
Glossary of grammatical terms

Action role shift

Also called constructed action, action role shift is a construction where the signer takes the role of another character. Under action role shift, the signer may shift his/her body toward the position associated to the character and his/her facial expressions indicate how the character feels and his/her gestures reproduce those produced by the character.

Adjective

An adjective is a lexical element that typically specifies a property and that can modify a noun (e.g. clean, red in English).

Adjunct

An adjunct is an optional constituent that is not selected by any other word present in the sentence. Rather, an adjunct is attached to some other constituent of the sentence, modifying its meaning. As such, adjunct is opposed to argument. An adjunct can be a word or a phrase (including clauses). For example, in the sentence “Ada left quickly at five because she was tired”, ‘quickly’ is an adverbial adjunct; ‘at five’ is a PP adjunct (or an adjoined prepositional phrase), and ‘because she was tired’ is an adjoined clause. Besides their category, adjuncts are also distinguished according to the constituent they attach to. For example, the sentence ‘Ada prefers to look at boys with glasses’ is ambiguous due to the constituent the PP adjunct ‘with glasses’ is attached to. It can either be attached to ‘boys’, or to some larger constituent including the verb.

Adposition

Prepositions and postpositions, together called adpositions, are a class of words expressing spatial or temporal relations or marking semantic roles. They typically combine with a noun phrase or a pronoun. A preposition comes before its nominal complement; a postposition comes after its complement. In sign languages an adposition marks the (usually spatial) relation between two items.

Adverbial

An adverbial is a constituent that is simplex or complex in form and that functions as an adverb; sometimes used interchangeably with simplex adverb.

Affirmative sentence

An affirmative or positive sentence is a declarative sentence used to express the validity or truth of a basic assertion. As such, it is opposed to a negative sentence. This dimension is often referred to in grammar as polarity.

Affixation / affix

Affixation is a word formation process by which a base (a stem or root) is extended by additional bound material; the items attached in this way are called affixes, they may come before or after a base, break up the base, or appear suprasegmentally.

Agreement

Agreement is an asymmetric relation between two or more constituents, by which one inherits the formal features of the other. For example, in the sentence 'Girls now are moving forward', the copula BE agrees with the subject 'girls' in number (plural) and person (third). This syntactic relation is morphologically expressed in English through verbal inflection, hence the form 'are'. In sign languages, agreement is often expressed through spatial modification.

Agreement verb

An agreement verb is a verb that is lexically defective (i.e. unspecified for one phonological feature) in that it requires syntactic agreement with a person or a locus to be realized.

Alignment

Alignment refers to the temporal coordination of different articulations; e.g. alignment of a non-manual marker with a string of signs, or alignment of various non-manual markers with each other.

Allomorph

Allomorphs are affixes or stems that are identical in meaning but have different phonological forms and are in complementary distribution; allomorphs are variants of the same morpheme.

Allophone

Variants of the same underlying phoneme that are either in complementary distribution or in free variation.

Anaphora

Expression that is referentially dependent on another expression previously mentioned in the context (i.e. the antecedent). In the following example, the pronoun he is co-referent with the antecedent a man: 'Mary saw a man. He was walking home.' Typical anaphoric expressions are pronouns or definite noun phrases.

Antecedent

The antecedent is the expression an anaphora is co-referent with, i.e. the anaphora refers back to the referent of the antecedent.

Argument

An argument is a constituent that completes the meaning of a predicate. Most predicates take one, two, or three arguments. For example, the verb 'to run' takes one argument (the subject, as in 'Ada runs'); the verb 'to destroy' takes two arguments (the sub-

ject and the object, as in ‘the typhoon destroyed the beach’); the verb ‘to send’ takes three arguments (the subject, the object and the indirect object, as in ‘Ada sent a present to her brother’). Arguments are often associated to verbs, but other syntactic categories can take arguments as well, or select them. For example, the noun ‘destruction’ can be said to select two arguments, as in ‘the destruction of the beach by the typhoon’, or the Adjective ‘proud’ can be said to select two arguments, as in ‘Nico (is) proud of Ada’. Arguments must be distinguished from adjuncts, which are never selected and thus optional.

Argument structure

Argument structure refers to the syntactico-semantic frame of predicates (typically verbs, but also nouns, adjectives or prepositions) and indicates the participants in the action or state denoted by that predicate. Argument structure typically includes the number of arguments a lexical item takes (e.g., the participants in the event denoted by a verb), their syntactic category, and their semantic relation to this lexical item.

Article

An article (or determiner) is a functional element that combines with nouns and that specifies features such as number, gender, definiteness, and closeness/distance (e.g. the, a, that in English).

Aspect

Aspect describes the internal temporal structure of an event or situation as reflected in a sentence or verb (e.g. repeated occurrence of an event).

Assimilation

Assimilation is a phonological process whereby the form of a phoneme is influenced by properties (features) of an adjacent phoneme; if the source of assimilation precedes the target, we speak of progressive assimilation, if it follows the target, we speak of regressive assimilation.

Atelic

Atelic eventualities do not contain an end point as part of the event description.

Attitude role shift

Attitude role shift, also called constructed discourse, is a construction where the signer reports utterances or thoughts of another person (the character) and typically does so by rotating his/her body toward the position associated to the character. Attitude role shift is usually accompanied also by a change in head position and eye gaze.

Auxiliary

An auxiliary is a semantically weak verb that combines with a lexical verb and expresses grammatical features like tense, aspect, and agreement (e.g. have and be in English); the lexical verb usually appears in a fixed (e.g. infinitival or participial) form.

Back-channeling

Back-channeling is a discourse strategy by which an addressee provides feedback without interrupting the speaker’s/signer’s flow; back-channel signals can be manual/vocal (e.g. hmmm) or non-manual (e.g. head nod).

