. However, certain authors claim that, as in Chinese, word order in colloquial Spanish also follows the topic/comment (or theme/rheme) pattern (Jiménez-Juliá, 1996: 485; see the RAE's comment on this issue, 2009: vol. 2, chap. 40).

Other authors address the informational component in its interrelation with utterance and discourse. Thus, Halliday (1967: 200ff.; 2002a: 190-1) distinguishes, on the one hand, the theme/rheme pair to refer to the distribution of information in the clause or sentence organised as message (coincident with the topic-comment pair, already defined); and, on the other, the given/new pair (that is, information treated by the speaker as recoverable from the text because it is already known, versus information not recoverable from the preceding discourse); this second pair belongs to textual organisation and is the pair Halliday names *information structure*. From this second dimension, the unit of discourse is the information unit, realised as one tone group; it involves the selection of a certain element as points of prominence within the message: the *focus* as the expression of new information (we will refer to this unit below).

These two pairs (theme/rheme and given/new) are thus independent, though related, variables; the theme will be selected from the given and the focus will fall on the rheme, but not necessarily extending throughout the whole of it (Halliday, 1967: 205).

In a recent publication, Sornicola (2009: 1091) also defends the need for the topic-comment (or theme-rheme) pair to be defined from a rhetorical-pragmatic dimension less anchored at syntactic level, as Lambrecht (1994) argued: “It seems necessary to bring back into focus the traditional distinction among ‘utterance’, ‘proposition’ and ‘sentence’ as constructions that belong to three different dimensions; namely, the pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic” (Sornicola, *op. cit.*). The topic-comment pair constitutes, in this sense, the basic articulation of the utterance-act level; in which the topic expresses the permanence or continuity of participants.

Chafe’s (1974; 2009: 136-141) notion of consciousness is also relevant to address this informational component, in particular, two properties of consciousness that this author relates to language: a focal and a peripheral consciousness (analogous to foveal and peripheral vision). Thus, a conscious experience expressed by language shows different focal points of information against a peripheral background, which constitutes the semiactive information (the discursive topic). And, as Tomlin *et al.* also state (1997: 133-147), the flow of information depends on control of the management of the focus (the item of information that stands out above the rest in any utterance or discourse) and the management of the topic (the point of departure at utterance level or the item of which something is said at discourse level).

To avoid any possible confusion caused by this terminological variation among the different authors referred to, in this paper we establish a difference between these two pairs, topic-comment and theme-rheme, following the decision adopted by the RAE (2009: chap. 40): the theme is the point of departure of any utterance and the topic is the part of the theme that is externalised; the rheme (equivalent to the comment) is what is said about the theme; and the focus is the rhemic segment that emphasises some information.

We finally refer to the notion of *focus* proposed by Lambrecht, and in particular its different types, which we have applied to our analysis. This author explains the *focus* as the element that converts a proposition into an assertion (Lambrecht, 1994: 207); in other words, the element added to the presuppositional part of the said proposition and which cannot be retrieved from what has been uttered. Formal mechanisms for marking this focus are mainly of a prosodic (as in the case of English: Martínez Caro, 1999) or morphosyntactic nature (Catalan and Spanish: Vallduví, 1992 and Martínez Caro, 1999 respectively).

Depending on the scope of the focus within the comment, Lambrecht proposes the following types: *predicative-focus* (“My car broke *down*”, as a response to “What happened to your car?”), *argument-focus* (“My *car* broke down”, as a reply to “I heard your motorcycle

had broken down”) and *sentence-focus* (“My car broke down” as a response to “What happened?”). When focus strategies are distinguished according to communicative point, it poses the question of what pragmatic reasons underlie the assignment of focus to the relevant part of the clause structure. In this sense, Dik (1997) distinguishes two other types: 1) focus as *information gap* (which coincides with Lambrecht’s one already described) and 2) focus as *contrast*, which opposes two actions, events, etc. (see a summary of all these theoretical positions in Tomlin *et al.*, 1997; and Givón, 2001: vol. 2, chap. 15, for some differences).

4. Theory

In this paper we have been using two theoretical frameworks. The first is based on functional approaches such as Halliday’s communicative grammar (1995) and typological studies – Comrie (1981), Tomlin (1986), Dik (1997) and Givón (2001), among many others. From the functionalist perspective, a language is interpreted as a network of relationships from which the different grammatical structures emerge “naturally” (Halliday 1995: xvii-xviii). Depending on the language, semantic-pragmatic relations prevail over morphosyntactic ones; in other cases this relationship is reversed, but always from a prototypical gradation dimension (Givón, 1995a, 2001).

The second is the *complexity* approach (Morin 1990, 1999; Juarrero 2001; etc.). This perspective rejects the parcelling of knowledge that leads to reductionism in the explanation of scientific phenomena; instead it focuses on specific objects, integrated within both their own system and their emerging conditions and circumstances (Morin 1990: 22-23 and 44).

Seen from this second perspective, the study of any language is inextricably linked to its socio-historical conditions, a fact which is more likely to be true in the case of signed languages, given the characteristics that have surrounded their emergence. In the majority of cases they are not generational languages; most signers do not acquire these language skills within the family environment, but within an educational or associative context.

This is a case of a primarily horizontal language transmission model, not a parent-to-offspring one (Mufwene, 2001: 11), which means that acquisition occurs at different stages throughout signers’ lifetime (when their deafness is detected, when the parents decide to introduce their children into associative or bilingual educational environments, etc.). For this reason, too, the level of language competence may vary considerably among signers.

Finally, they are also facial-gestural and spatial languages (as explained in sections 2.2

and 2.3), and gestures in three-dimensional space impose a number of restrictions differing from those associated with the spoken channel (although these two linguistic codes do coincide in other structural aspects).

5. Methodology

The data collected correspond to the variety of signed language used by deaf people in the city of A Coruña (North-West Spain) and consist of two kinds of material: a) short dialogues and narratives signed by deaf informants imagining natural contexts; and b) spontaneous discourse recorded on video, namely, narratives and interviews between two signers. In the examples included in the analysis, whenever the context is specified it means that the data come from real-life data sources.

We have included these two kinds of data, not only spontaneous discourse, for methodological reasons. This work is our first research at utterance-discursive level and, when we began, we lacked the experience to directly address the analysis of discursive data from a signed language. For this reason, we started with controlled empirical data, though signed as naturally as possible. Several deaf people consulted have considered they are similar to spontaneous speech.

In other forums we have presented preliminary versions of this research (Morales López *et al.*, 2004a and 2004b); however, it was not until we had created a corpus containing sufficient discursive data that we were able to obtain a full vision of the importance of the informative component at utterance and discursive level. We have also compared our results with data produced by signers in Barcelona; section 8 includes a discussion of this comparison (which, however, remains incomplete).

We still need to add the fact that research into this language is still in its infancy in Spain; in particular, very few studies have been published in the field of the interrelation of grammar and discourse. Likewise, our data come from informants within the specific geographical zone mentioned, meaning that the conclusions drawn in this study may not be extrapolated to LSE in general.

In the following sections, we show the results of our analysis, first at utterance level, and then the topic and focus functions at discourse level.

6. Results: Word Order at Utterance Level

6.1. Structures with SVO

The various orders detected in declarative utterances are the following:

1) SOV	2) SVO	3) $\frac{t}{O}$, SV.
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1) SOV order

This structure appears with animate subjects and inanimate objects (i.e. *non-reversible*), as shown in the following examples:⁶

- 1) $\frac{t}{\text{JEFE, DEIX.PERS.3 CONTRATO DAR TODAVÍA}} \frac{\text{neg}}{\text{---}}$
BOSS PERS.DEIX.3 CONTRACT GIVE YET
 Subject Object Verb
 ‘My boss has not given me the contract yet’.
- 2) $\frac{\text{---}}{\text{BIEN}} \frac{\text{---}}{\text{GOOD}} \frac{\text{---}}{\text{MOTIVO PADRES LIBRO REGALAR-DEIX.PERS.3-1}} \frac{\text{---}}{\text{BECAUSE PARENTS BOOK GIVE.AS.GIFT-PERS.DEIX.3-1}}$
BUENO-INTENS PASAR.PÁGINA
GOOD-INTENS TURNING.PAGE
 Subject Object Verb
 ‘Wonderful! My parents have given me a book as a gift. I’ve been reading it and it’s very good’.

