

Understanding ASL Grammatical Features and Discourse Mapping

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About Jeff

About Doug

About you

What we hope to
accomplish in this
workshop:

- Review and identify salient ASL grammatical structures:
 - nominal and pronominal structures
 - verbal and adverbial structures
 - complex sentences
- Introduce and demonstrate discourse mapping
- Work in small groups to incorporate ASL grammatical features in our work
- Debrief and evaluate

ASL grammatical features:

Nominals and pronominals

1. Proper usage of nouns

Nouns can be persons
(and name signs.)
(Trenton Marsh, Jeff Pollock)

Nouns can be places.
(CHICAGO, NEW YORK)

Nouns can be concrete
or abstract **things**.

(COMPUTER, TABLE, THEORY, LOVE)

Nouns are always identified by a sign or fingerspelling (if a name or proper noun that has no standard sign) or assumed if that information was given earlier.

Nouns can be made plural.

Plurality is shown in
two different ways:

1. Reduplication of the noun, usually in an arc or linear path.

BROTHER++

WORD++

TREE++

2. Use determiners
(SOME, MANY, FEW).

Avoid using the ~~s~~ suffix.

†

MANY #CAR INDEX-arc,
STILL NEW.

Determiners are signs
that modify nouns.

They identify whether
the noun referred to is a
specific noun or any
member of a particular
class of nouns.

{ determiner }

†

MANY #CAR INDEX-arc,
STILL NEW.

INDEX-arc functions
as a determiner, not
as a pronoun.

Determiners in English
include the, a, an, my,
that, and every.

Determiners in ASL tend
to be DET INDEX-rt, DET
INDEX-lt, DET INDEX-arc.

ASL determiners can
occur **before** a noun,
during a noun, **after** a
noun, and **before and**
after a noun.

Before a noun:

{ determiner }

†

DET INDEX-arc GIRL, SILLY.

During a noun:

{ determiner }

+

GIRL/DET INDEX-It, SILLY.

{ signed with non-dominant hand }

Before and after a noun:

{ determiner }

†

MANY #CAR INDEX-arc,
STILL NEW.

2. Proper use of pronouns

A pronoun represents
a person, place, or thing
that has already been
identified.

English pronouns
include I, me, we, us,
you, he, she, it, him, her,
them, they, us, etc.

The meaning of any ASL pronoun is dependent on the context in which it is produced.

ASL pronouns are
similar and different:

Subject Pronouns

| Pronoun | English | ASL |
|------------------------|----------------|--|
| First person singular | I | PRO.1 |
| First person plural | we | WE, TWO-OF-US, THREE-OF-US... |
| Second person singular | you | PRO.2 (singular)* |
| Second person plural | you | PRO.2 (plural), TWO-OF-YOU, THREE-OF-YOU* ... |
| Third person singular | he, she, it | PRO.3-IX*, PRO.3-thumb |
| Third person plural | they | THEY, TWO-OF-THEM, THREE-OF-THEM* |

Object Pronouns

| Pronoun | English | ASL |
|------------------------|-----------------|--|
| First person singular | me | PRO.1 |
| First person plural | us | WE, TWO-OF-US, THREE-OF-US... |
| Second person singular | you | PRO.2 (singular)* |
| Second person plural | you | PRO.2 (plural), TWO-OF-YOU, THREE-OF-YOU* ... |
| Third person singular | him, her, it | PRO.3-IX*, PRO.3-thumb |
| Third person plural | them | THEM, TWO-OF-THEM, THREE-OF-THEM* |

English pronouns
differentiate gender
(he/she, him/her);
ASL pronouns do not.

It is critically important for cohesion and comprehension to:

- **identify** the noun
- **set a location** in the signing space for that noun
- **consistently index that location** to refer to the noun

him/her vs. his/hers

Interpreters often
substitute the possessive
(HIS/HERS) when
the speaker actually
means HIM/HER.

