



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

UNDERSTANDING SIZE AND SHAPE CLASSIFIERS IN ITALIAN SIGN LANGUAGE (LIS)

Elena Fornasiero

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INTRODUCTION

- Morphologically complex elements in which each finger can be meaningful, called *Size and Shape Specifiers (SASSs)* (Supalla 1982; 1986).
- Two categories (Supalla 1986 for ASL; Zwitserlood 2003 for NGT):

- Static classifiers:** the handshape represents the shape of the entity;
- Tracing classifiers:** handshape associated to a movement that outlines the shape of the referent



SASSs in LIS are called *descriptive classifiers* and are considered as functioning as adjectives, but no formal analysis has been provided (Corazza 1990; Mazzoni 2012). From previous research, it seems they are ordered among other attributive adjectives within the LIS DP.

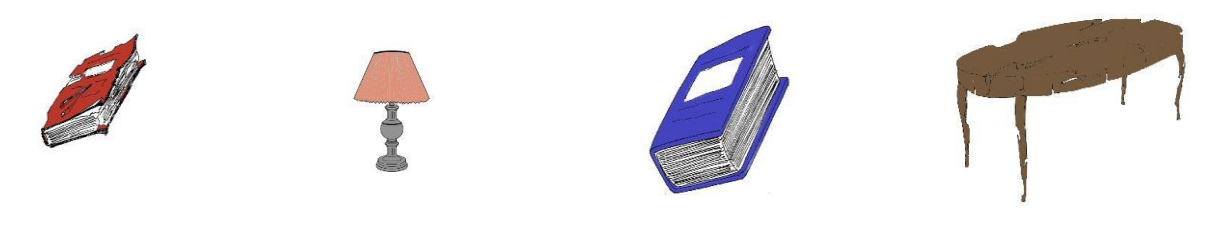
GOALS

- Improving the morphological analysis of SASSs in LIS;
- Accounting for their adjectival status through a descriptive and a formal analysis considering:
 - The distribution among lexical attributive adjectives;
 - Their morpho-phonological features;
 - Their morpho-syntactic properties;
 - Their position in the cartography of the DP.
- Comparing SASSs with spoken language classifiers.

DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT

Methodology

- Participants:** 4 LIS native signers;
- Elicitation task:** picture description (25 items of different size, shape, colour, material, quality);
- Data annotation** with ELAN.



Morpho-phonological analysis

High degree of iconicity



Gradability through modification of phonological parameters

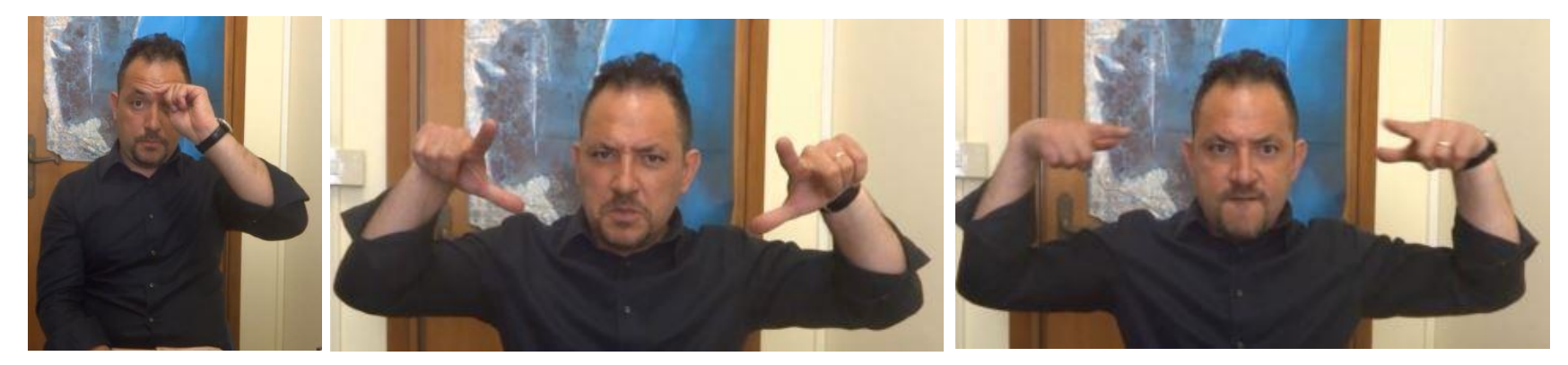


Simultaneity of features



Distribution among adjectives

N>APorigin>CLshape



1) HAT MEXICAN ROUND-CLshape
'a big round Mexican hat'