In Example (1), the signer has topicalised the subject with an anaphoric function and repeats the subject again with the pronoun. An explanation of this function will be given in Section 7, but for the purpose of this section this example shows how the utterance order is SOV. This SOV structure is used with the three types of LSE verbs (types similar to the ones found in other signed languages (Morales-López *et al.*, 2005).

2) SVO Order.

It appears in the following cases:

a) Some signers use this order instead of the SOV option in utterances containing an animate subject and inanimate object. The SVO structure coincides with one of the orders in Spanish, and could therefore be considered an example of convergence with this language. The statement could only be corroborated through research into the frequency with which these orders are used, something which is currently beyond the scope of this study.

⁶ See the appendix for the transcription system.

Consequently, for the time being, this order constitutes a second structure feasible in LSE.

Below are two examples:

- 3) **DEIXIS.PERS.1 DOLER ESPALDA. MAL FATAL**
 PERS.DEIX.1 HURT BACK BAD TERRIBLE
 Subject Verb Object
 My back is hurting. I'm terrible'.

Context: The signer is telling a personal experience.

- 4) t
AYER, DEIX.PERS.1 ENCONTRARSE.CON MARÍA PERSONA
 YESTERDAY PERS.DEIX.1 MEET MARY PERSON
 Subject Verb Object⁷

DEIX.PERS.3 ASP.FREQ ENCANTAR PELO PELO.CORTO
 PERS.DEIX.3 FREQ.ASP LIKE HAIR SHORT.HAIR
 Subject Verb Object

AYER ENCONTRARSE.CON 1pf foco
 YESTERDAY MEET CÓMO PELO.LARGO
 HOW LONG.HAIR

CHASCO, AL FINAL 1pf foco
 WHAT.A.PITY, IN.THE.END WHAT NOW LIKE LONG.HAIR LIKE
 Verb Object

Fijate" 'look.at.it'

'Yesterday I met Mary. She used to have short hair, but yesterday she had long hair and it surprised me a lot. In the end she likes to have it in this way. Look at it!'

In the fragments of these two examples in bold type, one can observe the post-verbal object. In Example (4), the order is SVO because the signer refers to the referent "hair" with a hyponym noun PELO.CORTO ('short.hair') –a different sign because the modifier is part of the sign. The same happens with PELO.LARGO ('long.hair'), which constitutes a single sign, and is also an example of SVO.

b) SVO in utterances *with a reversible subject and object*; in other words, utterances in which both the subject and object are animate and may be interchanged without creating a semantically anomalous construction. In these cases, the SVO structure depends semantically on the need for a better separation between agent and object, as shown in the first part of Example (4) above (DEIX.PERS.1 ENCONTRARSE.CON MARÍA PERSONA) and in the following ones:

⁷"MARÍA PERSONA" is the object: the noun and a nominal classifier (the latter similar to the one described by Bergman and Wallin, 2003; see below).

- 5) $\frac{\quad}{t}$
 PROPIO ABUELO, YA MORIR FIN
 MY GRAND-FATHER, ALREADY DIE END

ENTONCES AHORA **MADRE CUIDAR ABUELO-GEN.FEM SOLO**
 SO NOW MOM TAKE.CARE GRAND-MOTHER ALONE
 Subject Verb Object

‘My grandfather died, so my mom has now to take care of my grandmother, who is alone’.

Context: The signer is telling a fairy tale where one of the characters announces a piece of news about her daughter; she will marry the sun.

- 6) $\frac{\quad}{p}$ $\frac{\quad}{t}$
 HOLA MIRAR-IMPER SABER, **DEIX.PERS.1 HIJO, FIJO CASAR.CON SOL**
 HELLO LOOK YOU.KNOW PERS.DEIX.1 DAUGHTER SURE GET.MARRIED SUN
 Subject Verb Object

‘Hello, look, you know my daughter? In the end she is going to marry the sun’.

This second example, as happened in (1), includes a subject with the function of discursive topic; this text is a narrative, and the signer wishes to remind us that the character on hand is the one that has been mentioned before.

c) SVO in utterances *where the object is formed by a noun and a modifier*. The governing factor in these examples seems to be what is known as the *end-weight principle* (Leech, 1983: 65-66; Tomlin 1986: 137), the *syntactic weight* or *heaviness* (Hawkins, 1983) or the *principle of increasing complexity*; this is a preference for ordering constituents in an order of increasing complexity (Dik, 1997: 404). These modifiers may be of varying types: adpositions, adjectives, classifiers with adjective value, nominal classifiers, etc. The following examples are selected from these cases (see our web page for other cases):

c.1. Adposition:

- 7) AYER DEIX.PERS.1 VER PELÍCULA **VISIONADO VAQUERO BUENO-INTENS**
 YESTERDAY PERS.DEIX.1 WATCH MOVIE TOTAL COW-BOY GOOD-INTENS
 Subject Verb Object Modifier

TIRO-PLU VARIOS

GUN-DISTR.PLU SEVERAL.(THINGS)

‘Yesterday I was watching a cowboy movie, with a lot of guns, wonderful’.

c.2. Adjective:

Context: The signer is telling the tale of the three little pigs.

- 8) LOBO EMPEZAR RABIA RETROCEDER VER MADERA **EN.SU.DIMENSIÓN**
 WOLF BEGIN ANGER GO.BACK LOOK WOOD SOMETHING.AS.A.WHOLE
 Subject Verb Object Modifier

‘And the wolf, with anger, began to go back and saw the wooden house as a whole’.

c.3. *Modifiers* introduced by a kind of nominal classifier similar to those described by Bergman and Wallin (2003). In our examples they act as free morphemes but not just as hyponyms, as they state. Instead, the nouns in our data are classified under a wider range of options, such as the following: THEME, FORM, TYPE, NOUN and BRAND. See an example of the first case:

- 9) cnm: exclamación ‘exclamation’ cnm: “con esfuerzo” ‘with effort’
 POR.FIN, YA FIN NOSOTROS.DOS ELABORAR
 AT.LAST ALREADY END WE.BOTH DEVELOP
 Subject Verb

PROYECTO **TEMA** SUBVENCIÓN
 PROJECT THEME SUBSIDY
 Object Modifier
 ‘At last! We’ve finally finished the project for the grant’.

c.4. *The SVO structure with the repetition of the verb.*

In LSE the repetition of the verb is also frequent; in these cases, an SVOV structure is used, as shown below:

Context: The signer is relating his experiences at the School for the Deaf.

- 10) P
 SABER, (DEIX.PERS.1) **ENCANTAR** TORTILLA DEIX-LUG.tortilla COMER-ASP.DUR
 KNOW (PERS.DEIX.1) LOVE OMELETTE LOC.DEIX.omelette EAT-DUR.ASP
 Subject Verb Object

ENCANTAR
 LOVE
 Verb (repetition)
 ‘Do you know what? I love omelette. I just love it’.

Context: The signer is telling the tale of the three little pigs.

- mirada izq. ‘look for the left’
 11) CERDO **VER** PAJA CASA CL.palloza **VISUALIZAR**
 PIG SEE STRAW HOUSE CL.hay house VISUALISE
 Subject Verb Object Verb
 ‘The pig saw the house built of straw, he could see it completely’.

Context: The signer is telling the tale of the frog.

- mirada izq; locus: zona árbol
‘look on the left; locus: the area of the tree’
 12) NIÑO BUSCAR-ASP.DUR RANA BUSCAR-ASP.DUR **VER-DEIX.LUG.árbol** ÁRBOL
 BOY LOOK.FOR-ASP.DUR FROG LOOK.FOR-DUR.ASP SEE-LOC.DEIX.tree TREE
 Subject Verb Object Verb (repetition) Verb Object

mirada izq; locus: zona árbol
 AGUJERO DEIX.LUG.agujero AGUJERO CL.agujero/ **VER.DENTRO** PROBAR NO.HABER
 HOLE LOC.DEIX.hole HOLE CL.hole SEE.INSIDE TRY NOT.HAVE
 Verb (repetition)

RANA NO.HABER
FROG NOT.HAVE

'The little boy looked for the frog, until he looked inside a tree to see if the frog was there or not'.

