

# **Classifier Handshape Choice in Sign Languages**

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Sign languages possess a wide range of tools to convey spatial information, including classifier predicates: complex verbs which combine meaningful classifier handshapes with depictive use of localization and movement. For example, to refer to a person moving from point A to point B over a hill, a signer might use a sign with the 1-handshape (the index finger directed upwards), combined with depictive motion with an arc-shaped trajectory. The classifier handshapes are especially interesting because they resemble predicate classifier morphemes in spoken languages, but also manifest iconicity. Intriguingly, some classifier handshapes are partially synonymous, that is, multiple different handshapes can be used to refer to the same class of objects.

For instance, to describe a person moving, one can use the 1-handshape (above), or the 2-handshape (index and middle fingers directed downwards, resembling the legs of a person). In this presentation, I will report some results of the CAS-funded study "Whole-entity classifiers: a multiperspective approach". In this project, we tried to answer the following question: what influences the choice between synonymous classifier handshapes? We considered a variety of possible factors, including phonological, morphosyntactic, semantic, and discourse-related, across a variety of sign languages, and found both cross-linguistic and language-internal variation in this domain.