N>CLshape>CLdepth>CLsize



2) BOOK RECTANGULAR-CLshape THICK-CLdepth BIG-CLsize
'a very big book'

N>CLshape>CLdepth>APcolor



3) TABLE ROUND-CLshape NOT-THICK-CLdepth BLACK
'a round black table'

N>CLsize>APcolor>APvalue



4) CUP SMALL-CLsize WHITE SIMPLE
'a simple little white cup'

N>CLsize>APsize



5) CARPET SMALL-CLsize SMALL
'a little carpet'

FORMAL ACCOUNT

The Cartographic Approach

- It aims at drawing maps as precise and detailed as possible of syntactic configurations (Cinque, Rizzi 2010).
- Hierarchy of adjectives within the DP: APs are phrases generated in the specifier position of dedicated FPs with which they are semantically related (Scott 2002; Cinque 2010):

DETERMINER > ORDINAL NUMBER > CARDINAL NUMBER > SUBJECTIVE COMMENT > ?EVIDENTIAL > **SIZE** > LENGTH > HEIGHT > SPEED > ?DEPTH > WIDTH > WEIGHT > TEMPERATURE > ?WETNESS > AGE > **SHAPE** > **COLOR** > **NATIONALITY/ORIGIN** > MATERIAL > COMPOUND ELEMENT > **NP** (Scott 2002: 114)

- Different orders among languages explained through different movements of the NP:
 - No movement: Dem>Num>Adj>N (universal order)
 - NP movement alone: N>Dem>Num>Adj
 - NP movement with pied-piping: N>Adj>Num>Dem

Order of modifiers within the LIS DP

- NP moves with pied-piping (Bertone 2007; Mantovan 2015);
- Order of direct modification adjectives respects the universal hierarchy (Scott 2002):

VASE CHINA BIG
'a big Chinese vase' (Bertone 2010: 21)