Blend

A blend is a word formation process by which two otherwise independent stems or words merge by losing some of their phonological features to form a new item with a new meaning, e.g. English *smog* is a blend of *smoke* and *fog*.

Borrowing

Borrowing refers to the integration of a lexical item or expression from one language into the lexicon of another language (e.g. German borrowing English *computer*); borrowed elements may undergo certain phonological changes.

Boundary marker

A boundary marker is a linguistic signal that marks the start or end of a (mostly syntactic or prosodic) domain; can be manual or non-manual.

Buoy

A buoy is a sign articulated by the non-dominant hand, which may be held in space while the dominant hand continues signing; a buoy may be referred to (e.g. *pointed at*) by the dominant hand.

Calque

A calque is an item which in its entirety, or part-by-part, is borrowed directly from the donor language; Calques are verbatim translations of simplex or polymorphic forms and are modeled on the constructions of the donor language.

Causative

A causative is a construction that indicates that an agent causes someone or something to do or be something, or causes a change of state. Prototypically, it brings a new argument, the causer, into a clause, with the original subject becoming the object, as in 'John makes Mary cry' vs. 'Mary cries'. All languages have ways to express causativization, but they differ in the means they employ. Many have lexical causative forms, such as English 'raise' vs. 'rise'; Other languages have morphological inflections that change verbs into their causative form. Other languages, and sign languages among them, employ periphrasis with the use of an auxiliary.

Citation form

A citation form is the basic form referring to the dictionary entry of a lexeme. As lexemes are abstract objects, citation forms make it possible to refer to a lexeme.

Classifier

Generally, a classifier is a morpheme that reflects certain semantic properties of a referent; for sign languages, a classifier is a visually motivated (iconically based) lexical/grammatical category, mostly a handshape that combines with certain types of predicates.

Classifier construction

A classifier construction is a complex sign that encodes information about spatial localization and (manner of) motion and that is part of the non-core lexicon.

Classifier predicate

A classifier predicate is a complex predicate made up of a classifier and a verb.

Clause

A clause is the smallest grammatical unit that can express a complete proposition (i.e. a statement that can be either true or false). Typically, it consists of a subject and a predicate, which in turn is prototypically a verb phrase, a verb and its internal arguments.

Cliticization

Cliticization refers to a process whereby a functional element phonologically attaches to a lexical element such that a single prosodic word is created (e.g. English *can't* and French *j'aime*); the functional element is referred to as a clitic.

Coalescence

Coalescence refers to a special type of cliticization; most commonly, cliticization of an indexical sign to a preceding symmetrical two-handed sign, such that a single prosodic word is created.

Code-switching

Code-switching refers to a (usually bilingual or multi-lingual) language user's switching between two languages or registers during communicative interaction.

Coherence

Coherence is the semantic continuity of a text or discourse which is determined by semantic and conceptual relations between its parts.

Cohesion

Cohesion are grammatically realized relations in a text or discourse that are used to explicitly link different parts of discourse. Cohesive devices make it possible for the addressee to keep track of the discourse referent.

Common noun

A common noun is a noun that denotes a class or type of entity; a common noun can be a count noun (e.g. *book* in English) or a mass noun (e.g. *rice* in English).

Comparative/comparison

Comparison introduces orderings between two or more objects with respect to the degree to which they possess some property. In the prototypical case, a comparison involves two objects that are explicitly expressed ('John is taller than Mary'). However, comparison can be more implicit (in 'John is tall' John's height is evaluated with respect to a contextually determined degree of tallness). Many languages have one or more syntactic constructions specifically encoding a comparison.

Complement clause

A complement clause, or object clause (also called completive) is a subordinate argument clause carrying the syntactic function of an object, as 'that she would do it' in 'Ada promised that she would do it'.

Complementizer

A complementizer is a functional word or a particle introducing a subordinate clause, such as *that* in English as in "John knows that he is lucky." It is often abbreviated as C.

Complex movement

A complex movement is a movement composed of a change in more than one phonological parameter (e.g. simultaneous change of location and handshape).

Compounding/Compound

Compounding is a word formation process by which two otherwise independent stems or words come together to form a new item with a new meaning; the result is a compound.

Conjunction

A conjunction is a functional element that links phrases, clauses, or sentences; coordinating conjunctions (e.g. English and, but) have to be distinguished from subordinating conjunctions (e.g. English that, because).

Constituent

A constituent is a word or a group of words which function(s) as a single unit within a given syntactic structure. The constituent structure of a sentence can be identified using constituency tests. Typical constituents phrases that can be distinguished according to their category in noun phrases (NP), verb phrases (VP), Adjectival phrase (AP), Adverbial Phrase (AdvP) and the like.

Constituent negation

Constituent negation refers to a type of negation whereby a constituent smaller than the clause is negated, e.g. negation of the verb in I didn't steal the book, I borrowed it.

Contact (in the sense of language contact)

Language contact refers to the circumstances determined by two language communities living side-by-side that allow linguistic patterns and words from one to be used in the other.

Contact (in the sense of phonology)

Contact refers to an articulator physically touching another articulator, a body part, or the torso, or the appearance of an articulator in a location.

Context

The context of an utterance consists at least of the speaker, the addressee, the time and the place of the utterance. Broader definitions of context may also include information about the previous discourse and the communicative situation, shared background knowledge and shared world knowledge among other kinds of information.

Contralateral

Contralateral refers to a location/area on the side opposite of the active articulator.

