<u>A New Classifier-Based Morpheme in German Sign Language (DGS)</u>
Marjorie Herbert, University of Michigan

Introduction. Like many other spoken and sign languages, German Sign Language (Deutsche Gebärdensprache; DGS) makes use of multiple strategies for the plural marking of nominal signs. I propose that a new morpheme for plural marking is becoming grammaticalized and that the morpheme is drawn from the classifier system already available in DGS. This new morpheme attaches only to nouns that do not allow the overt realization of the canonical plural marker. For this reason, I propose that signers are beginning to use the classifier-based morpheme as a repair for this underspecification.

Background. According to Pfau and Steinbach (2005), the plural marker is realized in three ways. The first default realization is lateral reduplication, in which the sign is reduplicated as the hands move laterally through the signing space. The second is simple reduplication, whereby the base sign is reduplicated as the hands maintains the same position in space. The third case is zero-marking, with no overt realization of the plural marker. Pfau and Steinbach argue that the realization of the plural depends critically on the phonological properties of the base sign, making this phenomenon a case of phonologically triggered allomorphy.

As a consequence, this phenomenon leaves the majority of nouns bare in the plural, for it is a small subset of lexical items that allow the canonical plural morpheme to attach in the plural form. Pfau and Steinbach (2006) argue that classifier constructions are often used to express plurality in conjunction with *both* nouns that display zero-marking in the plural *and* nouns that have the overt realization of the plural marker available to them. In sign languages, classifiers are handshapes that can be used to represent a specific referent in the signing space (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006). According to Sandler and Lillo-Martin, classifiers display characteristics of the referent they stand in for within a discourse. Once a signer has articulated a particular nominal sign, she can then use a classifier construction to represent how that person or thing moves, what he, she, or it looks like, and/or where the noun is located in space. Though classifiers in DGS are versatile in their ability to describe the NPs to which they correspond, they invariably assign a definiteness and a location in the signing space to those NPs. For example, if the [+FLAT] classifier (CL_{FLAT}) used for flat objects were signed two times in a similar location in the signing space, the interpretation in (1) would follow.

(1)   BOOKS CL_{FLAT} CL_{FLAT}
       'there are two books lying next to each other'.

New Proposal. However, I argue, based on my original fieldwork, that DGS can make use of a new classifier-based morpheme, in conjunction only with nouns that have no overt realization of the plural marker. I argue that signers are adopting the classifier-based morpheme in the plural as a repair for underspecification of the canonical plural marker. This classifier morpheme is a laterally reduplicated version of any classifier handshape. For example, the noun WOMAN displays zero-marking in the plural. To pluralize this noun, a signer would use the classifier that is licensed for the class of [+human] entities: the personal agreement marker or PAM (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Single Articulation of PAM.

The signer would first articulate the noun, WOMAN, followed by three rapid articulations of PAM. As a signer executes these articulations, she moves her hand laterally in the signing space, in a motion that is very similar to the lateral reduplication that plural-marks nouns (2a). I represent this rapid articulation of PAM with underscores because the production of each successive PAM is much more fluid than it would be in a typical classifier construction. A typical classifier construction involves disjointed productions of the classifier, and it implies a spatial relationship among the referents (2b).

(2)   a. WOMAN PAM_PAM_PAM
          'women'
      b. WOMAN PAM PAM PAM
        'there are three women standing next to each other'

I argue that this classifier-based morpheme is a new morpheme and not a classifier construction because it is not available in certain contexts where a typical classifier construction would be allowed to occur. For example, Pfau and Steinbach (2005) assert that DGS does not have NP-internal number agreement. When the noun is embedded within a quantifier or numeral phrase, plural marking on the head noun is blocked (3a), but a classifier construction may appear after the noun has been articulated (3b). When a noun that blocks overt realization of the plural marker is embedded within a quantifier or numeral phrase, the classifier morpheme is also not allowed (3c).

(3)   a. MANY CHILD
          'many children'
      b. MANY CHILD PAM PAM PAM
        'there many children standing next to each other'
      c. *MANY WOMAN PAM_PAM_PAM
        'many women'

Conclusion. As demonstrated in this abstract, there are many strategies for expressing plurality in DGS. In addition to the plural marker that occurs overtly on some nouns, there is a rich classifier system that signers use to express plurality and spatial relationships among referents. In the case of nouns that are bare in their plural form, a morpheme based on classifier handshapes seems to be emerging in order to realize an overt plural without implying a particular spatial configuration of the referents.