“The mind must be understood in the context of its relationship to a physical body that interacts with the world” M. Wilson (2002).

The human mind interacts with the world through the human body that it emanates from. We will trace a number of emergent properties of sign languages to the physical nature of the human body and its interaction with the world. Two examples come from grammar, strictu sensu. First, the use of the hand/body dichotomy to represent Aristotelian predication (the hands represent the predicate, the body represents the subject). Second, the use of the hands and body to represent verb agreement. In phonology, we will discuss the role of the non-dominant hand. In all these cases, we will argue, the categories themselves arise because of the particular anatomy of the human body that the mind is part of: the fact that humans, being bipedal, are free to move their hands in front of and separately from their bodies, and the fact that humans have a dominant hand. This is similar to the way in which spoken languages recruit available features of human anatomy (e.g. the anatomical features of the vocal apparatus) to their own systematic purposes. The fact, however, that grammatical properties that are widespread across known sign languages are so readily traced to the anatomy of the human body calls into question the utility of the widely-accepted view that the computational system of language can and should be studied as a purely abstract device that is not grounded in humanity.