Sentence Type Non-Manual Grammatical Markers in ASL

Introduction

Sentence Type (ST) Non-Manual Grammatical Markers (NMGM) are used to differentiate among grammatical or linguistic features in American Sign Language (ASL) sentences. A sign is formed on the hands and is considered to be a manual behavior. Non-manual behaviors are formed elsewhere on the body; typically on the face. ST NMGMs identify a sentence as a statement of fact, yes/no or Wh question, new topic of discussion, rhetorical question, and so on. Each ST is produced differently from another in that they may have a particular eye brow formation that is either raised, neutral, or lowered; a headshake either upwards and downwards or from side-to-side; or is used with different parts of speech i.e., some brow forms are only used with nouns and noun phrases, with noun and verb phrases, or with verb phrases only, and so on.

ASL uses topic-comment (TC) grammatical structure extensively. It also allows for subject-verb-object (SVO) structure as in English. The explanations of the STs in this text will be based on using TC structure.

TC structure typically represents concepts in this order:
1. If a sentence has a time concept, many time concepts tend to be stated first in the ASL sentence.
2. The next phrase is the topic phrase and states the general topic of discussion. The topic phrase consists of nouns and noun phrases. If no time concept is needed in a sentence, the topic phrase is stated first.
3. Finally, the comment phrase includes verbs and verb phrases, details regarding the topic, and is where several ST NMGMs are produced, as well as other structures.

A simple TC sentence might be shown as:

\[(TIME), (TOPIC), (COMMENT)\]

The parenthesis around \textit{TIME} indicates that a sentence may or may not include an overt time concept.
sentences are formed and the ST MGNS that may be used.
To structure and glossed translations of any sentence will
be used throughout this text to provide examples of how AST
My sister was very sick yesterday morning.

translated into English as:

This is an exclamation mark in English. The astros above may be
emphasize the strong concept very-sick. The word sick can be used
emphasize the strong concept. This emphasis agrees with and further
on the strong concept. The emphasis being placed on the
meaning that there is emphasis being placed immediately after a topic phrase. In the example above, the
sentence from as well as other information, the sentence is strong
verb phrases as well as other information. The sentence is strong
and includes verbs and phrases containing details about the topic and include words that
are important to understanding the sentence as a whole, and that
are important to understanding the sentence as a whole, and

The capitalized words in the glosses above represent stages

The use of glossing in this text.

ST MGNS are glossed using tenses and symbols above the
used in this text. The examples used are basic glossing techniques to understand the examples
represent the strong language. It is important that the reader
written form. It uses a variety of symbols and other methods to
A gloss is a translation of a strong language into a
Individual STs will be discussed in the section below. Each glossed ASL sentence provides an example of the sentence type identified and will have its related non-manual behaviors identified and glossed in the ASL sentence to provide examples.

1. Topic:

   This sentence type is generally used at the beginning of a conversation or sentence with time concepts and when introducing or changing to a new topic of discussion. The form that is used is:

   A. The eyebrows are raised high enough to be clearly visible to a recipient/conversation partner.

   B. The brows are formed throughout the conversation.

   This is a very frequently used sentence type in ASL. The raised brows form in this instance is used to draw the attention of the recipient in a conversation.

   There are two basic functions of the topic ST:

   A. ASL typically marks the verb tense, i.e., past, present, and future tense. The verb tense is not recognized by the tense stated in the first phrase and then mentally applied to all other verbs until a new tense is stated. Some signs do have verb tense and may be added to the comment such as IN-THE-PAST, WILL, LATER, FINISH.

   B. The topic of discussion is typically stated early in the sentence and immediately after the time concept. The topic consists of a noun or noun phrase that serves as the general topic of discussion. The topic phrase may have other information about the topic introduced into the conversation, and will immediately be marked with raised brows. The topic of discussion has been introduced into the conversation, and will only be marked with raised brows. After the first phrase is introduced, the recipient is expected to recognize the tense stated in the first phrase and then mentally apply it to all other verbs until a new tense is stated. Some signs do have verb tense and may be added to the comment such as IN-THE-PAST, WILL, LATER, FINISH.

   If a recipient misses the initial time phrase, he or she will not know what the main idea is once a new topic of discussion is introduced into the conversation. The topic of discussion may be marked with a neutral or declarative brow formation. The importance of the topic ST is glossed using the symbol T. Note the example from above:

   YESTERDAY MORNING, SISTER, MR. VERY SICK.
An English translation could be as follows:

**THREE-WEEKS FUTURE**

_If we get there, you sell._

The example below:

The phrase **this/that** is used to gloss a yes/no question as in the last sign of the question but throughout the entire question and the comment phrase. The phrase should not be formed only during the comment phrase. The yes/no NMOD is used during forward lean of the upper body throughout the comment phrase.

