

## Cumulative metonymies in sign languages

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It is our intention in this talk, firstly, to show that, unsurprisingly, metonymy is pervasive in sign languages (and not only in spoken/written languages) and that it occurs not only at the lexical level. Secondly, we demonstrate that many of these metonymies cascade and are complex. More specifically, they are cumulative in the sense that the target of one feeds into another, serving as its source/vehicle (and recursively so). As a result of this, many of these metonymies remain obscured to sight and are not recognized as such by signers and/or researchers into sign languages. Thirdly, in the final part of our presentation we argue that a number of metonymies are (no longer) recognized as such due to various reasons. This may happen because of diachronic reductions that occur naturally over time. Sometimes this is the result of some puristic/normative interventions. In part this can be attributed to the current drive to demonstrate by all means that sign languages are no different than “normal” spoken/written languages, and that they in addition to their own peculiar syntax and morphology (touched upon in the first part of the talk) also have a phonology that can be described in terms of their own peculiar features, such as hand shapes, spaces, etc. This amounts to the proverbial robbing holistic-cognitive Peter to pay the modular-componential Paul. This excessively structuralist approach to sign languages as good as obliterates what we may call historical or diachronic lexical semantics, or etymological research, into sign languages. One of its consequences is that much of the deep (metonymic and metaphorical) motivation of sign language is lost. This loss may, however, have some adverse effects

on the process of teaching/learning sign languages, which offsets the putative gain of making the description of sign languages more formalized and “scientific”.