Control verb

The term control refers to the constructions in which the understood subject of a non-finite embedded clause is determined by some expression in the main clause. Control verbs (such as promise, order, try, ask, tell, force, yearn, refuse, etc.) obligatorily determine which of their arguments in the main clause controls the embedded clause. Some of them qualify as subject control verbs. 'Promise' is an example, as in 'Ada promised to leave', where the understood subject of 'leave' is obligatorily interpreted as the main subject. Some are object control verbs. An example is 'order', in 'Ada ordered Auguste

to leave', where the understood subject of the infinitive is obligatorily interpreted as the object of the main verb, 'Auguste'. Arbitrary control occurs when the controller is understood to be anybody in general, as in 'Running is good for health'.

Conversion

Conversion (also called zero affixation) is a category-changing process, where the input and output categories are phonologically identical, i.e. where there is no overt affix that bears the information of category change (e.g. walk (N) and walk (V), put (present tense) and put (past tense) in English).

Coordination

Coordination is a non-hierarchical combination of at least two constituents belonging to the same syntactic category, such as noun phrases, verb phrases or clauses, either through conjunction or juxtaposition

Copula

A copula is a word used to relate the subject of a sentence with a non-verbal predicate, such as the word 'is' in the sentence 'Ada is nice'. It is often a verbal element, but it can also be pronominal in nature or suffixal. Many languages have one main copula, others have more than one, and some (including many sign languages) have none.

Correlative

Correlatives are conjunctions that are separated in a sentence but coordinate the constituents they introduce, which have thus the same function. Examples of correlatives in English are: 'both... and', or 'either...or'. The same term can also be used to refer to the constituents themselves that are coordinated in a correlative structure. For example, 'Ada' and 'Maya' are two correlative noun phrases in 'Both Ada and Maya love to play'. Similarly in 'Either you call or you write a letter', the two clauses can be referred to as correlative clauses. Correlative constructions can also be found in some languages as the functional equivalent of relative clauses: 'the boy was late, that boy called' meaning 'The boy who was late called'.

Co-speech gesture

A body movement, executed by the hand(s) or another body part, that accompanies speech, often to illustrate, supplement, or accentuate the message conveyed in speech; e.g. pointing gesture, thumbs-up gesture, headshake, shrug.

Count noun

A count noun is a noun that can appear in the plural and that may combine with numerals like three but not with quantity expression like much (e.g. book, horse).

Declarative

Declaratives are the most common type of sentences in any given language. They are used to express statements, to make something known, to explain or to describe. As a sentence type, they are usually opposed to interrogatives, imperatives and exclamatives. The corresponding declarative force is specialized to provide new information. Declaratives are typically used to realize assertional speech acts.

Definiteness/Indefiniteness

Definite expressions are noun phrases that denote referents that have the property of being unique ("The book is on the table", where there is just one relevant book in the

context of utterance) or the property of being familiar both to the signer and to the addressee. Indefinite noun phrases denote referents that are not known to the signer but can be known to the addressee.

Deixis

Deixis is a strategy to refer to objects present in the actual context of utterance. Deictic expressions can refer to concrete entities ('I', 'you', 'that (one)') as well to the spatiotemporal coordinates of the context of utterance ('here', 'now', 'yesterday').

Demonstrative

A demonstrative is deictic word (a type of determiner) that specifies which entity a speaker refers to and distinguishes this entity from others; they may e.g. be used for spatial deixis (e.g. English *this* vs. *that*).

Deontic modality

Deontic modality refers to the speaker's attitude towards the possibility or necessity of an event, embodied in the notions obligation, permission, prohibition, wishing, desiring, etc.

Derivation

Derivation is a lexical word formation process that creates a new lexeme, mostly by combining a stem and an affix.

Derivational affixation

Derivational affixation is a type of affixation whose function is to create a lexeme associated with an already existing lexeme (e.g. -er in *swimm-er*); derivational affixation contrast with inflectional affixation which exists solely for grammatical purposes (e.g. agreement morphology).

Determiner

A determiner (or article) is a functional element that combines with nouns and that specifies features such as number, gender, definiteness, and closeness/distance (e.g. *the*, *a*, *that* in English).

Discourse

A discourse is formed by a sequence of logically united utterances, which are also connected to the context.

Discourse marker

Discourse markers are cohesive devices between two utterances (such as connectors or discourse particles) that establish coherence.

Discourse structure

Discourse structure describes the relations between grammatical elements and their effects beyond the sentence level.

Ditransitive

A ditransitive verb is a verb which takes a subject and two objects corresponding to a theme and a recipient. These objects may be called direct and indirect, or primary and secondary. An example of a ditransitive verb in English is 'send', as in 'Ada sent a letter to her friend'.

Domain marker

A domain marker is a phonological signal that spans over an entire prosodic or syntactic domain; can be manual or non-manual.

Dominance reversal

In a dominance reversal, a signer uses his non-dominant instead of his dominant hand for signing; a dominance reversal may be phonologically (e.g. articulatory constraints) or pragmatically motivated.

Dominant hand

The dominant hand is the preferred hand of a signer, i.e. the hand s/he would normally use to articulate one-handed signs.

Doubling (syntactic)

Syntactic doubling refers to the repetition of a morpho-syntactic constituent within a sentence; e.g. doubling of a wh-sign.

Dual

One of the values of the feature number that indicates 'two' of an entity.

Ellipsis

Ellipsis refers to the omission from a clause of one or more words that are nevertheless understood in the context of the remaining elements. There are numerous distinct types of ellipsis, according to the nature of the omitted constituent and to the syntactic context where it occurs. Some of the most common types are briefly described below. Gapping occurs in coordinate structures: material that is present in the first conjunct can be omitted, i.e. 'gapped', from the second conjunct. The gapped material usually contains a finite verb, as in 'Nico plays the piano and Phil the trumpet'. VP ellipsis omits a non-finite VP. The ellipsis site must be introduced by an auxiliary verb or by the particle *to*, as in 'Phil played today, and Ada will tomorrow'. Sluicing elides everything from a direct or indirect question except the question word, as in 'Ada will call someone, but I don't know who'.

