

UNIMODAL SIGN BILINGUALISM: THE CO-USE OF TWO SIGN LANGUAGES IN A MICRO-COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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This presentation explores unimodal sign bilingualism, that is, signers who use more than one sign language in conversation. The focus is on patterns of co-use of two sign languages in the conversations of deaf bilinguals, where the participants are fluent in Indian Sign Language (ISL) and Burundi Sign Language (BuSL). The data analysed here come from casual conversations between four signers. The presentation investigates the contributions that both sign languages make to these conversations at lexical, clause, and discourse levels. The results show that despite individual differences between signers, there are also striking commonalities. This leads to the argument that these signers have developed a fairly stable bilingual variety that is characteristic of this particular micro-community of practice. Theoretical implications arising from these patterns are also explored, which enable a comparison with spoken language bilingualism.