

Spatial terms and conditions of Slovenian Sign Language Agreement

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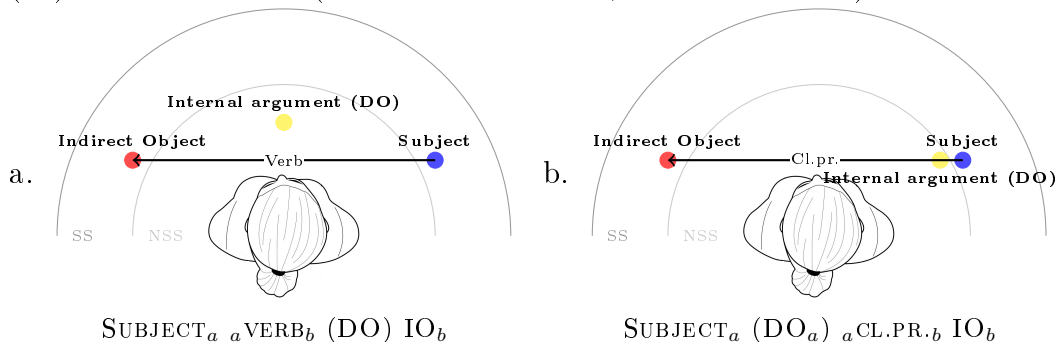
1. Introduction. In sign languages, arguments are associated with specific individual points in signing space —r(eferential)-locations— that enable signers to keep track of the referents within the same discourse. Agreement verbs adapt their form (movement) to the r-locations of their arguments, but spatial verbs do so, too (Padden 1983). In sign language literature, a number of notable attempts was made to construct a theory that would explain spatial verbs as instantiation of agreement – or a consequence of iconicity (Janis 1995, Liddell 2000, Meir 2002, Rathmann and Mathur 2002, Lillo-Martin and Meier 2011). This paper explores whether the movement component of classifier versus non-classifier agreeing verbs in Slovenian Sign Language (SZJ) may change the position of r-locations that their arguments are assigned in signing space.

2. R-location of internal argument

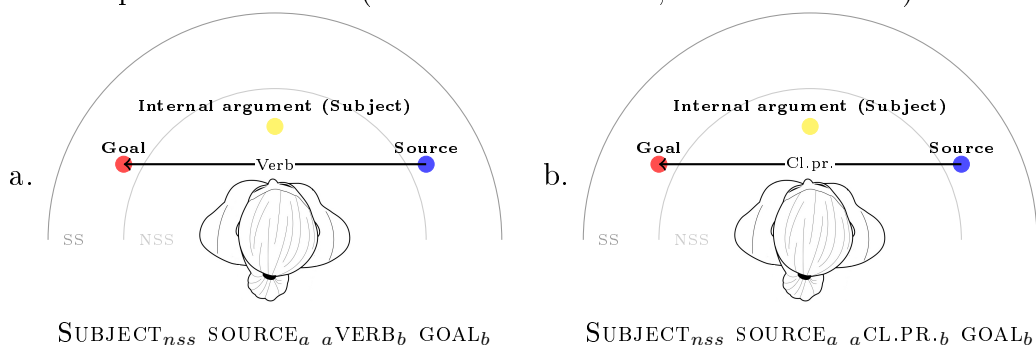
2.1 (Di)transitive agreeing predicates start at r-location associated with the Subject and end at r-location associated with the Indirect Object (1). The majority of agreeing verbs across sign languages assign Agent theta role to the Subject and Experiencer/Receiver theta role to the Indirect Object. If Internal Argument (Direct Object) is present, too, it gets signed in the neutral signing space. In case of non-classifier verb, it is not assigned r-location, while in case of classifier verb, it seems to be assigned its r-location – but not in neutral signing space but at the end point of verb movement.

2.2 Unergative agreeing verbs of motion start at the r-location associated with Source and end in r-location associated with Goal (2). Internal argument is signed in neutral signing space and does not seem to be assigned r-location. In case of a classifier predicate, however, it is also referred to by a Whole Entity classifier during the production of the predicate and can be retrieved at the Source’s r-location in the subsequent discourse.

(1) (Di)transitive scheme (a=non-classifier verb; b=classifier verb)



(2) Motion predicate scheme (a=non-classifier verb; b=classifier verb)



3. Experiments

My aim in this study is to shed light on the differences between classifier and non-classifier predicates: in (di)transitive structures and unergative structures of motion they both denote transfer – but do they “literally” transfer the r-locations of their internal arguments?

Grammaticality judgements task: Five SZJ native signers were presented with 48 randomized pre-filmed sentences, each corresponding to one of the types presented in (3). Half of the sentences included classifier and half non-classifier predicates. They were all signed from right to left and licensed two arguments. Participants were asked to evaluate one of the three possible continuations of a discourse that differed with respect to the direction of an index sign. Index was intended to pick up a reference to the Internal Argument of the previous sentence. The participants’ judgements suggest that the reference to the Internal Argument cannot be established by pointing to its original location in neutral signing space both in case of classifier and non-classifier verbs. It can be established, however, by pointing to a ending location of a classifier predicate. In order to further explore these results, two follow-up experiments —picture-sentence matching task and picture description task— will be conducted and presented.

- (3) a. $\overline{\text{CHILD}_{nss}}^{\text{top}}$ SCHOOL-BUILDING_a aGO_b HOME_b ... *IX_{nss}/*IX_a/*IX_b TIRED.
‘A child came home from school. He was tired.’
- b. $\overline{\text{CHILD}_{nss}}^{\text{top}}$ SCHOOL-BUILDING_a aWALK-CL(V)_b HOME_b ... *IX_{nss}/*IX_a/IX_b TIRED.
‘A child walked home from school. He was tired.’
- c. NEIGHBOUR_a aGIVE_b BOOK_{nss} CHILD_b ... *IX_{nss}/*IX_a/*IX_b FAIRY-TALE.
‘A neighbour gave a book to a child. It was a book of fairy-tales.’
- d. NEIGHBOUR_a BOOK_a aGIVE-CL(C)_b CHILD_b ... *IX_{nss}/*IX_a/IX_b FAIRY-TALE.
‘A neighbour gave a thick book to a child. It was a book of fairy-tales.’

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