In (10) the repetition of the verb has no emphatic value –the same happens in the first part of (12): “NIÑO BUSCAR RANA BUSCAR”; but in (11), with the repetition, the signer wishes to stress what is being said. That is why the signer replaces it with another form that qualifies semantically the idea expressed by the previous verb (VISUALIZAR). However, in similar situations, other signers repeated the same verb, thereby proving that both options are possible.

When the verb is signed again with another object, qualifying the sense of the previous phrase, a SVOVO structure is formed:⁸

- 13) AYER PASEAR-ASP.DUR DEIX.PERS.1 **COMPRAR** LIBRO 4, DEIX.LUG.locus de libro
 YESTERDAY WALK-DUR.ASP PERS.DEIX.1 BUY BOOK 4, LOC.DEIX.locus of book
 Subject Verb Object

COMPRAR SER DESCUENTO

BUY BE OFFER

Verb (repetition)

'Yesterday, whilst out walking, I bought four books that were on offer'.

Finally, reference must be made to other cases in which the SVO structure also appears but which do not fall within the categories described above:

- 14) AYER POR.LA.NOCHE cnm: “con extrañeza” ‘strangely’ DEIX.PERS.1 VER TELEVISIÓN
 YESTERDAY AT.NIGHT PERS.DEIX.1 SEE TELEVISION
 Subject Verb Object

'Last night I saw something really strange on television'.

- 15) DEIX.PERS.1 QUERER COMPRAR NEVERA CL.abrir nevera
 PERS.DEIX.1 WANT BUY FRIDGE CL.open the fridge
 Subject Verb Object

'I want to buy a fridge'.

- 16) DEIX.PERS.1 QUERER COMPRAR MANZANA MOTIVO HAMBRE.
 PERS.DEIX.1 WANT BUY APPLE BECAUSE HUNGER
 Subject Verb Object

'I want to buy an apple because I'm hungry'.

⁸ Volterra *et al.* (1984: 31) refer to the use of this construction in LSI. It also occurs in LSA (Massone and Curiel, 2004).

The first example seems to be a case of phonological constriction, as it is easier to articulate first the verbal sign SEE than the sign TELEVISION. In the following examples the SVO order is a *diagrammatic* structure (or *iconic*; Haiman, 1985; Dik, 1997:399) of the timeline of events: the action of ‘wanting’ is prior to that of ‘buying something’.

3) Order with a Grammaticalised Topic: \overline{t} O, SV.

Another common structure is formed by the topicalisation of the object, time, location and ground in both reversible and non-reversible constructions.

Some signers (in both A Coruña and Barcelona) have expressed their preference for the topicalised object rather than SOV order, although they consider both to be grammatical utterances. One of our informants in A Coruña thinks signers use the topic structure more than the rest when they explain something in a narrative way.

In our data, the topic is a structure that has been *displaced to the left*, with the following formal features: raised eyes and eyebrows, a slight tilting of the head and a brief pause after the topic (see Figure 1). In the case of negative structures, and in keeping with the findings of other authors in the case of sign and oral languages (Liddell, 1980; Lambrecht, 1994:153), the negation does not affect the topic.⁹

[Insert here Figure 1-4 pictures-]

The next three examples show the object topic in non-reversible constructions:

- 17) \overline{t}
 PASTILLA POMADA, DEIX.PERS.1 DAR-DEIX.PERS.1-2
 TABLET CREAM PERS.DEIX.1 GIVE-PERS.DEIX.1-2
 Object Subject Verb
 ‘I’m going to give you some tablets and cream for your back’.
- 18) \overline{t} \overline{t} \overline{t} mimo: mira a todas partes ‘mime: ‘he looks everywhere’
 VENTANA, NIÑO ABRIR_{ventana} CERRAR_{ventana}
 WINDOW BOY OPEN_{window} CLOSE_{window}
 Object Subject Verb
 ‘The child opens and closes the window’.
- 19) \overline{t}
 SABER AYER LADRÓN ROBAR, AL.FINAL POLICÍA YA COGER-ASP.PERF
 KNOW YESTERDAY THIEF STOLE IN.THE.END POLICE ALREADY CATCH-PERF.ASP
 Object Subject Verb
 ‘You know that thief that stole yesterday? In the end the police arrested him/her’.

⁹Lambrecht (op. cit.) explains the characteristics of topics in relation to negation in the following terms: “Since the topic is an element of the pragmatic presupposition evoked by the sentence, there is a sense in which the topic itself must be taken for granted, hence it must be outside the scope of negation or modality in an assertion”.

And in the following ones, one can see the topicalisation of location and time:

- 20) $\overline{\text{t}}$
AQUÍ CORUÑA, PLAYA TRES
 HERE CORUÑA BEACH THREE
 ‘Here in Coruña, there are three beaches.’
- 21) $\overline{\text{t}}$
POR.LA.MAÑANA, (DEIX.PERS.1) LEVANTAR HORA OCHO
 IN.THE.MORNING (PERS.DEIX.1) GET.UP HOUR EIGHT
 ‘In the morning, I get up at 8’.

The figure/ground may also be topicalised, as in the example shown below:

- 22) $\overline{\text{t}}$
COCHE, RUEDA PINCHAR ‘CAR, WHEEL GET.PUNCTURE’
 ‘My car’s got a puncture’.

In some cases, other elements of the sentence may be topicalised for emphatic effect; these refer mainly to things that have been mentioned previously or things which the interlocutors are already familiar with (i.e. discourse topics), but which the signer wishes to highlight for some reason. In these cases the signed chain is accompanied by a manual element that indicates puzzlement, anger, surprise, etc., as in the following examples:

Context: Cristina is in hospital and has not yet eaten any solids. A member of her family is bemoaning this situation and a second person responds as follows:

- 23) $\overline{\text{p}}$ $\overline{\text{t}}$ $\overline{\text{cnm}}$: “con énfasis” ‘with emphasis’
QUÉ CRISTINA, NO,
 WHAT CRISTINA NO

YA HACE.POCO VER COMER MANZANA
 ALREADY RECENTLY SEE EAT APPLE
 ‘What? Cristina? But just a short time ago I saw her eating an apple. Come on!’

Context: Someone expresses to another his surprise at his boss’s behaviour.

- 24) $\overline{\text{cnm}}$: “con extrañeza” $\overline{\text{t}}$
Qué raro **POS.1 JEFE**, CONTRATO PAPEL DAR-DEIX.PERS.3-1
 How odd! POSS.1 BOSS CONTRACT PAPER GIVE-PERS.DEIX.3-1

$\overline{\text{cnm}}$: “con extrañeza” ‘strangely’
TODAVÍA, UN.POCO RARO PERSONA
 STILL A.LITTLE ODD PERSON
 ‘How odd! The boss still hasn’t given me the papers for the contract! The truth is that he’s a bit strange’.

Context: The signer wishes to stress that he will not be giving Juana a gift.

- 25) $\overline{\text{t}}$ $\overline{\text{lpf}}$ $\overline{\text{foco}}$
SÍ, TODOS, PERO **JUANA** REGALAR-DEIX.PERS2-1 CERO
 YES EVERYONE, BUT JUANA GIVE.AS.GIFT-PERS.DEIX.2-1 ZERO
 Subject Verb
 ‘Yes, everyone has given me (something), but Juana hasn’t given me anything at all!’

Observe the structural difference between the above sentence (25), and the next (26) (which are propositionally equivalent). In (25), the signer has presented a topicalised subject, followed by his comment, which is divided again into a focus structure. In (26), a focus construction has been used to replace the subject topic:

- 26) $\overline{\text{ASK-PERS.DEIX.1-3}}$ $\overline{\text{APOLOGY NOTHING PERSON}}$ $\overline{\text{PERSONA JUANA REGALO}}$ $\overline{\text{NO-INTENS}}$
 t. cond 1pf foco
 'If she doesn't apologise, there's absolutely no way I'm going to give Juana anything'.

