

Syntactic Development of ASL by M2L2 Hearing Parents of Deaf Children



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Background

- More than 90% of DHH children in the U.S. are born to hearing parents. (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004)
- Some hearing parents choose to learn a sign language with their child. (Lieberman et al. 2024)
- **How do parents' signed M2L2 morphosyntactic skills develop?**
(cf. Chen Pichler, 2021; Ritmeester et al., 2026)

Our Current Study

- **Family ASL Project**
- **6 hearing parents of DHH children** in the U.S., learning ASL
- Focus: longitudinal **ASL morpho-syntactic development**
- Observation Duration: ~ 4 months
- Assessment Tool: **ASL-Index of Productive Syntax (ASL-IPSyn)** with **ASL-Pullout** (Lillo-Martin et al., 2017, 2019, Under review; Barrett et al., 2025)



Findings: Overall ASL-IPSyn & ASL Pullout Scores

Family	Child Age at T1	Overall ASL IPSyn Scores (maximum score: 146)			
		T1	T2	Score Change	Percent Change
Ellie	2;01	59	73	14	10%
Nigel	2;05	24	28	4	3%
Nayla	2;06	28	39	11	8%
Imani	2;05	45	39	-6	-4%
April	2;07	13	25	12	8%
Haven	3;02	15	9	-6	-4%

ASL Pullout Scores (maximum score: 50)			
T1	T2	Score Change	Percent Change
18	20	2	4%
5	13	8	16%
7	9	2	4%
13	15	2	4%
2	8	6	12%
4	6	2	4%



ASL Pullout

25
ASL-specific constructions (diverging from English), e.g., depiction, nonmanuals, doubling, etc. (Barrett et al., 2025)

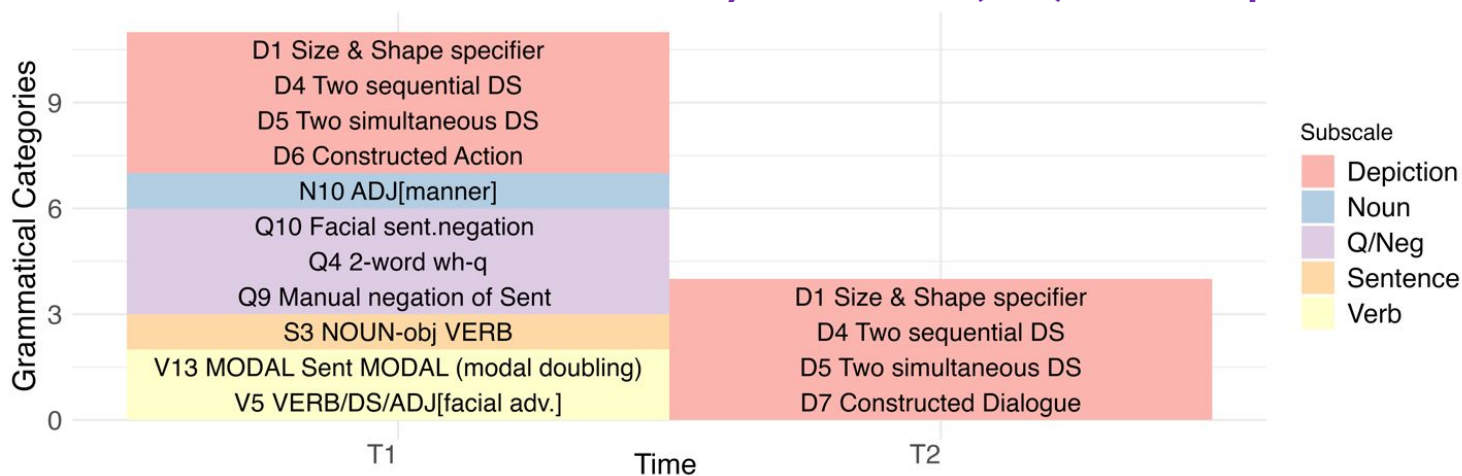
- Overall development: modest & variable;
- 'ASL-specific' usage: more consistent increases; individual differences in trajectories

Findings: Morphosyntactic Patterns of Use Across Timepoints

This figure shows ASL Pullout structures that were rare or absent in parents' signing. At T2, the list is much shorter than at T1, indicating emerging use of ASL-specific structures over time.

Notably, the items that continue to be rare or absent at T2 **all involve depiction** (in pink), suggesting that this aspect of ASL grammar is especially challenging for parents to learn.

ASL Pullout structures used by 2 or fewer (0-2) of the 6 parents



Conclusion

In general, hearing parents rely heavily on ASL structures that parallel English word order.

Results confirm need for explicit support in ASL grammar, especially for depiction.

ASL-IPSyn + ASL Pullout reveals more nuanced (and encouraging) picture of parents' M2L2 syntactic development.



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For more information:
<https://slla.lab.uconn.edu/family-asl/>

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