Embedded clause

An embedded, or dependent, clause is a clause that is dependent from another clause in a given sentence. It can be an argument clause or an adjunct (or adverbial) clause.

Embodiment

In the context of role shift, embodiment is understood as a phenomenon whereby the actual signer (i.e. the narrator) of a text or discourse uses his/her body as one of the interlocutors or agents in the narrated discourse.

Entity classifier

An entity classifier (also called whole entity or semantic classifier) is a classifier (hand-shape) which reflects shape properties of the subject of an intransitive clause (e.g. a car moving).

Epistemic modality

Epistemic modality refers to the speaker's belief or knowledge about an event, embodied in the notions of knowing, believing, assuming, etc.

Ergativity

Ergativity refers to a system of marking grammatical relations in which intransitive subjects pattern together with transitive objects, and differently from transitive subjects. Ergativity may be manifest, for example, in terms of morphological case marking on nominals, or patterns of agreement on the predicate. An example of an ergative language is Basque.

Event structure

Event structure or situation type refers to the internal temporal structure of eventualities and it is also known under other denominations like Aktionsart, actionality or inner aspect.

Evidentiality

Evidentiality is a grammatical category used to mark the source of information. Evidential markers typically distinguish between the following sources of information: (i) visual, (ii) sensory, (iii) inference, (iv) assumption, (v) reported and (vi) quotative.

Exclamative

An exclamative is a grammatical form specialized to convey surprise, denoting that all or some part of the utterance is unexpected, as in 'What a beautiful day!'. It is one of the four well-recognized sentence types, together with declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives. The corresponding exclamative force is specialized to convey a surprise. Declaratives are typically used to realize assertional speech acts. Unlike the other assertions, questions or commands, exclamations are expressive speech acts that are not used to ask the speaker to do something.

Exhortative

An exhortative construction is a construction used to express an order or an invitation including other participants other than the addressee, and typically the first and third person ('Let us go!').

Existential clause

An existential clause is a clause that refers to the existence or presence of something. Examples in English include the sentences 'There is bread in the kitchen' and 'There are three pencils on the desk'. Many languages form existential clauses without any particular marker, simply using forms of the normal copula, the subject being the noun (phrase) referring to the thing whose existence is asserted.

Expressive meaning

Expressive meaning is the meaning that is conveyed but not actually said, i.e. expressive meaning is typically due to some kind of pragmatic enrichment. Expressive meaning does not contribute to the truth-conditional meaning of an utterance.

Extended exponence

Extended exponence is a concept related to morphology whereby two markers occurring in different places in a word or phrase belong to the same morpheme; i.e. two separate units realizing a single function.

Extraction

Extraction refers to any syntactic operation responsible for the displacement of a word or a constituent from the position within a larger constituent where it is interpreted. For example, we can say that 'who' is extracted from the object position of the embedded clause in 'Who do you think Ada will call?'.

Extrapolation

Extrapolation is a mechanism of syntax altering word order in such a manner that a relatively "heavy" constituent appears in a position other than its canonical position, usually to the right. The relative clause 'which was addressed to Ada' is extrapolated in the following sentence: 'A letter arrived yesterday which was addressed to Ada'.

Fingerspelling

Fingerspelling refers to the use of handshapes from the manual alphabet to represent (part of) a word, often because no sign exists for the concept; in fingerspelled sequences certain reduction and assimilation phenomena may occur.

Finite clause

A finite clause is a clause with a finite verb.

Floating quantifier

A floating quantifier is a quantifier that is not immediately adjacent to the NP it quantifies. French 'tous' (all) in 'les étudiants ont tous lu ce livre' (the students have all read this book) vs 'Tous les étudiants ont lu ce livre' (all the students have read this book) is an example.

Focus

A focus is an item that is presented as a new piece of information in the context of utterance. Entire sentences can be a focus, for example when they are used as opening lines in a conversation. In other cases, only a part of the sentence is new information, for example the constituent *War and Peace* is a focus in the following question-answer pair: "Which book did you read? I read *War and Peace*". Focus can be contrastive or emphatic, as the constituent *Anna Karenina* in the sentence "I am not reading *War and Peace*, I am reading *ANNA KARENINA*".

Free relative

A free relative clause is a relative clause not containing any (overt) antecedent, or head, as 'what you will read' in 'I will read what you will read'. In many languages, free relatives are introduced by a *wh*-element, as 'what' in the English example.

Functional element/category

A syntactic category that has grammatical meaning rather than lexical or encyclopedic meaning and that fulfills a syntactic function (e.g. negation, tense, number).

Gapping

Gapping is a type of ellipsis occurring in coordinate structures: some material that is present in one conjunct is omitted, i.e. 'gapped', from the other conjunct. The gapped material usually contains a finite verb, as in 'Nico plays the piano and Phil the trumpet'.

Gender

Gender is a grammatical (morphosyntactic) category that classifies nouns in terms of their (real or assumed) semantically shared properties in some languages; in others, the classification can be somewhat arbitrary.

Gloss

Explanation/rendering of a morpheme or word in a text by means of providing a literal translation in another language (usually English).

Grammatical function

Grammatical function refers to the syntactic role of a constituent in a given syntactic structure, such as subject or object. It is independent from the category of that given constituent and rather depends on its position in the structure.

Grammatical word

A grammatical word is a free form composed of a root and morphosyntactic features (inflection), which enables it to be used in a syntactic context; the morphosyntactic features can have overt expressions, or they can be phonologically null.