These structures in (23)-(25) could be considered instances of an *emphatic topic*, already mentioned by Sornicola (1999:380). Martínez Caro (1999: 266ff.) also discusses similar cases at the start of the sentence in English and Spanish. One of her examples in Spanish is reproduced below (the emphatic topic is shown in italics), which seems to be parallel to our examples:

- A: "¿Me puedes hablar un rato de toros?" ('Can you speak a while of bullfighting?')
 B: "Pues sí, *de toros* puedo hablar no un rato, sino muchísimo".
 ('Of course, of bulls I can speak, not for a while, but plenty').

6.2. Double Topic

At the pre-frontal position, sometimes two topics are used, with the same formal characteristics as the one-topic structure. Below are several examples in which the core of the noun phrase and its modifiers (27)-(28), the subject and object or receptor (29), and two locative and/or time expressions (30) have been topicalised (the latter two are the most frequent cases):

- 27) $\overline{\text{CLARA POS.3 HERMANA}}$, $\overline{\text{SER TRABAJAR PROFESIÓN INTÉRPRETE}}$
 CLARA POS.3 SISTER BE WORK JOB INTERPRETER
 Subject Verb
 Clara's sister works as an interpreter.
- 28) $\overline{\text{HOMBRE TRABAJAR CELADOR HOSPITAL}}$, $\overline{\text{HIJO DOS}}$, $\overline{\text{SER ESTUDIAR}}$
 MAN WORK PORTER HOSPITAL SON TWO BE STUDY
 Subject Verb
- UNIVERSIDAD SECTOR DERECHO
 UNIVERSITY SECTOR LAW
 Object
 'Both of the hospital porter's children are studying Law'.

- 29) $\frac{t}{\text{PADRES}}$, $\frac{t}{\text{LIBRO COCINA}}$, REGALAR-DEIX.PERS.3-1 LIBRO PASAR.PÁGINA BONITO
 PARENTS BOOK KITCHEN GIVE.AS.GIFT-PERS.DEIX.3-1 BOOK TURNING.PAGE PRETTY
 Subject Object Verb
 ‘My parents gave me a cookery book. It’s great!’.

Context: The signer is relating past experiences at school.

- 30) $\frac{t}{\text{HORA 11}}$, $\frac{t}{\text{TOCA RECREO}}$, DEIX.PERS.1 NUNCA
 HOUR 11, TO.BE.THE.TIME BREAKTIME, PERS.DEIX.1 NEVER
 ‘At 11 o’clock, break-time, I would never go out’.

In our data, when the double topic is composed of two arguments (agent and object/receptor), deixis is sometimes added, to locate these participants at a specific point in space. Relative to the organization inside this double topic construction, Rosenstein (2004) claims that, in ISL structures with a double topic, word order is free. However, in the examples given above, the order is only free when the relation between the two topics is not hierarchically dependent. In the other cases, opinions vary among signers as to whether the order is free or not.¹⁰

6.3. Utterance Order and the Spatial Location of the Participants in an Event

Apart from the various orders discussed in previous sections, in some cases signers may opt to alter the order of the elements due to the spatial arrangement of the participants within the space, assigning a specific *locus* to each. See the following examples:

Context: A signer relates events at a party.

- 31) $\frac{t}{\text{MADRE}}$, $\frac{t}{\text{HERMANA}}$, **DEIX.PERS.3.locus de hermana**
 MOTHER SISTER PERS.DEIX.3.sister’s locus
 Subject Receptor

REGALAR-DEIX.PERS.3.locus de madre-3.locus de hermana SORPRESA ESPECIAL
 GIVE.AS.GIFT-PERS.DEIX.3.mother’s locus-3.sister’s locus SURPRISE SPECIAL
 Verb
 ‘My mother gives my sister a special gift’.

- 32) MADRE HIJO, **DEIX-PERS.madre a hijo** CUIDAR COMER MADRE **DAR.locus de niño**
 MOTHER SON PERS.DEIX.mother to son TAKE.CARE EAT MOTHER GIVE-son’s locus
 Subject Receptor Verb Subject Verb

¹⁰ It is relevant that the latest Spanish grammar –published by the Academies of Spanish (RAE, 2009), where the weight of the pragmatic-discursive level is higher– recognises that in colloquial Spanish one can find double, even triple, topics: “*Mi abuela el arroz lo hacía siempre caldoso*” (‘My grandmother the rice she cooked it with liquid’); and “*Yo, hoy, de este asunto no pienso hablar*” (I, today, of this topic, won’t say anything’). So this kind of structure is also frequent in languages with a clear argumental structure.

COMIDA HIJO
 FOOD SON
 'The mother feeds her child'.

In the first example, the signer uses a double-topic structure (with a slight movement with his/her eyes indicating a different space allocation to each participant), then a deictic sign expressing the direction of the verbal action (towards the receptor's locus), followed by the verbal action which also includes the direction towards the receptor's locus (in bold). In the second, the formal marker of topic in the participants (subject and receptor) fails to appear, and then the argumental structure of the utterance is only marked by the deixis (also in bold).

As seen in these examples, a reorganisation of the order of the elements in accordance with spatial location is also a possible structure in LSE, a consequence of the facial-gestural nature of these languages (as explained in Section 2.3). It allows for the imaginary positioning of the participants or entities in the neutral space, assigning a specific *locus* to each participant or entity whilst maintaining the same discourse framework.

In Section 2.3 we referred to some authors who have shown other more complex spatial structures to symbolise simultaneous events. The data analysed for this paper only include examples of the use of space that place entities in different loci. However, at present, we are glossing a long narrative, and the simultaneous constructions described by the authors referred to also occur. Even so, the analysis of these new data needs to be performed in more depth and cannot be included in this work.

6.4. Discussion

The analysis carried out so far at utterance level has shown that the order of constituents at utterance level presents the following possibilities:

a) Syntactic-argumental order with two structures: SOV and SVO. The latter usually occurs whenever the object has a modifier, a consequence of the pragmatic phenomenon of syntactic "end-weight".

In these cases, the subject has an essentially semantic-pragmatic nature: it is the argument of the verb and the theme of the utterance. No grammatical feature that characterises the subject category has been found.

b) The information order, which places the topic at front position; in these cases, the topicalised argument is the object; the spatio-temporal setting is also placed in this position.

In some signers' opinion, this structure is more common than the SOV order, and it is used above all when signed speech becomes more spontaneous. They also think that the left-dislocative position of space and time is the most common; an equivalent to the *setting* described by Coerts (1994), and the pre-eminence of ground/figure organisation, noted by authors such as Bouchard and Dubuisson (1995). This structure also seems to be common in spontaneous speech in spoken languages; thus, as suggested by Chafe (2009: 140), the fact that speakers (of oral languages) use a topic structure to provide a setting –an orientation in terms of space, time, participants, and background activity– suggests that this kind of information is required by well-ordered consciousness.

The double topic construction has, on the one hand, an argumental role; in this sense, it presents the main participants of an event at the beginning of the message, and then predicate information is added. Sometimes, each of these arguments carries a spatial deictic, indicating that this informative construction is reinforced by the positioning of participants in a specific locus of the signer's space.¹¹

The second function of the double topic structure is to mark the syntactic dependence of modifiers to the core of the noun phrase. So instead of using prepositions, morphological cases and/or relative pronouns, LSE uses this structure to indicate the relation of dependency in the nominal phrase.

c) *Spatial location* of participants, the third type of utterance organisation in this language.

Due to the nature of the data analysed (short dialogue and narratives), in this research we have found only the simplest spatial organisation, the location of participants in a particular *locus* in space, as indicated. And perhaps on account of the characteristics of these data, spatial organisation has been less common than topic structure. However, we cannot but conclude that space is an integral part of LSE, and is a key phenomenon in explaining utterance order and, above all, discourse organisation.

¹¹ An anonymous reviewer has reminded us that the double topic construction (with or without deixis) functions here as the *referent point* described by Langacker (1999: 173). We agree with this interpretation.