Example sentence

It is important to
identify and consistently
use the correct pronoun
and not the possessive.

ASL pronouns use the same form (INDEX) for both second and third person pronoun use.

The equivalent meaning
is dependent on both the
context and **consistency**
in which it is used.

ASL grammatical features:
Verbal and adverbial information

adverbial behaviors:

'cs'

close to the present time
or to a particular place

CS
RECENTLY (just recently)

CS
ARRIVE-AT (just arrived)

CS
INDEX-rt (close by)

'th'

carelessly or without
paying attention

th

DRIVE

th

WRITE

'mm'

normally or regularly

'cha'
large or tall

'puff cheeks'

large, huge, huge number
of, large mass of, etc.

'intense'

awfully huge mass of or
number of, often with a
negative connotation

intense
SCADS-OF

intense
INDEX-rt

(very far in
that direction)

'pursed lips'
very small/thin/narrow,
smooth, quickly, or easily

pursed lips
BOWLING BALL

pursed lips
FAST

pursed lips
WIRE

verbal inflections:

Subject and object information is given by modifying the direction of movement, palm orientation, and location in verb signs.

Frequently, the subject
of the sentence is
indicated by where the
sign **begins**; the object
by where the sign **ends**.

These verb signs
are often called
directional verbs.

(See handout for a
variety of verb samples.)

Reciprocal verbs

Using both hands, the subject and object are shown to be jointly performing the action indicated by the verb.

Verbs made with one hand become **reciprocal** by using both hands in the appropriate locations and orientations.

Verbs normally made
with two hands become
reciprocal by moving the
hands from the two
separate locations.

Some verbs are
always reciprocal.

Locative verbs

Show a particular location on the person or in the signing space where the action occurred.

Plain verbs

Verbs which don't have any inflection or cannot be inflected for subject and object information

ASL grammatical features:
Complex sentence structures

Compound sentences
contain two independent
clauses (complete
sentences in a subject-
verb-object form).

English compound sentences are joined by a **coordinator** such as and, so, for, but, or, nor, and yet.

{ coordinator }

Jack ran up the hill and
Jill followed after him.

{ coordinator }

The man turned
around and ran so the
dog chased him.

ASL does not use coordinators such as "and" or "so." What does ASL use instead?

ASL uses wh-words
such as WHAT (#WHAT),
WHO, WHEN (#WHEN),
WHERE, WHICH, WHY,
and WHAT'S-UP.

Additionally, ASL also
uses conjunctions such as
HOW, HOW-MANY, HAPPEN,
REASON, UNDERSTAND and
FOR-FOR.

These are often seen
in the form of
rhetorical questions.

ASL sentences don't
necessarily need to have
coordinators to be
compound sentences.

KNOW-THAT LAST-WEEK,
ME DRIVE, HAPPEN
CAR-ACCIDENT.

WE STILL GO CHICAGO.
UNDERSTAND, MUST
fs-R-E-N-T CAR MUST.



The Snowmobile Story

MY GRANDFATHER INFORM
FAMILY, fs-L-A-K-E HOUSE
AREA-near house fs-L-A-K-E
WOW fs-ICE THICK, CAN
SNOWMOBILE.

Complex sentences
contain an independent
clause (complete
sentences in a subject-
verb-object form) and
a dependent clause.

The dependent clause is
not a complete sentence
and cannot stand alone.

Conditional statements
fit the definition of
complex sentences.

{ conditional }

“If you complete your
chores for me, we will
go out to eat.”

KNOW-THAT LAST-WEEK,
ME DRIVE, HAPPEN
CAR-ACCIDENT.

YOU WORK++ FINISH,
WE GO-OUT EAT.

KNOW-THAT ONE-WEEK
FUTURE, ME MOVE-AWAY.

References

- Lucas, C., Valli, C. & Mulrooney, K. J. (2005). Linguistics of American Sign Language (4th ed.). Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press.

Thank you.

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