Grammaticality judgment

A grammaticality judgment is a metalinguistic assessment of the acceptability of a given utterance by a native speaker. Grammaticality judgments are typically used in linguistic research to gather negative evidence about what the grammar cannot generate, alongside with what is actually produced.

Grammaticalization

Grammaticalization refers to a process by which an independent lexical form diachronically develops into a free or bound functional (grammatical) element; e.g. in English development of future tense marker from the verb *go*.

Head of a word

The head of a word is the element which provides the label for the categorial status of a word or compound, thus determining whether it is a noun, verb etc. The concept of head presupposes asymmetrical (head-complement or head-modifier) structures.

Headedness

Headedness is the property that distinguishes symmetrical from asymmetrical constructions in morphology, used usually in compounding. Symmetrical constructions are usually considered headless, while asymmetrical constructions have a syntactic head (and a complement or modifier).

Homonym

Two or more words that are phonologically identical but have different meanings, causing lexical ambiguity.

Iconicity

Iconicity implies a non-arbitrary (motivated) relation between form and meaning, i.e. a phonological form reflects in some way the assumed visual (or auditory) characteristics of the entity or event it refers to; the form of the category/construction is then iconic.

Illocutionary force

The illocutionary force of an utterance depends on the speaker's intention in producing that utterance and the corresponding syntactic structures he/she uses to reach this goal. Declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamative sentences are linguistic structures that are typically used to perform the illocutionary acts of making an assertion, eliciting information from the addressee, eliciting a behavior from the addressee and conveying a surprise.

Imperative

An imperative is a grammatical form that is specialized to elicit a (possibly non-linguistic) behavior from the addressee, as in ‘Go away!’. It is one of the four well-recognized sentence types, along with declaratives, interrogatives and exclamatives. The corresponding imperative force is specialized to elicit a specific behavior of the addressee. Imperatives are typically used to realize commands or requests.

Impersonal verb

An impersonal verb is a verb whose argument structure does not include an external argument. For example, ‘seem’ in ‘It seems that Ada is growing’ does not assign any interpretation to ‘it’, which is a pure placeholder, or expletive subject.

Implicature

Implicatures are context-dependent pragmatic aspects of the meaning of an utterance that do not contribute to the truth-conditional meaning of an utterance (what is said) but to the pragmatic meaning of this utterance (what is meant). Conversational implicatures are calculated on the basis of conversational maxims.

Incorporation

A complex verb formed by the syntactic combination of a verb with a noun (noun incorporation) or another verb; in sign languages often used for the combination of a verb and a classifier or of a noun and a numeral (numeral incorporation).

Indefinite pronoun

An indefinite pronoun is a pronoun that stands for an entity without specifying any grammatical (morphosyntactic) features such as number (e.g. someone in English).

Indirect question

An indirect question is a question, or interrogative, sitting in an embedded position, as ‘when she should leave’ in ‘Ada asked me when she should leave’. An indirect question is typically embedded under a declarative.

Inflection

Inflection is a type of word formation which is to some extent dependent on a syntactic structure and involves morphosyntactic features such as e.g. person, number, and tense.

Information structure

The term information structure refers to the way in which information is packaged within a sentence. For example, the information conveyed by an utterance can be divided in old vs. new information and within a sentence it is possible to identify a constituent that is a topic and a constituent that is focus.

Initialization

Initialization is a sign language-specific type of word formation (compounding) whereby the handshape of a lexeme is the handshape of the manual alphabet representing the first letter of the corresponding word in the spoken language (e.g. the sign lemonade with a C-handshape).

Interrogative

The term interrogative refers to a grammatical form that is specialized to elicit information from the addressee, as in 'What have you done?', or to report a doubt or a similar attitude towards a given propositional content, as in 'I wonder what you did'. The corresponding interrogative force is specialized to elicit information from the addressee. Interrogatives are typically used to realize a question.

Intonation

Intonation refers to the totality of the prosodic phenomena that accompany the segmental part of strings (i.e. stress, pitch, and pause), marked mostly through non-manual articulations (such as facial expressions) in sign languages.

Intransitive verb

An intransitive verb is a verb that only takes one argument, as 'telephone' and 'arrive'. Intransitive verbs can be distinguished between unaccusatives, that only take an internal argument, such as 'arrive', and unergatives, whose only argument is the external argument, such as 'telephone'.

Ipsilateral

Ipsilateral refers to a location/area on the side of the active articulator.

Irreversible predicate

An irreversible predicate is a predicate that selects for two arguments associated with different semantic features, such as animacy. For example, typically 'eat' is an irreversible predicate, because its external argument is animate and its internal argument is inanimate. Only 'Ada eats a salad' is a meaningful sentence, while the reverse, 'A salad eats Ada' is semantically odd. Irreversible predicates are opposed to reversible predicates.

Isomorphic

The term isomorphic refers to the equivalence between the values of two sets of entities, rules etc.; e.g. in isomorphic use of space, signs are produced in a spatial configuration that corresponds to (i.e. is isomorphic with) a real-world configuration.

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition is a kind of coordination not involving any overt conjunction, such as and, or, but or the like. Two constituents that are juxtaposed usually belong to the same syntactic category and perform the same grammatical function.

Layering/layer

In sign language linguistics, layering refers to the simultaneous (i.e. layered) use of various manual and non-manual articulators, e.g. a string of signs accompanied by a body lean, a head movement, and a specific eyebrow position.

Lexeme

A lexeme is a (semi-)abstract unit of meaning which corresponds to the basic forms in the lexicon; the actual realization of these units in language use are called 'word forms' (or sometimes simply 'words').