The analysis so far presented shows that that in utterance construction in this language there is a predominance of the pragmatic level (including in it the spatial dimension). Therefore, we agree the researchers' group that has highlighted how, in the phenomenon under discussion, this dimension prevails over the syntactic-argumental one. However, other research points in this second direction, though it should be noted that this work very often includes data composed of short sentences, out of context and not taken from corpora. Likewise, as Slobin (2008: 177) states, some research has followed the strategy he calls "theories in search of data", instead of its opposite "data in search of theories". In the former, the goal is a very well defined theory, signed languages being an instrument for its confirmation, and in the latter, no theory is given in advance: this will be constructed or confirmed with data analysis. The results achieved by the first strategy can be appropriate in some cases, but it is unlikely that they will reflect the diversity of uses of the phenomenon studied (Perniss, 2006).

In our final comment in this section, we return to one of our aims stated at the beginning of this paper: the possibility of assigning LSE to any of the typologies proposed by Li and Thompson (1976). According to the data available to us, this language would correspond to the second type, a *topic-prominent* language, but it does not seem to be a language in which the category of subject has disappeared. The reasons for our position are as follows: in transitive constructions, the object is usually presented as an externalised topic at the beginning of the message, and afterwards the rheme is added, including the subject and predicate.

The subject remains a category, but has to be defined in functional terms (in the sense explained in Section 4). As indicated above, the subject is agent and theme in SOV and SVO structures, and agent (but not theme) in the topic construction (in this case, the topic is the theme).

7. The Discursive Function of Topic

This section will consider the textual role of this category in the flow of information. Analyses carried out in both oral languages (Shibatani, 1991) and signed languages (such as ASL, Janzen, 1999, 2007; Janzen and Schaffer, 2002) have shown that the topic is an important cohesive device. In this case, its function is to contribute to the thematic organisation of the discourse (Tomlin *et al.*, 1997: 133), that is, the register of the core

elements around which information develops. Therefore this is a *discursive topic* (Chafe, 2009: 140; Downing, 2001: 59).

Our data corroborate this discursive function, which is shown in the following way:

a) *Establishing the theme at the start of the discourse framework*, as in the next example:

Context: The signer is relating his experiences at the School for the Deaf.

33) DEIX.PERS.1 RECORDAR, ^tPASADO COLEGIO, ^tASP.FREC ESPECIAL COMIDA,
 PERS.DEIX.1 REMEMBER PAST SCHOOL FREQ.ASP SPECIAL FOOD,

PONER.COMIDA.MESA ASCO ^{1pf}EL.MÁS QUÉ ^{foco}TORTILLA MAL-INTENS
 PUT.FOOD.ON.THE.TABLE DISGUST THE.MOST WHAT OMELETTE BAD-INTENS

‘When I was at the school, I remember that, with regard to the food, what I found most disgusting was the omelette’.

This double topic indicates that the theme of this narrative is about the food in the School for the Deaf, which the signer attended as a student. This means that the signer assumes this referent as accessible to the interlocutor –or represented in some pre-existing mental structure in the interlocutor’s mind (Givón, 1995b: 68).

b) *The anaphoric or cataphoric relation*, linking the topicalised element with information that has already been given or which will be given immediately afterwards, as in the examples shown below:

Context: The signer is telling the tale of the three little pigs.

34) CERDO UNO PERSONAJE TOCAR.LA.FLAUTA;
 PIG ONE CHARACTER PLAYING.THE.FLUTE;

^P
 “(DEIX.PERS.2) QUERER VENIR PASEAR”
 (PERS.DEIX.2) WANT COME WALK

^t
 OTRO CERDO, “VALE”: JUNTOS CL.cerditos juntos paseando
 ANOTHER PIG ALL.RIGHT TOGETHER CL.little pigs walking together

^t ^P
 ÚLTIMO TERCER CERDITO, “VENIR TOCAR.LA.FLAUTA”; “SÍ”
 THE.LAST THIRD LITTLE.PIG COME PLAYING.THE.FLUTE YES

JUNTOS TRES JUNTOS TOCAR.LA.FLAUTA
 TOGETHER THREE TOGETHER PLAYING.THE.FLUTE

‘The little pig was playing the flute. “Do you want to come for a walk?” he said to the other little pig: “All right”. So they went off together, playing the flute. When they saw the third little pig they said to him, “Do you want to come and play the flute with us?” And he said ‘yes’. And so, the three of them went off for a walk’.

- 35) ^t AYER, ^t GRUPO SORDO IR CASA FIESTA CL.gente en un local; DEIX.LUG.fiesta,
 YESTERDAY GROUP DEAF GO HOUSE PARTY CL.people in a place LOC.DEIX.party

^t ^{cnm: "muy fuerte" 'loudly'} _

GRUPO DISCUTIR **QUÉ.PASADA**
 GROUP ARGUE AMAZING

'Yesterday there was a party attended by a group of deaf people. There was a huge argument. It was amazing!'

Context: The signer is talking about a film and is describing the characters and situation.

- 36) TIEMPO.PASAR CONVOCAR OFICINA HERENCIA, ^t **HERENCIA**, CONTAR GANAR
 TIME.PASS CONVENE OFFICE INHERITANCE INHERITANCE COUNT WIN

PERDER, ^t **TEXTO.ESCRITO/DEIX.LUG.palma mano** HERENCIA MILLÓN-PLU
 LOSE WRITTEN.TEXT LOC.DEIX.palm of the hand INHERITANCE MILLION-PLU

PERO CONDICIÓN DEBER
 BUT CONDITION MUST

'At the Notary's office, in relation to the inheritance, they were going to tell him whether he was going to get anything or not. The will said he would receive several millions, but only if he fulfilled certain conditions'.

In the first example, the topic is an anaphoric linking device, indicating that the signer is dealing with the same little pigs mentioned previously. The second example is another case of anaphora, whilst in the third example the first topic is anaphoric and the second shares both values (anaphoric and cataphoric). In the last two examples, the topic reinforces lexical repetition as a cohesive device; the exception is the second topic of Example (36), in which a synonymous expression has been used instead (a classifier structure, with the signer's non-dominant hand representing the written inheritance text and a deictic pointing to it with his dominant hand).

c) *Cohesion marker in listing*. In oral languages, such as English and Spanish, listing takes the form of the repetition of varied and syntactically marked parallel structures (displacement to the left and right, topicalisation, etc., Martínez Caro, 1999: 137ss.). In our corpus, listing is expressed by the topicalisation of the various elements included therein, as in the following example; in it, the serie of theatrical activities the signer used to perform when at the School for the Deaf is topicalised. In a case like this, topic could be considered a cohesive device at a more local level (Givón, 1995b: 80).

Context: The signer is relating his experiences at school.

37) [...] TEATRO FIJO TODA.LA.VIDA
 DRAMA SURE ALL.MY.LIFE

t

SABES **NACIMIENTO NAVIDAD**, PARTICIPAR TEATRO
 YOU.KNOW NATIVITY CHRISTMAS TAKE.PART DRAMA

t

SEMANA.SANTA JESUCRISTO CRUCIFICADO VARIAS.COSAS
 EASTER JESUS ON.THE.CROSS SEVERAL.THINGS

PARTICIPAR TEATRO [...] [...]
 TAKE.PART DRAMA

'I've been involved in drama all my life. You know? If we had to put on the Nativity at Christmas, then I took part; at Easter if we had to represent Jesus on the cross and all that, well I was involved'.

As already said, in this paper we have focused on the analysis of declarative utterances; for this reason, in this section we have only considered the cohesive value of topic. This, however, does not exhaust its function in discourse; our recent data have confirmed the function of topic to express conditional meaning –in Example (26) this phenomenon is shown; however, to go further into this issue and other potential ones would go beyond the bounds of this work and will be the subject of future research.

8. The Focus at Utterance Level.

This section and the next will address the focus structure, in order to complete the study of the second key concept in the information structure. We begin with a description of the focus at utterance level and then at discourse level.

