Instrument in HKSL and TJSL Classifier Predicates

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Abstract

Benedicto and Brentari (2004) claim that ASL classifiers are heads of functional projections determining whether the argument that lands on the respective specifier is external or internal. What the verbal root does is only to determine the number of argument(s) of the predicate. Specifically, Benedicto and Brentari hypothesize that whole entity classifiers select an internal argument and enter into intransitive predicates whereas handling classifiers introduce an agentive, external argument and an internal argument, hence transitive predicates result. In this paper, we argue that this may be a language specific property. While examining the instrument classifiers in HKSL and Tianjin SL (TJSL), we observe that such a rigid division does not hold between handling instrumental and whole entity instrumental classifiers. Instrument in HKSL and TJSL is represented by three types of classifier handshapes, namely, whole entity instrumental classifiers (1), handling instrumental classifiers (2), and whole entity+handling instrumental classifiers (3), the last of which combines a whole entity and a handling classifier in one single handshape configuration.

1. TJSL	FISH^CAN$_i$	IRON^CAN-OPENER$_j$	open+CL$_{handle\ j}$ // CL$_{handle\ i}$
	fish can	can-opener	[CL+CL]-Pred
	'I open the fish can with a can-opener.'		

2. HKSL	COW^MEAT$_i$	KNIFE$_j$	cut+CL$_{w/e\ j}$ // CL$_{w/e\ i}$
	beef	knife	[CL+CL]-Pred
	'I cut beef with a knife.'		

3. TJSL	EAR-RING^GUN$_i$	push_lever+CL$_{w/e+handle}$
	earring gun	CL-Pred
	'I push the lever of the earring gun (on my earlobe).'	

Figure 1. (TJSL)
open+CL$_{handle\ j}$ // CL$_{handle\ i}$
'open can with a can-opener'

Figure 2. (HKSL)
cut+CL$_{w/e\ j}$ // CL$_{w/e\ i}$
'cut beef with a knife'

Figure 3. (TJSL)
push_lever+CL$_{w/e+handle}$
'push lever on my earlobe'

Benedicto and Brentari used volitional adverbs like WILLINGLY to test for agentivity. A similar result is found with (1), but as well as (2) and (3) in our data. Further evidence came from another agentivity test based on agent-related manner adverbs 'carelessly' expressed through non-manuals, and all showed positive results, as in (4).

4.			_____carelessly
HKSL	COW^MEAT$_i$	KNIFE$_j$	cut+CL$_{w/e\ j}$ // CL$_{w/e\ i}$
	beef	knife	[CL+CL]-Pred
'I cut beef with a knife, carelessly;			

	SUDDENLY	cut+CL$_{w/e}$ // CL$_{bodypart}$	SELF	
		[CL+CL]-Pred		
Suddenly, I cut my fingers				

Therefore, nonmanuals for manner adverbials offer an additional piece of crucial evidence showing that whole entity classifiers as instruments may enter into agentive transitive predicates. In other words, classifier handshapes are not entirely correlated with the valency of the predicate, and it is the verb root that determines its argument structure. To account for classifier predicates that involve an instrument, we propose to adopt Pylkannen's (2008) analysis that the instrumental classifier triggers the projection of an Appl$_{high}$P between the VoiceP and vP, and the instrument NP base generates at its specifier. The analysis of Appl$_{high}$P being an external argument introducer besides VoiceP for the agentive argument lends support to the claim that the instrument argument is not directly selected by the main verb, thus cannot be simply accounted for by the VP shell.

Selected References

Benedicto, E. and Diane Brentari. 2004. Where did all the arguments go? Argument-changing properties of classifiers in ASL. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 22:743–810.
Pylkkanen, L., 2008. Introducing Arguments. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.