



# A Case Study on Instrument Classifiers in Tianjin Sign Language

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## Introduction

- Tianjin Sign Language (TJSL) is a natural sign language used in the Deaf community in Tianjin.
- Tianjin is one of the four municipality cities in China, as well as the third largest city, which has a population of 12,000,000, including 140,000 Deaf people.
- TJSL can be dated back almost 150 years ago.

## What is classifier predicate in TJSL?

- Classifier predicates in sign languages are considered as morphologically complex predicates with several components: movement, handshape and non-manuals etc.

## What is instrument classifier predicate (ICL) in TJSL?

- ICL predicates refers to classifier predicates which involve an instrument argument

## My claim

- Instrument classifier handshape morpheme does not closely correlate with the valency of the predicate. It only agrees with some of the arguments in the predicate.
- Signer's body constitutes one of the formational components of the ICL predicate. It represents the agent argument of the predicate. We would like to propose body as a type of classifier in ICL predicates.

## No. of tokens of ICL handshape in my data: 66

- 29 handling instrument classifier handshape (H-ICL) : it refers to the way that instruments are being handled or manipulated, such as:



- 30 entity instrument classifier handshape (E-ICL): it refers to the instrument argument in the predicate, such as:

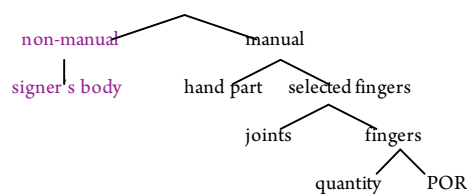


- 7 entity+handling instrument classifier handshape (E+H-ICL): classifier handshape that has both properties of entity and handling, such as:



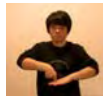
## Phonological structure of ICLs

Articulator



## Alternation between Entity classifier predicates and Entity ICL predicates

- (1) AUGER E-CL\_auger goes into the ground  
 auger E-CL\_auger goes into the ground  
 'The auger goes into the ground.'



- (2) MAN AUGER E-ICL\_the man uses an auger to drill the ground  
 man auger E-ICL\_the man uses an auger to drill the ground  
 'The man uses an auger to drill the ground.'

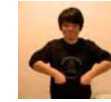


Non-manuals in example (1) and (2) show that the signer's body plays an important role in representing the agent argument of transitive predicate.

Alternation between entity classifier and entity instrument classifier (E-ICL) shows the grammatical function of the signer's body is an agentive component of ICL predicate.

## The same ICL predicate with different types of classifier handshapes

- (3) MAN AUGER H-ICL\_the man uses an auger to drill the ground  
 man auger H-ICL\_the man uses an auger to drill the ground  
 'The man uses an auger to drill the ground'



- (4) MAN AUGER E+H-ICL\_the man uses an auger to drill the ground  
 man auger E+H-ICL\_the man uses an auger to drill the ground  
 'The man uses an auger to drill the ground.'



## Conclusion

- Entity classifiers are not necessarily unaccusative (B&B, 2004). They can be transitive in ICL predicates in TJSL.
- E+H-ICL handshape is a new type of classifier handshape that contains properties of both entity and handling classifier handshape, such as example (4).
- Instrument classifier handshape does not show agreement for all the arguments in the predicate.
- The signer's body is an active articulator in the phonological structure of ICL.
- The signer's body consistently relates to the agent argument in ICL predicates. Hence we propose that signer's body as another type of classifier, besides handshape classifier.

## Selected References

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