One of the first studies to be published on focus in signed languages was Wilbur's research into ASL (1994: 650-1). She claimed that this function was expressed in this language through a structure divided into two parts (a pseudo question-answer structure), although it constitutes a single unit from an intonative and syntactic perspective.

Some researchers into oral languages explain focus structure in a more functional way and highlight the coincidence between the focus and question/answer structures (Dik, 1997; Givón, 2001:237). According to Dik (1997:328-9), this *question-answer* structure is common in oral languages when a special strategy is used to mark the focus. Therefore, if a language possesses special strategies that enable it to express the focus, these will also coincide with those used in questions. This structure is a means of indicating the gap in information, and the

answer is the means of filling this gap. Consequently, the question is the focalised element that requires assertion in the response.

Our corpus reveals that this structure is indeed a possible means of expressing focus in LSE and would coincide, according to the intuition of our deaf informants, with the formal characteristics of a question-answer structure (see below). This structure is used both to express the informative focus and the contrastive focus. The following utterances provide examples of informative focus; in these examples, the element focalised is, respectively, an argument, a sentence and a predicate:

Argument focus:

Context: The signer is explaining what the town of Santa Cristina is known for.

38) PUEBLO NOMBRE SANTO C-R-I-S-T-I-N-A FAMA QUÉ
 TOWN NAME SAINT CRISTINA FAME WHAT

foco
DISCOTECA, JOVEN-PLU CL.personas-ACUDIR.MASIVAMENTE VARIOS
 DISCO YOUNG-PLU CL.PEOPLE-GO.MASSIVELY SEVERAL
 ‘The town called Santa Cristina is known for its discos, the amount of young people that go there and for other things as well’.

Sentence focus:

Context: The signer is telling the tale of the three little pigs.

39) UN.DÍA QUÉ.PASAR LOBO [APARECER]¹² [...]
 ONE.DAY WHAT.HAPPEN WOLF [ARRIVE]
 ‘And what happened one day, the wolf arrived...’.

Predicative focus:

Context: The signer is explaining what happened in one of the last Galician elections.

40) TIEMP.PAS. FECHA 19 JUNIO SABES ELECCIONES GALICIA ZONA
 PAST.TIME DATE 19 JUNE YOU.KNOW ELECTION GALICIA ZONE

VOTAR PERSONA-PLU VOTAR-ASP.DUR YA FIN
 VOTE PERSON-PLU VOTE-DUR.ASP ALREADY END

CONTAR-ASP.GRAD LISTO [o ASP.PERF] P-P GANAR PERO FALTAR TODAVÍA
 COUNT-GRAD.ASP READY [or PERF.ASP] P-P WIN BUT MISS YET

MOTIVO EMIGRANTE ZONA SUDAMÉRICA VOTAR
 BECAUSE EMIGRANT ZONE SOUTH AMERICA VOTE

¹² The signer does not express the verb because it is understood from the previous discourse.

$\overline{\text{foco}}$
 $\overline{\text{neg}}$
 $\overline{\text{1pf}}$
 AHORA QUÉ CONTAR TODAVÍA, GANAR NADIE
 NOW WHAT COUNT STILL WIN NOBODY

‘On 19th June, you know? There were elections in Galicia; once voting was over and the votes had been counted, it was announced that the PP had won; but the votes of emigrants in South America still hadn’t been counted; the situation is now that, as the votes haven’t been counted, we don’t know who’s won’.

This question-answer pattern does not always occur. Instead, there is sometimes an alternative structure containing an initial informative part that is reinforced by a non-manual element expressing surprise (or something unexpected) and, following on from this, the focalised element. The presence of this second focus structure is coherent with the fact that in LSE *wh*-elements are not required in interrogative structures, as stated by Báez and Cabeza (2002:65).

We would draw attention to the following examples, in which instead of the sign for a question, the first part of the focus is marked by the facial expression referred to (indicated in the gloss by the sign “1pf” ‘first part of focus’) followed by the focused expression (in these examples focus corresponds to a sentence, an argument and a predicate, just as in the previous structure).

Sentence focus:

Context: The signer is talking about a trip he’s been on with some friends.

- 41) AMIGO 4 GRUPO IR AMSTERDAM, [HOLANDA ZONA], IR.ANTES
 FRIEND 4 GROUP GO AMSTERDAM [HOLLAND ZONE] GO.BEFORE

$\overline{\text{1pf}}$
 PENSAR ZONA BICICLETA POCO, CHASCO
 THINK ZONE BIKE A.LITTLE SURPRISE

$\overline{\text{foco}}$
 BICICLETA CL.bicicleta-ESTAR.APARCADAS QUÉ.PASADA
 BIKE CL.bike BE.PARKED IT.WAS.AMAZING

‘A group of four of us went to Amsterdam in Holland. Before we thought that there weren’t many bikes. But we were surprised to find that it’s packed with bikes all parked together. It was amazing!’

Argument focus:

Context: The signer is talking about his family (this example is a transcription of the one included in the educational video *Signar*):

- 42) $\overline{\text{t}}$ PAREJA PADRES LOS.DOS, DEIX.PERS.3-PLU HIJO CUÁNTO 4 $\overline{\text{1pf}}$ $\overline{\text{foco}}$
 COUPLE PARENTS THE.TWO PERS.DEIX.3-PLU SON HOW.MANY 4

$\overline{\text{t}}$ $\overline{\text{t}}$
 DOS, OYENTE, DOS, SORDO DEIX.LUG-4 dedos
 TWO HEARING TOW DEAF LOC.DEIX-4 fingers

t
 DEIX.LUG dedo 1, HERMANO MAYOR HOMBRE
 LOC.DEIX.finger 1 BROTHER OLDER MAN

1pf foco
 SORDO SEÑA [Seña hermano] [...]
 ‘José Manuel’
 DEAF SIGN [The sign for his brother]

‘My parents had four children: two hearing and two deaf. The eldest is a deaf man; his name is [SL sign for his brother]’.

- 43) t 1pf foco
 JUANA REGALAR-DEIX.PERS.2-1 CERO [Repetition]
 JUANA GIVE-PERS.DEIX.2-1 ZERO
 ‘Juana hasn’t given me anything at all.’

Predicative focus:

Context: a dialogue between César and Cristina about a trip the former made to Amsterdam.

- 44) César: p p
 SABER CASA TÍPICO CÓMO SABER TÚ
 KNOW HOUSE TYPICAL HOW KNOW YOUR

- Cristina: NO ‘NO’

- César: p 1pf foco
 NO.SABER, BONITO QUÉ CASA CL.fachadas-LOC.contiguas y rectas
 DON’T.KNOW PRETTY WHAT HOUSE CL.façades-LOC.adjoining façades and straight

1pf foco
 NO, CL.fachadas-.LOC.contiguas en desnivel
 NO CL.façades LOC.adjoining façades in hilly

-‘You don’t know what the typical houses are like? -No -The attractive thing about them is that the façades aren’t straight, but instead they’re all uneven’.

This last example is a case of contrastive focus, where the two types of focus structure mentioned appear: the first is the one with the question-answer format, and the second with the negative particle as the first part of the dual structure (which in turn indicates something contrary to what is stated in the preceding one), followed by the focus element.

As mentioned above, the formal markers assigned to the first focus structure correspond to those of a question formed by an interrogative pronoun and the answer (see Báez and Cabeza, 2002, for a description of these structures), and, in the case of the second structure, a facial expression indicating surprise and the response. More accurately, these two structures would be the equivalent of tension-relaxation in facial expression, together with a contrasting movement between the forward movement of the torso and a return to an upright position or slight backward lean (see figure 2). This movement corresponds to the contrast between the *forward/backward body leans* described by Wilbur and Patschke (1998: 279-280)

to mark the focus in ASL and by van der Kooij *et al.* (2006: 1604) as one of the ways of marking focus in Dutch Signed Language.

[Insert here Figure 2 -two pictures-]

9. The Discursive Function of Focus

The focus structure already described not only occurs in an intra-utterance position, but also in the linking of various utterances. This can be seen in the following example, where the focus contrasts two events.

Context: the participant is answering a question as to whether he will be presenting a paper at a congress.

