

# Possessives and existentials in SLs

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# Typological summary of possession in SL

(slide from Zeshan (2010) presentation)

- Three handshapes used in possessive pronouns: A, B, V
- Many East Asian sign languages have no possessive pronouns
- Many spatial inflections with possession.
- Often complex differences in meaning with different signs for possession.
- Illnesses, “pain” etc are often not expressed as possession.
- Possession of abstract and concrete items may use different structures.

# Kata Kolok

# General info on Kata Kolok

- literally 'language deaf'
- in Desa Kolok village in the north of Bali
- 2% of deaf people
- 2007 first school for deaf

# Why is Kata Kolok special?

- impact of the system of conventionalised gestures used by hearing speakers of Balinese
- non-arbitrariness of pointing signs
- geocentric system of spatial terms
- widespread polysemy or ambiguity

# Pointing

- for both possessor and possessum
- for both attributive and predicative possession
- also in locatives and existentials

a looot of ambiguity

# Attributive possession

- Pronominal possession:
  - pointing to possessor
  - same signs as for subject and object pronouns
  - for 1Sg sometimes bent-B handshape
  - may precede or follow the nominal
  - poss pronouns are not obligatory



# Attributive possession

- Nominal possession:
  - juxtaposition
  - the word order is variable, pointing signs can co-occur

# Predicative possession

- Juxtaposition:
  - typically found with pronominal possessors
  - overlaps with the expression of location in Kata Kolok
- Predicative quantifier/modifier construction:
  - also juxtaposition, but it does not overlap with existentials or location.  
Clear possession construction.

# Predicative possession

- THUMB-UP for possession and existence:
  - THUMB-UP always occurs clause-finally
  - is a borrowed gesture accompanying spoken Balinese
  - three meanings: “it is that way”, “strong/healthy”, possession/existence



FLAT<sub>1</sub>

HOUSE

THUMB-UP

‘I have a house.’

# Predicative possession

- So-called 'belong' construction:
  - still juxtaposition
  - NP of possessum is topicalized
  - often in contrastive sentences

# Negative possession/existence

- NEG and FINISH signs
- NEG usage:
  - clausal negation, 'nobody'/pronoun negation, negative imperative, and possession/existence

INDEX<sub>1</sub> HIT NEG  
'I didn't hit him.'

CLOTHES INDEX<sub>1</sub> NEG  
'I don't have any clothes.'

# Negative possession/existence

- NEG and FINISH signs (both occur clause-finally, interchangeable)
- FINISH usage:
  - signals an end of an utterance; completive; negation

Now give me a thumbs-up if you think sign language linguistics is cool



THUMB-UP

# References

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3. Zeshan, Ulrike & Nick Palfreyman (in press) 'Typology of sign languages', in A.Y. Aikhenvald and R.M.W. Dixon (eds.) The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Typology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
4. Zeshan, Ulrike (2010) Typology of possessive constructions in sign languages. DGfS-CNRS Summer School on Linguistic Typology, Course "Sign Language Typology"