

Plenary 1: Dr. Nick Palfreyman (University of Central Lancashire)

The BISINDO corpus in five clips: Towards a better understanding of sign language variation and change.

Our knowledge of sign language variation and change is growing but still massively underdeveloped compared with spoken languages. This presentation, which focuses on Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO), shows how a corpus of 131 BISINDO users can contribute to our understanding of variation and processes of language change. Data for the BISINDO corpus were collected in six locations between 2010 and 2017.

I present five clips from the corpus, which both foreground the data and encapsulate leaps forward in my own understanding of BISINDO's development. The clips include examples of numeral systems that have developed rapidly within school networks, examples of uniformity and divergence within urban communities, forms that have become welded together over time, and switches in the mouthing channel, which point to signers' impressive repertoires and sociolinguistic competence.

Identifying welded forms is a significant part of our current cross-modal work in the CrossMoGram project, which addresses grammaticalisation in the aspectual marking of sign languages and creoles. While seeking to establish truly cross-modal definitions, we are creating indicators to measure grammaticalisation in signed and spoken modalities.

Meanwhile, work is underway to extend the BISINDO corpus further, to include older varieties used in West Java and Bali. I conclude by considering what kinds of predictions we might make about these older varieties, given the research on BISINDO undertaken so far.