45) [...] $\overline{\text{DEIX.PERS.1 PARTICIPAR}}^{\text{1pf}}$ 'PERS.DEIX.1 TAKE.PART'.

foco

NO SÓLO OBSERVAR DESARROLLO.DE.CONFERENCIA NADA.MÁS
 NO ONLY OBSERVE DEVELOPMENT OF LECTURE NOTHING.MORE
 'Yes I'm going to take part, but I'm not going to present a paper, I'm just going to sit there watching what goes on, that's all'.

However, at inter-utterance level, the focus does not always have this contrastive function; instead, it occasionally subordinates and/or coordinates two utterances. It is then a case of grammaticalised focus. The values encountered to date are the next:

Purpose value:

Context: Conference during a summer camp with deaf persons, their families and hearing authorities.

46) [...] $\overline{\text{SABER, DEIX.LUGAR.mano}}^{\text{p}}$ $\overline{\text{UNIÓN QUÉ, PARA QUÉ, OBJETIVO CUAL}}^{\text{1pf}}$, $\overline{\text{UNIÓN QUÉ, PARA QUÉ, OBJETIVO CUAL}}^{\text{1pf}}$, $\overline{\text{UNIÓN QUÉ, PARA QUÉ, OBJETIVO CUAL}}^{\text{1pf}}$,
 KNOW LOC.DEIX.hand UNION WHAT FOR WHAT GOAL WHAT

foco

HACER.FALTA UNIÓN PARA CONSEGUIR COSA
 NEED UNION FOR ACHIEVE THING
 'There has to be a greater sense of union in order to achieve things'.

In the first part of the focus in this example, the signer repeats the interrogative element three times to highlight its meaning. The predicate HACER.FALTA is inferred because it has previously been made explicit (although it is repeated again in the focus part). One can see,

then, that the focus structure connects two statements: one expressing the need to unite and the other the need to secure rights, the second of which is the purpose of the first.

Causal value (Continuation of Example 43):

47) [...] [SL sign for his brother] $\frac{\text{1pf}}{\text{BECAUSE}} \frac{\text{SIGN}}{\text{SIGN}} \frac{\text{NOMBRAR POR QUÉ}}{\text{NAMING WHY}} \frac{\text{1pf}}{\text{WHY}} \frac{\text{foco}}{\text{LONG.TIME.AGO}} \frac{\text{HACE.TIEMPO}}{\text{LONG.TIME.AGO}}$

[SL sign for his brother] $\frac{\text{PEQUEÑO ASP.FREC}}{\text{(BE).SMALL FREQ.ASP}} \frac{\text{LLORAR-ASP.DUR}}{\text{CRY-DUR.ASP}} \frac{\text{foco}}{\text{CRY-DUR.ASP}}$

POR.ESO NOMBRAR [SL sign for his brother]
SO NAMING.

‘The sign for my brother is [he makes the sign], because a long time ago when he was small he was always crying. So the sign was [makes the sign]’.

Here, the first part of the focus does not only include a *wh*-pronoun as in the previous one. Instead, the item MOTIVE is used first, which likewise acts as a causal connector. This is therefore a focus structure reinforced by a lexical procedure whose specific function is to link these two utterances (the second is the cause of the first one).

Result value:

Context: The signer is relating news of a plane crash in Africa.

48) $\frac{\text{t}}{\text{PLANE CL.plane flying and falling}} \frac{\text{ERROR ACCIDENTE}}{\text{ERROR ACCIDENT}} \frac{\text{CL.el avión se estrella}}{\text{CL.the plane crashes}} \frac{\text{INCENDIAR}}{\text{FIRE}}$

$\frac{\text{t}}{\text{HOMBRE RESPONSABLE, ANALIZAR}} \frac{\text{cnm: “concienzudamente”}}{\text{‘thoroughly’}} \frac{\text{rol: técnico ‘technician’}}{\text{CÓMO IMPOSIBLE}} \frac{\text{rol: técnico ‘technician’}}{\text{HOW IMPOSSIBLE}}$

$\frac{\text{rol: técnico ‘technician’}}{\text{PODER.NO RARO AVIÓN SER SEGURO-INTENS RARO}} \frac{\text{rol: técnico ‘technician’}}{\text{CAN’T.BE STRANGE PLANE BE SAFE-INTENS STRANGE}}$

$\frac{\text{1pf}}{\text{AL FINAL PERSONA}} \frac{\text{foco}}{\text{CÓMO CL.nichos dentro de la morgue}} \frac{\text{cnm: “con resignación”}}{\text{‘with resignation’}} \frac{\text{cnm: “con resignación”}}{\text{HOSPITAL DE.MOMENTO}} \frac{\text{cnm: “con resignación”}}{\text{HOSPITAL AT.THE.MOMENT}}$

$\frac{\text{CL.nichos dentro de la morgue}}{\text{CL.niches in the morgue}} \frac{\text{QUEDAR}}{\text{STAY}}$

‘Something went wrong with the plane and it crashed. The plane caught fire. After examining the situation in depth, the person in charge decided it was impossible and very strange that this should happen, as the plane was perfectly safe. As a result of the accident (there were many victims), who are currently provisionally being kept in the hospital morgue’.

In this case, the focus structure is used to connect the following two events: the description of the accident and then the situation deriving from it in the morgue of the hospital; so the latter occurs as a consequence of what happened to the plane.

The formal differences between the grammaticalised focus referred to and the focus as emphasis are to be found in the degree of facial tension.

10. Discussion (of Sections 7-9)

The analysis of discursive topic in LSE also confirms the importance of topic in the cohesion between utterances, similar to descriptions in other signed languages. Not only does the topic mark the starting point of a message in an utterance but also guides interlocutors in their interpretation of this information as it progresses in the discourse: it marks the information at the outset, indicates that some items coincide with others mentioned previously (anaphoric function) and unifies the items of information listed. In these cases, it is a cohesive device, with roles similar to the meta-functions of reference and lexical cohesion described by Halliday and Hasan (1976) (see also Martin, 2001, and Halliday 2002b).

As for the focus, the description, at utterance level, has displayed certain formal traits: a structure divided into two parts, in which the first may be composed of a question or a segment that expresses expectation, followed by the focalised element. The latter thus appears at the end of the informative item, indicating that it complies with the *ordo naturalis* (Sornicola, 1999), in a way similar to that of Spanish (Martínez Caro, 1999), and Catalan (Vallduví, 1992); and very different from Euskera, another language of the Iberian Peninsula, with the focus in a pre-verbal position (Landa, 2008).

The pragmatic function of the focus at utterance level coincides with its function in many other languages, that is, as the rhematic segment that emphasises some kind of information and is realised in two types of foci: information focus and contrastive focus. However, the novelty in our data is its role in the connection between utterances, especially to indicate values of coordination and subordination. Thus, this structure has a function parallel to conjunctions and discourse markers in spoken languages. It could be another resource to realise the metafunction of *conjunction*, proposed by Martin (2001: 38), after Halliday and Hasan's (1976) first proposal: conjunction is concerned with resources for connecting messages, via addition, comparison, temporality and causality (see also Halliday, 2002b: 224-5).

As mentioned above, the Examples (62)-(64) show that the focalised part expresses three kinds of meaning: purpose, causal and result. For a more discursive explanation, we follow the classification of these structures proposed by the recent grammar of the RAE (2009: cap. 46). In the first case, the purpose construction corresponds to the type called utterance-purpose construction (*construcción final del enunciado*) because the focalised proposition is an argument of the head predicate. However, the causal construction in (63) is an example of a causal construction with an enunciation function (*construcción causal de la enunciación*);¹³ here the cause is not internal to the predicate of the main clause but a different utterance, an argumentative premise of what is said in the initial utterance (an explanation of why the deaf person uses this specific sign). Finally, the result construction would correspond to *illative* (lat. *illatio*) utterances, argumentative resources to articulate messages and establish a cause/effect relationship between them. These work at enunciation level as declarative statements different from the main utterance: in Example (64) the focus structure is a conclusion of the whole story and explains the final state of bodies after the accident.¹⁴

11. Final Comments and Conclusions

Having completed the analysis and the discussion of each main section, we wish to draw attention to several points.