Lexical item

A lexical item is any item that is part of the vocabulary of a particular language, and that has to be learned in order for the language to be used.

Lexicalization

Lexicalization refers to the adoption of a particular form into the lexicon of a language; the form can be a completely novel form, or might be based on previously existing items.

Lexicon

The lexicon is the mental repository of all the vocabulary items of a language.

Loan sign

A loan sign is a sign that is of foreign origin, influenced by the spoken language or taken from another sign language.

Local lexicalization

Reduction of a fingerspelled sequence that is repeatedly used within a discourse; the phonological changes (e.g. dropping of letters, creation of movement contour) are characteristic of lexicalization.

Locus

A locus is a point in space used for grammatical purposes (e.g. pronominalization, agreement); it either is the actual location of a present discourse referent or an arbitrary location established by means of pointing or some other strategy.

Main clause

The main clause of a sentence, also called the independent clause, is a clause that is syntactically and semantically autonomous. It is thus opposed to the subordinate clause, which is syntactically and semantically dependent on the main clause.

Mass noun

A mass noun is a noun that does not usually appear in the plural and that cannot combine with numerals like three; however, it may combine with quantity expression like much (e.g. rice, milk).

Measure phrase

Measure phrases are constructions containing a noun referring to a measure of time, capacity, weight, length, temperature, currency. For example 'five months' in 'I will leave in five months', or '4 kilos' in 'I bought four kilos of strawberries'.

Metaphor

Metaphor is a general cognitive mechanism, which is important for the constitution of meaning of many expressions in everyday language. In a metaphor, two different concepts can be mapped on each other and one (typically abstract) concept is being understood through the other (typically more concrete) concept.

Metonymy

In a metonymy, one entity stands for another related entity such as a part (face) for a whole (person), a writer for his writing, a place (Paris) for an institution (French government).

Minimal pair

Two lexemes that differ from each other only in terms of a single distinctive feature, a single phoneme in spoken languages (e.g. bat and matt in English) or a single parameter in sign languages.

Modal particle

A modal particle is a particle that expresses (logical/semantic) modality (e.g. doch, ja, etc., in German).

Modal verb

A modal verb is a verb – mostly an auxiliary – that expresses (logical/semantic) modality (e.g. the verbs can, must, etc., in English).

Modality

A functional feature that indicates the speaker's level of commitment to the actuality of an event, or its desirability, necessity, possibility, etc.

Modality differences

Differences between signed and spoken languages that are due to or related to the difference in communication channel (visual-gestural vs. oral-auditive).

Morpheme

A morpheme is the smallest linguistic unit that bears meaning; it can be free (i.e. standing on its own) or bound (i.e. morphologically dependent on a stem/base and unable to be used on its own).

Morphosyntactic feature

Morphosyntactic features (also called grammatical features) are the categories of declension and conjugation (e.g. number, tense, etc.) which carry grammatical information and enable a word to be used in a particular syntactic context.

Mouth gesture

A mouth gesture is a configuration of the mouth that may accompany a sign or signs and that is not related to a word of the surrounding spoken language.

Mouthing

A mouthing is the (mostly silent) articulation of (a part of) a word from the surrounding spoken language that is either related to the sign it accompanies or specifies its meaning; occasionally, a mouthing may spread over a string of signs.

Nativization

Nativization implies the adoption of a foreign word into the native lexicon such that it conforms fully to the native phonology.

Negation

Negation is a semantic notion which is encoded by dedicated morphemes. Negation systematically changes the meaning of expressions by introducing various kinds of oppositions. Negating a proposition has the effect of reversing its truth value, i.e. of the two clauses Tim is at home and Tim is not at home, only one can be true. By contrast, constituent negation only affects the constituent in the scope of negation

Negative suppletion

Negative suppletion refers to a process whereby a negative morpheme is phonologically different from its affirmative form.

Neologism

A word (sign) or phrase that is newly formed, usually for naming new objects or states of affairs.

Neutral word order

Every language has a neutral word order, an ordering of main constituents that is pragmatically neutral and syntactically unmarked. Typically, the neutral word order for a given language is established following the following criteria: it corresponds to the ordering of constituents in declarative main clauses; both the subject and the object are nominal; it is pragmatically neutral; no element is emphatic or topicalized.

Non-concatenative morphology

The part of morphology that is about non-affixal word formation processes (such as stem modifications or templatic morphology).

Non-dominant hand

The non-dominant hand is the non-preferred hand of a signer, i.e. the hand s/he would normally only use in the articulation of two-handed signs.

Non-finite clause

A non-finite clause is a dependent clause whose verb is non-finite. Many languages can form non-finite clauses with infinitives, participles and gerunds. Like any embedded clause, a non-finite clause depends on another clause in the sentence.

Non-manual (marker)

A non-manual marker is a lexical or information-bearing unit which is expressed by articulators other than the hands; non-manual markers can have phonological, morphological, syntactic, and prosodic functions.

Non-native lexicon

The non-native lexicon is the repository (mental dictionary) of the forms that are borrowed from other languages and, in the case of sign languages, from co-speech gesture.

Number

An inflectional feature (functional category) that indicates whether the an expression refers to a single entity or to more than one entities. The most common values of the category number are singular and plural, but intermediate values such as dual and paucal also exist.

Numeral

The term 'numeral' indicates an item specifying the number of the entities referred to by a noun.

Numerals can be classified into three main categories: cardinals (which answer the question 'how many?'), ordinals (which answer the question 'which in order?'), and distributive numerals (which answer the question 'how many each?').

Numeral incorporation

Under numeral incorporation, a polymorphic form (a compound) is created by simultaneous the combination of a numeral and a syntactically adjacent noun.

Parameter

Parameters are the phonological components (building blocks) of a sign: handshape, orientation, location, movement, and non-manuals.

