Digging into buoys: their use across genres and their status in signed discourse
Silvia Gabarrot-López, Laurence Meurant & Gemma Barberà
silvia.gabarro@unamur.be, laurence.meurant@unamur.be & gemma.barbera@upf.edu

Objectives
- To study the distribution of buoys across genres
- To analyze the extension of buoys (scope) across the discourse and their role for cohesion
- To investigate the role of buoys at the level of discourse: discourse markers (DMs)? Other discourse related devices?
- To find out the possible DM functions of buoys
- To establish a set of criteria to distinguish buoys with a DM status from the others

Data and method
First corpus (C1) 1 LSFB signer (5M) in monologic setting
Second corpus (C2) 6 signers from different age groups from the LSFB Corpus (May 2014) in dialogic setting

Comparative in terms of genre
Argumentative, explicative, narrative and metalinguistic discourses with different degrees of preparedness

Annotation of discourse markers (DMs) Protocol for spoken corpora (Criste 2014)

Scope and cohesive role of the most represented buoys
- FRAGMENT BUOYS: Held while the other hand produces from 2 to 5 signs, i.e. limited scope + Ensure semantic or syntactic cohesion of a discourse portion by holding a referent.
- LIST BUOYS: variable scope
  - Enumerative
    - Local enumeration of signs or short string of signs
  - Global organisation of the discourse where large portions of discourse are given an order
  - Cohesive: structures a full discourse and appears when anaphoric reference takes place

Are fragment and list buoys genre-related?
- FRAGMENT BUOYS: not at all, they appear in all genres
- LIST BUOYS: almost inexistent in narration. Globally organizing and cohesive list buoys are more likely to appear in prepared or semi-prepared narratives, and discursive lists in spontaneous productions.

Conclusions
- List buoys present variable scopes whereas the other categories not. The degree of preparedness rather than the discourse genre makes list buoys with long scopes more likely to appear.
- Not all buoys have a role at the discourse level and only some list buoys (globally organising and cohesive) behave as DMs.
- The semantics of list buoys are not limited to ordering events or items (Liddell 2003) but they can structure a mess a sequence, add meaning of alternatives, summarize, etc.
- Implementation of Liddell’s definition: buoys are signs produced by the weak hand held in a stationary configuration while the strong hand continues signing. The configurations are diverse and sometimes the same one conflates different functions at the level of iconic constructions (participating in simultaneous constructions or backgrounds in locative constructions), syntax (in different layers of the utterance) and discourse (either micro or macro).

Results
Role of buoys at the level of discourse
2 existing theories:
- Information Structure (IS) studies how information is packaged at the level of the sentence contrasting new vs old information within the same general topic (Vallvé 1992).
- The Question under Discussion (QUD) presents the organisation of the discourse under the form of a tree. The discourse as a whole is on the top and has different movings which are the different questions under discussion. Each question under discussion in turn has different moves that are its sub-topics as in the figure beside (Büring 2003).

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List buoy changing the move of the QUD

Translation:
Mum was a sign language guide. I was proud to see her signing (…) Dad always showed the materials about deaf culture at the Robert Dresse Centre (…)