



# Stabilization Processes in Recurrent Gestures: The Case of the Slicing Gesture in German

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## Abstract

Researchers rightly note that our understanding of language evolution is predominantly focused on speech, leaving the evolution of gestures and signing largely unexplored. Sign linguists address this gap by systematically studying grammaticalization processes in various sign languages revealing gestures' fundamental role in sign evolution. Yet, an overlooked aspect is that gestures, too, undergo change and stabilization.

This paper presents the initial findings of a research project on the stabilization of gestures. By concentrating on a specific type of gesture, recurrent gestures, the research project investigates the emergence of recurrent gestures in terms of their stabilization and the stabilization of sequences of recurrent gestures. Additionally, it compares the processes of stabilization in selected recurrent gestures with signs in German Sign Language (DGS). The paper particularly focuses on one recurrent gesture not previously described for German speakers, namely the Slicing gesture. In the analyzed data of 6 hours of political talk shows, 529 tokens of this gesture were documented. Variants of this gesture were used to halt a process, define one side of an argument, or emphasize the dichotomy of two perspectives. In many cases, the gesture was integrated into longer gesture sequences, acquiring a meta-pragmatic meaning. Specifically, in these instances, the Slicing gesture embodied the rhetorical quality of making an argument or defining things clearly.

The paper adds to the project's overarching aim of fleshing out a media-specific and cross-modal approach to stabilization processes in human expressive modes focusing on gestures and signs.

## Speaker



Dr. Silva H. Ladewig is a linguist at the Georg-August University of Göttingen. She studies the embodied nature of language with a focus on gesture from perspectives including Pragmatics, Cognitive Grammar, Cognitive Semantics and Dynamic Multimodal Communication.

She is PI of the project "Processes of Stabilization in Gestures. A media-specific and cross-modal approach" funded by the DFG Research Priority Project (ViCom) and author of the book *Integrating Gestures: The Dimension of Multimodality in Cognitive Grammar* (De Gruyter Mouton, 2020).

## ZOOM



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