

Signatures of comparison in natural language

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Languages employ a variety of strategies for expressing comparison. While on one level there is significant structural variation across languages, on the other hand there is also variation in the semantic tools used to express comparison. I present an experimental method to investigate the semantics of four different strategies of comparison in English: 1. explicit comparatives (A is taller than B) 2. implicit comparatives (A is tall compared to B) 3. intensification (B is tall, A is very tall) 4. iconic comparatives (with a co-speech gesture).

I then show how investigations into comparatives in sign language raise questions regarding the role of iconicity in the expression of comparison. I propose an extension of this experimental setup to investigate iconic comparatives in sign language and present preliminary results from a production study in ASL.