A question of this type requires, at minimum, a response of either yes or no however, more information may be added to the response.

3. YES-NO QUESTION

A declarative NMOD shows that the sentence is a statement.

I will sell that blue car in three weeks.

An English translation could be as follows:

**THREE-WEEKS FUTURE**

_If we get there, you sell._

Comment **SELL** therefore it is a declarative sentence.

Phrases use neutral brows.

**Declarative** is a conjunction, both the topic and the comment established in a conversation, both the topic has been used after a topic has been established. Once a topic has been established the comment should be maintained throughout the phrase. If the topic is neither raised nor lowered during the comment phrase and the sentence type is read, this sentence type uses a neutral brow formation.

A declarative statement is a statement that is fact e.g.; The yes/no topic eyebrows after the comment phrase are noted. In the example below, no tone is marked above the comment. All other types of sentence type NMODs have symbols and gloss symbols are used to represent declarative eyebrows.

2. Declarative Statement

Not know who is very sick. The raised topic eyebrows after the sentence do not indicate the importance of the information.
This statement is an example of an extraction emphasis on information similar to the use of an extraction emphasis in a text. This statement uses both upper and down head movement. It places

6. Assessed Statement:

But means the same thing as in A. Example B. excludes the NOT sign

Example A. includes the sign NOT and is marked with the

I didn't go to the committee meeting three days ago.

Both of the glosses may be transcribed as:

B. THREE-DAYS-PAST, ME

GO

COMMITTEE MEETING, ME

NEG

T

T

A. THREE-DAYS-PAST, ME

NEG

NOT

COMMITTEE MEETING, ME

NEG

T

T

Glosses below:

glosses below.

WAYMEG negations are glossed using neg. Note the

another place, the negated information and ends

Tęprality begins before the related information that is to be negated. The handshake

the negative sign is detected and the non-manual signal is used

CANONIC, etc. It can be used in lieu of a negative sign such as NOT, WILL-NOT, etc.

This sentence type uses a handshake from side-to-side. It

5. Negated Statement:

Why did you sell that blue car last week Saturday?

An English translation could be as follows:

WHY YOU SELL MY

ONE-WEEK-PAST SATURDAY, BLUE CAR THERE.

This MWG is also produced during the comment phrase.

The upper body, the MWG for WH-questions is glossed as WH-4.

Sometimes a head tilts or forward lean of

is lowered brows and sometimes a head, but not how, the MWG concomitant this question

where, when, which and how. The MWG accompanied this question

Yes or no, there are questions that involve the words who, what,

This is a question that cannot be answered by responding

4. WH Question:

WILL YOU SELL THAT BLUE CAR IN THREE WEEKS?

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go.
I will attend the conference if my supervisor allows me to.

When you go to the store, then (then) buy milk.

If it gets any colder, then I will get frostbite.

result depending on the condition, e.g.

A conditional sentence formed by combining an 'if/when'

8. Conditional Statement:

instead of with a sign.
The interrogative question phrase is also negated non-manually

appointment.
I can't go to the meeting because I had a doctor's

The translation could be:

MEETING => WHY DOCTOR GO
neg + that

Interrogative questions are glossed using that or that-

The grammatical structure of an interrogative sentence

answer the question.

These sentences typically have a WH sign in the

This type of question does not require a response from

7. Rhetorical Question:

glossed using asserted.

asserted information and ends afterwards. NWG assertions are

the information. The head movement typically begins before the

extreme dependency on how much emphasis the speaker is putting on

mark in English. The head movement can be stylistic through

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In ASL, the condition must always be stated first followed by the result/then phrase. The condition/if/when phrase must have raised eyebrows throughout the phrase. The result phrase can be declarative, yes/no, WH- or asserted, or negated depending on what a signer needs to communicate. Conditional sentences may take the following forms and the NMG is glossed as cond:

**IF WEATHER COLDER, (THEN) FINGERS TOES FREEZE WILL.**

The first example includes the sign IF and the second THEN is optional as noted by the parentheticals. The sign must be stated first in ASL unlike an English sentence.

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**Differences Among Raised Brow STs**

Four ST NMGs are formed using raised eyebrows: topic, yes/no, rhetorical and conditional. There must not be other confused about the ST. The differences are:

A. Conditional brow raise is used only during the IF/WHEN phrase when signs are being established.
B. Topic brow raise is used in the first or second phrase and must include noun and verb concepts.
C. Yes/no questions have raised brows but with noun only.
D. Rhetorical brow raise is used with a WH sign and then the signer answers the question during the last part of a sentence.

Typically includes a WH sign and then the signers answer question.

As you can see these four ST all have raised brow forms but there are clear differences among them prevent a recipient from confusing them one another.
combinations of SGS in ASL Sentences

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Bibliography

Summary

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