Personal Pronoun Copy in Shanghai Sign Language:
A Functional View

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In modern oral Chinese, it is observed that sometimes a personal pronoun appears twice within the same sentence, once in sentence-initial position and once in sentence-final position, for example*, Ni gan shenme ni?* 'You do what you?', which is less frequently found in other spoken languages. However, this is quite normal in sign languages. In the literature, this type of personal pronoun copy is found in many historically unrelated sign languages, namely, American Sign Language (ASL), Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT), Australian Sign Language (Auslan) and Japanese Sign Language (JSL). On the basis of two hours of spontaneous data collected from 38 deaf native signers using native Shanghai Sign Language (a variety of Chinese Sign Language), we found that similar to other sign languages, personal pronoun copy also exists in Shanghai Sign Language. On the perspective of its syntactic distribution, the copy personal pronouns could be subjects, embedded subjects, as well as objects. As to its phonological characteristic, there is no obvious shortening or lengthening, or any regular intonation break such as blink, pause, nod, etc. Previous studies of personal pronoun copy in sign languages put forward three major accounts: these pronouns serve as focus/emphasis markers, agreement markers, and right dislocations. However, these proposals are mainly based on the syntactic form of this phenomenon and ignore its function. Therefore, we turn to the functional view. On the one hand, we agree with Felix (2012) that sentence-final pronouns can help secure the attention of the addressee towards the topic of conversation by upholding their visual prominence via spatial indexing. On the other hand, the present paper argues that personal pronoun copy is a strategy to express a speakers' positive or negative emotion in both monologue and conversational data by its use with some emotion related signs, such as *happy*, *admire*, *kindness*, *hate*, *disdain*, and non-manuals, such as *smile*, *nod*, *frown*, etc), as well as context. At last, we try to do a comparison between the use of personal pronoun copy in Shanghai Sign Language and oral Chinese. The conclusion is that even though they look quite similar in their forms and functions, we cannot easily confuse them due to their modality difference.

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