Firstly, once again we pose the question as to which of the structures described form the basic order for utterances in the variety under analysis. As observed in our examples, some signers use SOV and/or SVO structures, but the completed analysis of our data has shown that some semantic-pragmatic principles such as the informational component, syntactic weight, ground/figure order and the spatial positioning of the elements have an important role too at the level of utterance organization. Likewise, in future research, two other aspects will need to be taken into account: on the one hand, the personal characteristics of each signer, because, as explained by some informants, some resort more frequently to the topicalisation of the object topic than others (perhaps these differences are due to the peculiarity of these languages in the process of acquisition, very few of them being children of deaf signers); on the other, particular constraints due to the discourse genre involved (for

¹³ *Enunciación* is the Spanish translation of the Benveniste's term *enunciation* ('the act of producing an utterance') translated in English by Johansson and Suomela-Salmi (2011: 71-72) as *enontiation*.

¹⁴ In Wilcox y Jarque (2006), one can find similar constructions to the purpose and conclusive ones described here (especially their Examples 9 and 12).

example, spatial positioning seems to be more common in long narratives than in talks and lectures).

Therefore, as in Mithun's (1992) conclusion after her research into several languages, it does not seem appropriate to raise the issue of the basic order of utterances in LSE. The use of each of the above-mentioned structures seems to respond to specific functions, and only future analysis of new discursive data, from other signer and other genres, may offer new evidence on the precise context of their use, and the greater or lesser frequency of their occurrence.

In an analysis of LSC (Catalan Signed Language) data, Jarque *et al.* (2004: 1068) refer to an 'apparent' freedom of signers when selecting order. However, we consider this on account of the influence of the factors just mentioned. The first author of this paper (Morales-López) is also working with a research group in Barcelona analysing signed data of this variety. Most of our results in the present paper coincide with the Barcelona data (with the exception of the focus, which has not been wholly contrasted yet). Therefore, our conclusion is that both varieties match almost perfectly in this matter (we reached the same conclusion in a previous research on verbal typology, Morales López *et al.*, 2005).

Secondly, the discursive topic and focus data have also pointed to a preference for the use of informational structure in the co-referentiality between utterances (the anaphoric function of topic), cohesion at local level (the topic as a cohesive device in the listing of elements) and the *conjunction* of utterances (the focus with purpose, causal, and result functions). In the future, the analysis of new discursive data (which the authors themselves are in the process of performing) will complete these proposals at the level of informative component, but also at the spatial organisation of discourse (an issue not found very frequently in our data, as already explained). However, in this work the groundwork has been laid for recognizing the importance of these two phenomena in LSE.

The final issue our research leads us to put forward is whether it is possible to find an explanation for the priority given to pragmatic factors in the data analysed, an aspect that also appears in other grammatical phenomena of these languages. In particular, relative to the informational component (the phenomenon to which we have devoted most attention in our paper), authors such as Rosenstein (2004) believe that these characteristics are the result of the fact that these languages are young and that they have traditionally been used in informal situations, as well as their facial and gestural modes.

The argument for the youth of these languages may well be true and could be an aspect for consideration in a number of signed languages, as occurs in oral pidgin languages (Romaine, 1988; Givón, 1995b). However, LSE is not such a young language; the earliest evidence of education for the deaf in Spain goes back as far as the 17th century, and the first school for the deaf was founded a century later. Even so, Maruxa Cabeza, a LSE researcher (personal communication), has pointed out the need to consider the absence of a written tradition, an aspect which could have been an obstacle for the development of a standard variety, and the fact that all signed languages are revived or are reinvented in each generation, most frequently due to their horizontal transmission (Mufwene, 2001).

Although these sociological traits need to be considered as well (in particular when differences among particular signers occur), we therefore lean more towards the difference in modality patterns in order to explain the higher number of pragmatic factors (as stated by other authors referred to in Section 2). Yet we must not overlook the fact that there are oral languages which also make use of these pragmatic features; examples include isolating languages such as Chinese, to give just one example (Haiman, 1985: Chap. 1), and even a language with such an extensive morphology as Spanish, as already discussed. We therefore consider the vision of an author such as Jiménez-Juliá (1996: 487) to be of particular interest. He claims that human languages in general have two possible axes for the distribution of information: a *transitive axis*, in which the principal element is the syntactic function, and the *theme axis*, which takes the informational component as its principal value. The gestural and spatial characteristics of signed languages tend to situate them along the latter of these axes.

Transcription system

HOUSE	Signed language words
IN.THE.MORNING PAINT.LIPS, etc.	One word in signed language; it can include several words in oral (or spoken) language.
EAT-PAST	One word with two morphemes: one lexical and another with lexical-grammatical function.
ASP FREQ.ASP DUR.ASP PERF.ASP	Aspect Frequentative aspect Durative aspect Perfective aspect
PLU, CHILD-PLU -DISTR.PLU	Plural Distributive plural as verbal morpheme: Ex. GIVE-DISTR.PLU
INTENS THINK-INTENS BLACK-INTENS _Intens_ THINK	Intensifier Verbal morpheme Adjectival morpheme It can also be expressed by a non-manual component (<i>cnm</i>), simultaneous to the lexical sign.

-MAN.ADV	Adverb of manner as verbal morpheme Ex. STUDY-WITH.EFFORT
CL.person, child, etc. CL.people-MEET	Classifier and its referent in small letters. Classifier as verbal morpheme.
<i>Mime</i>	Gestures inserted in the discourse: E.g.: <i>The dog put its head in the pot</i>
PERS.DEIX.1, 2, 3	Personal deixis (first, second and third person).
GIVE-PERS.DEIX.1-2, 2-3, 3-3, etc.	Personal deixis as verbal morpheme.
PERS.DEIX.1-2, 2-3, 3-3.	Deixis as a free verbal morpheme (e.g. HUG DEIX.PERS.3-3).
TWO.OF.US. THREE.OF.US, FOUR.OF.US, etc.	Dual. ¹⁵ Personal deixis with numeral incorporation.
PLACE.DEIX.table, etc.	Spatial deixis and its referent in small letter.
PLACE.DEIX-finger1, 2, etc.	Listing of objects or entities with the fingers.
_____p_____ DEIX.PERS.1 IR	“P”: Non-manual component simultaneous with the gestural sign. It has the function of question.
Locus	Points in space in which the participants or entities of an event are situated; the references remain stable until there is a change of setting. E.g.. DEIX.PERS.3.child’s locus. This indicates that the signer is addressing the locus in which the child is situated (a participant about whom something is being said).
<i>Rol</i> and <i>semi-rol</i> (‘role’ and ‘half role’). Ex.: _role: person imitated_ IMPOSSIBLE	In the role function (or role playing), the signer says literally the words of another person (direct speech). In the half-role function the signer is narrating what another person has said (indirect speech) although he/she is imitating this person with gestures.
TIE _{a very fine, thick bow, etc.} OPEN _{door, a package, etc.}	The sub-index is used to indicate that the predicative classifier included in the verb form is still productive.
_____t_____ THINK	Topicalised element.
_____t. cond_____ THINK...	Topic with a conditional value.
“/” e.g. CL.book / DEIX.LUG.book	Everything to the left of the stroke has been signed with the left hand and to the right with the right hand.
_____1pf_____focus_____ WHICH BE PEUGEOT	Divided focus structure: 1pf (first part: tension) and focus (response: distension).
_____Look left “stone”_____ STONE ATTRACTIVE SHINY	The signer looks at a stone situated to his left.
_____neg_____ THINK HAVE-NOT	Negation using facial expressions. Negation as a compound element with the verb.

* See <http://ruc.udc.es/dspace> for details of our project: *Bilingüismo lengua de signos/lengua oral* (some of our papers can also be downloaded from this page and from www.cultura-sorda.eu). Cristina Freire Rodríguez and Cristina Pérez Casanova were involved in the early stages of our research into word order and took part in the initial discussions on the data collected. We wish to thank them for their contribution. We also thank some colleagues who read parts of this paper.

¹⁵ Maria Josep Jarque has suggested we consider this expression as dual.

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