

Librería
Bonilla y Asociados
desde 1950



Título: Discourse In Signed Languages

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Precio: Desconocido

Editorial:

Año: 2011

Tema:

Edición: 1ª

Sinopsis

ISBN: 9781563685118

In this volume, editor Cynthia B. Roy presents a stellar cast of cognitive linguists, sociolinguists, and discourse analysts to discover and demonstrate how sign language users make sense of what is going on within their social and cultural contexts in face-to-face interactions. In the first chapter, Paul Dudis presents an innovative perspective on depiction in discourse. Mary Thumann follows with her observations on constructed dialogue and constructed action. Jack Hoza delineates the discourse and politeness functions of hey and well in ASL as examples of discourse markers in the third chapter.

Laurie Swabey investigates reference in ASL discourse in the fourth chapter. In Chapter 5, Christopher Stone offers insights on register related to genre in British Sign Language discourse, and Daniel Roush addresses in Chapter 6 the 'conduit' metaphor in English and ASL. Jeffrey Davis completes this collection by mapping out the nature of discourse in Plains Indian Sign Language, a previously unstudied language. The major thread that ties together the work of these varying linguists is their common focus on the forms and functions of sign languages used by people in actual situations. They each provide new keys to answering how thoughts expressed in one setting with one term or one utterance may mean something totally different when expressed in a different setting with different participants and different purposes.