A Case Study on Instrument Classifiers in Tianjin Sign Language
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• Introduction
  o Tianjin Sign Language (TJSL) is a natural sign language used in the Deaf community in Tianjin.
  o 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.
  o TJSL can be dated back almost 150 years ago.

• What is classifier predicate in TJSL?
  o 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?
  o ICL predicates refer to classifier predicates which involve an instrument argument

• My claim
  o 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.
  o 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
  o 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
    - non-manual
    - manual
    - signer’s body
    - hand part
    - selected fingers
    - joints
    - fingers
    - quantity
    - POR

• Alternation between Entity classifier handshape and Entity ICL predicates
  (1) AUGER E-CL_auger goes into the ground
  (2) MAN AUGER E-IKL_the man uses an auger to drill the ground

• Alternation between entity classifier and entity instrument classifier handshape
  (3) MAN AUGER H-ICL_the man uses an auger to drill the ground

• The same ICL predicate with different types of classifier handshapes
  (4) MAN AUGER E+H-IKL_the man uses an auger to drill the ground

• Conclusion
  o Entity classifiers are not necessarily unaccusative (B&B, 2004). They can be transitive in ICL predicates in TJSL.
  o E+H-IKL handshape is a new type of classifier handshape that contains properties of both entity and handling classifier handshape, such as example (4).
  o Instrument classifier handshape does not show agreement for all the arguments in the predicate.
  o The signer’s body is an active articulator in the phonological structure of ICL.
  o 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 handleshapes classifier.

• Selected References

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