

## **The semantic underpinnings of verb classification in a sign language**

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Verb classifications for sign languages are typically based on agreement properties: roughly, agreement verbs and spatial verbs agree with person/location, while plain verbs do not agree (see e.g. Padden 1983, Janis 1992, de Quadros 1999, Meir 2002). It has also been suggested that this classification is semantically grounded, with agreement verbs denoting transfer, spatial verbs motion, and plain verbs neither of the two (Meir 2002). Given this proposition, it is perhaps surprising that details of the semantics of verb types have not been explored in more depth beyond what Meir has offered. In this talk, I investigate the semantic underpinnings of verb types in one sign language – German Sign Language – in greater detail. I show that certain aspects of events and their participants can be iconically reflected in a verb's form, such that verb type can, to some extent, be predicted. Indeed, the same sort of event properties are also known to govern transitivity marking in spoken languages (Hopper & Thompson 1980, Tsunoda 1981), thus underscoring the centrality of these notions in human language.

Marloes Oomen is a PhD student at the University of Amsterdam. She is primarily interested in the study of sign languages from formal as well as typological perspectives, and has carried out research on various topics in the domains of negation and argument structure in sign languages.