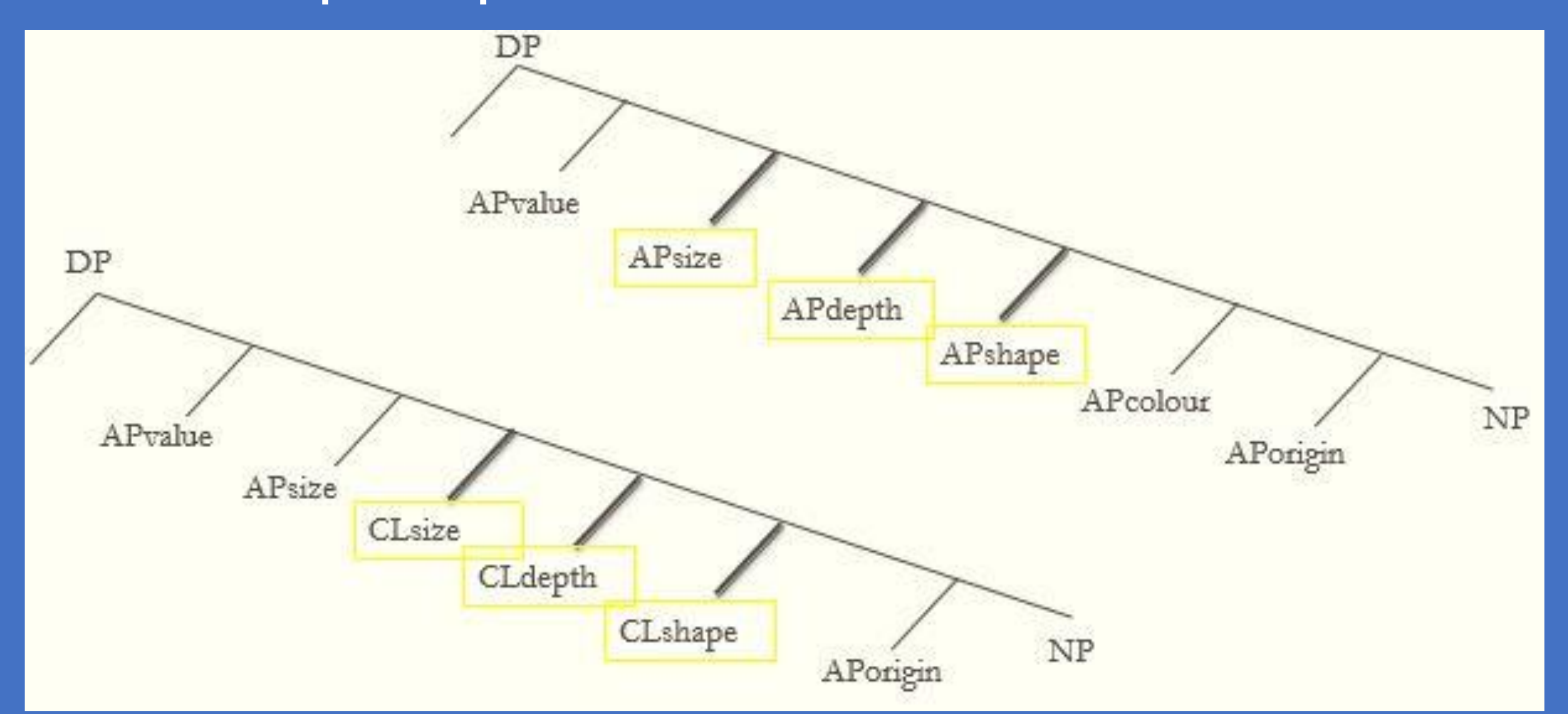
Morpho-syntactic analysis

- Proximity to the noun they modify:
TABLE OVAL-CLperimeter OVAL-CLshape BIG-CLsize
'a big oval table'
- SASSs do not classify referents, they rather specify information about size and shape;
- SASSs belong to the portion of the DP dedicated to direct modification adjectives (Cinque 2010: 28);
- They seem to be rigidly ordered like direct modification adjectives (Cinque 2010):

N>APorigin>CLshape>CLdepth>CLsize>APsize>(APcolor)>APvalue

WHAT'S NEW!

- LIS can convey features of shape, size and depth also through SASSs, which are ordered among direct modification adjectives within the LIS DP.
- Considering APs dedicated to size, shape and depth the universal order is:
APsize>APdepth>APshape>NP
- In languages displaying NP-movement with pied-piping the order is:
NP>APshape>APdepth>APsize
- The attested order of SASSs matches the order of APs dedicated to features of shape, depth and size:
NP>CLshape>CLdepth>CLsize



We can conclude that SASSs are a special class of adjectives that occupy dedicated FPs within the LIS DP.

Comparison with spoken languages

- SASSs in LIS can occur when no lexical adjective is available (for instance, for shape and depth) or in combination with lexical adjectives. In this respect, LIS seems to belong to that group of languages with few lexical adjectives for size and shape features but a rich set of classifiers, like Tariana (Aikhenvald 2003):

KANarI HANU-KWEMA
mirror big-cl:flat.round
'big round mirror' Tariana, Aikhenvald (2003: 72)

- SASSs differ from numeral classifiers encoding size and shape in spoken languages.

KA(A-E)B' XOYAN 'IXIM PAAT
Two-NumCL sortalNumCL NCL tortilla
'two tortillas' round objects Akatek (Zavala 2000: 125)

CONCLUSIONS

- In LIS we find different categories of SASSs which can be employed to convey information about size and shape of entities.
- SASSs are characterized by morpho-phonological properties which are typical of visuo-gestural languages, but they also display morpho-syntactic properties typical of attributive lexical adjectives.
- SASSs belong to the lower portion of the DP and are ordered among direct modification adjectives, respecting the hierarchy proposed for spoken languages.
- We can conclude that SASSs form a special class of adjectives displaying sign language-specific properties.

Selected References

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