Particle

The term particle is typically used for items that cannot be inflected (e.g. conjunctions), but it is also applied to formally dependent items (e.g. clitics) and functionally dependent items (e.g. adpositions and auxiliaries).

Parts of speech

The lexical and functional categories that are the building blocks of syntax: verb, noun, adverb, adjective, conjunction, etc. (see also syntactic category).

Passive

In a passive construction the patient (or theme) argument of a transitive or a ditransitive verb is in the subject position, the agent argument is absent or expressed optionally, and the verb or the verb phrase is marked in a special way.

Personal pronoun

Personal pronouns are pronouns that are associated primarily with a particular grammatical person – first person (as I), second person (as you), or third person (as he, she, it). Personal pronouns may also take different forms depending on number (usually singular or plural), natural gender, case, and formality.

Path movement

Path movement refers to a movement of the whole hand, be it in neutral signing space or on the signer's body.

Perspective

Perspective refers to the viewpoint from which an event is described. The event can be described from an external viewpoint (observer or narrator perspective) or from an internal viewpoint (character perspective).

Plain verb

A sign language verb that cannot be spatially modified to agree with (indicate) one or more of its arguments; plain verbs contrast with agreement verbs and a spatial verbs.

Plural

One of the values of the category number, indicating that there is more than one of an entity.

Polar interrogative

Polar interrogatives are sometimes called yes/no interrogatives because they ask whether a certain state of affairs holds or not, so they are naturally answered by 'yes' or 'no'. A direct polar interrogative in English is 'Are you sick?' while an indirect polar interrogative in English is the embedded clause in 'I wonder whether you are sick'.

Politeness

The linguistic expression of the intention of a speaker to save the face of the addressee (or some other person) in communicative interaction. To express his/her intention, the speaker uses various linguistic strategies.

Possession

Possession can be viewed as the realizations of a – typical asymmetric - association or relationship between two referents. Possession comprises kinship relations, whole-part relations, ownership relations and more general associations between possessor and possessum.

Possessive

A possessive construction is typically a noun phrase expressing a possession. It is usually articulated into the possessor (someone who possesses something) and the possessed (often referred to as possessum or possessee as well).

Postposition

See adposition

Predicate

In traditional grammaticography, a predicate combines with a subject to form a sentence, and ascribes a property to the subject referent (e.g. 'Socrates' is the subject in the sentence 'Socrates is mortal' and 'is mortal' is the predicate). Predicates combine with a certain number of dependents or participants in order to express a complete predication to refer to a particular event or situation.

Preposition

See adposition.

Presupposition

A presupposition of an utterance is some additional information that the speaker or signer assumes (or acts as if he/she assumes) in order for the utterance to be meaningful in the current context. In the sentence 'Peter stopped smoking', the use of the verb stop presupposes that Peter used to smoke.

Pronoun

A syntactic category that takes the place of a noun phrase (e.g. English I, him, mine, etc.) Personal pronouns are pronouns that are associated primarily with a particular grammatical person – first person (as I), second person (as you), or third person (as he, she, it). Personal pronouns may also take different forms depending on number (usually singular or plural), natural gender, case, and formality. Semantically, pronouns are used as cohesive devices to establish co-reference between the referent of the pronoun and the referent of its antecedent.

Proper noun

A subgroup of the syntactic category noun; proper nouns denote individuals (e.g. persons: Noam Chomsky, places: Europe).

Prosodic word

A prosodic unit that consists of at least one syllable and that may or may not be a lexical word; cliticization or compounding may yield a prosodic word.

Prosody

Elements of speech or signing that determine how we say what we say, e.g. the pauses, the prominent parts, the rhythmic chunks, tones, etc.

Purpose clause

Purpose clauses are subordinate clauses expressing the purpose of the event expressed by the main clause, as in 'We stopped driving to work in order to save money'.

Quantifier

A syntactic category that indicates quantity (excluding numerals), e.g. some, many, never. Semantically, quantifiers are operators that quantify over a set of individuals, with different interpretations depending on the meaning of the quantifier.

Raising verb

Raising constructions involve the movement of an argument from an embedded or subordinate clause to a matrix or main clause; in other words, a raising predicate/verb appears with a syntactic argument that is not its semantic argument, but is rather the semantic argument of an embedded predicate. An example of raising verb in English is 'seem', as in 'Ada seems to be happy'.

Reason clause

Reason clauses are subordinate clauses expressing a reason for the event expressed by the main clause, as in 'I called you because I missed you'.

Reduplication

Under reduplication, a morphological process is realized by repeating (part of) a stem.

Reference

Reference is the symbolic relationship between a linguistic expression and a concrete or abstract entity that it represents. The reference of an expression is the set of entities that the expression denotes.

Reference tracking

Reference tracking has to do with specifying the referents' identity in a text or discourse, i.e. with signaling which discourse referent we are talking about. Languages use various morphosyntactic devices such as pronouns or verbal agreement and pragmatic principles such as accessibility and salience to specify a referent in a discourse context.

Reflexive

A construction where the agent and another thematic role bearing argument refer to the same entity (e.g. He washes himself); a reflexive pronoun is a pronoun that refers to the agent (e.g. himself).

Register

The term register describes all kinds of linguistic variation that depends on the communicative situation or the specific purpose of communication.

Resumptive

A resumptive pronoun is a pronoun that refers back to a previously realized item within the same syntactic structure. Resumptive pronouns are often found in relative clauses.

es, where they refer back to the relative pronoun, as in 'This is the toy that Ada thinks that we should definitely buy it'. The use of resumptive pronouns is marginal in standard English, but completely acceptable in colloquial varieties and in many languages.

