

## **Functions of Mouthing in Interrogatives of Chinese Sign Language**

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Mouthing has not been discussed so far in CSL. And its role in SL has been a hot issue for years. This paper investigates mouthing in CSL interrogatives. We try to understand the function of mouthing at different levels of sign structures represented by interrogatives and the mechanism behind it. The analysis is based on naturalistic data mainly collected in Shanghai from sixty-four subjects who are all native CSL signers, with a background of schooling in deaf schools, and ages ranging from about 20 to 60. Data collected from 99 clips of natural data amounting to more than 15 hours have been annotated using ELAN, totaling 1427 polar questions and 630 content questions.

First, all the signs and mouthings are counted in all 2057 interrogatives. We find two types of mouthing: those with signs, and those without signs. We observed the spread of mouthing, where mouthing spreads over one or more signs. Moreover, the distribution of mouthing is analyzed from the ages and sentence types, namely polar question vs. content question. No significant difference has been found, between the young deaf and the old, neither between the polar question and the content question.

We found that over 80% of signs co-occurred with mouthing, and 90% of them spread over a single sign. As for question signs, we found most question signs have equivalent mouthings. Mainly, the mouthing function is at the level of morph-phonology. However, there are cases where they function syntactically. In some special cases, mouthings can form interrogative in language communication without the company of manual signs. We suggest that most speakers of CSL maybe belong to a bimodal type, i.e. the mouthings are an integral part of Chinese sign language, though playing a complementary role, or even a redundant one. However, basically CSL cannot do without them. We further infer that gesture, sign and sound are three elements in the whole system of our language. CSL merely is a continuum that has CSL as its main element and various degrees of spoken Chinese and gesture blending into it.

### *References*

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