Reversible predicate

A reversible predicate is a predicate that selects for two arguments that are not necessarily associated with different semantic features such as animacy. An example of a reversible predicate is 'kiss', because both its external argument and its internal argument are indistinct with respect to animacy. Both 'Ada kissed Nico', and 'Nico kissed Ada' are thus meaningful.

Role shift

A construction where a signer assumes the characteristics of another person/animal (the character) and linguistically marks his/her utterance accordingly, commonly by rotating his/her body towards the position in space associated to the character (and by other non-manual markers); role shift is typically used in narration to report someone else's utterance (attitude role shift, also called constructed discourse) or action (action role shift, also called constructed action).

Root

A root is the part of a word that carries the main conceptual meaning expressed by that word and that cannot be segmented any further.

Scope

Scope refers to the domain over which a certain feature – be it semantic or phonological – has an effect; e.g. negation can have semantic scope over part of a sentence or the whole sentence (sentential scope), and a non-manual marker like headshake can have scope (i.e. can extend) over part of a sentence or the whole sentence.

Secondary movement

Movements of the hand that are not path movements; articulator-internal movements: handshape changes, orientation changes, and hand-internal movements like finger wiggling.

Secondary predication

A secondary predicate is an expression that attributes a property to a nominal phrase (that can be the subject or another argument of the main verb) but it is not the main predicate of the clause. In 'The boys arrived home exhausted', for example, the underlined element expresses a secondary predication on the main subject.

Sentence

A sentence is a unit in which words are grammatically linked to make a statement or to describe something (typically via a declarative sentence), to express a command (typically via an imperative sentence), to elicit information from an addressee (typically via an interrogative sentence) or to convey surprise (typically via an exclamative sentence). The typical sentence contains at least a predicative nucleus consisting of a subject and of a predicate (for example, in "John is smart" the property of being smart is predicated of John and in "Mary thinks that John is smart" the property of thinking that John is smart is predicated of Mary). However, there can be elliptical sentences with a minimal structure.

Serial verb construction

The serial verb construction, also known as (verb) serialization or verb stacking, is a syntactic phenomenon by which two or more verbs or verb phrases are put together in a single clause. Serial verb constructions are often described as coding a single event.

Shared sign language

A sign language that emerged in a village community, due to an increased likelihood of deafness; often a considerable proportion of the hearing population also knows the sign language (also known as village sign language or rural sign language).

Signing space

Space in front of the signer that plays a role at different linguistic levels: phonology (location specification of lexical signs), morphology (e.g. agreement), semantics (e.g. topographic descriptions), pragmatics (e.g. reference tracking, contrast).

Simple movement

A simple movement is a movement that consists of a change in only one phonological parameter (e.g. location or orientation).

Simultaneity

The combined expression of two (or more) signs – be they manually or non-manually articulated – at the same time (by the same person).

Size-and-Shape-Specifier (SASS)

A Size-and-Shape-Specifier is a classifier(-like) item that expresses the size and shape of an entity, usually by outlining its boundaries.

Sluicing

Sluicing is an ellipsis phenomenon which elides everything from a direct or indirect question except the question word, as in 'Ada will call someone, but I don't know who'.

Small clause

A small clause is a construction that has the semantics of a clause, with its typical subject-predicate divide, but it lacks either a verb or the markers of (verbal) inflection typically associated with finite clauses. An example is 'Ada smarter' in 'I consider Ada smarter'.

Spatial agreement

Sign languages have the option of exploiting space for agreement: the sign encoding the lexical verb is modified to include agreement with the locus in space associated with the argument(s) of the verb. Typically, the orientation and the direction of movement is modified and oriented towards the point in space associated with the external argument, the internal argument or both. Not all verbs agree in space.

Spatial verb

A verb that can be spatially modified to indicate the locative source and/or locative goal of an event, e.g. WALK (from a to b), PUT-DOWN.

Specificity

Indefinite noun phrases can be specific and non-specific. An indefinite is specific when the signer, but not the addressee, knows the referent of the noun phrase. An indefinite is non-specific indefinite when neither the signer nor the addressee know its referent.

Speech act

A speech act is a linguistic act that is performed by a speaker while uttering a sentence. Speech acts can either be explicit performative or implicit performative and they are typically performed to make an assertion, a question, a command or to convey surprise.

Spreading domain

A spreading domain is a prosodic domain over which a manual or non-manual articulation is extended.

Stem

A stem (also called a base) is the morphological unit to which inflection and derivation applies.

Stem modification

A stem modification (also called stem-internal change or base modification) is a word formation process which affects the phonological form of the stem (e.g. English sing – sang – sung); stem modification may combine with affixation.

Subordination

Subordination is a principle of hierarchical organization of linguistic constituents. More precisely, the constituent A is said to be subordinate to the constituent B if A depends on B.

Subordination conjunction

See complementizer.

Suppletion

Suppletion refers to a word form which is associated with another form but has a completely or partially different phonological form, also called base allomorphy (e.g. go – went and bad – worse in English).

Suprasegmental features

Phonological or prosodic features that associate with the segmental layer of a word/sign; e.g. tone in spoken languages, non-manual features in sign languages; suprasegmental features constitute a layer on top of the segmental layer.

Syllable

A prosodic unit that is composed of a sequence of segments and that is the domain for stress assignment; in spoken languages, a syllable consists minimally of a vowel, in sign languages minimally of a movement.

Syntactic category

Building blocks of syntax; e.g. lexical categories such as noun, verb, etc., functional categories such as tense, number, etc., and phrasal categories such as Noun Phrase, Tense Phrase, etc.)

Telic

Telic eventualities are conceptualized as involving a change of state that amounts to the end point of the event described by the predicate.

Temporal clause

A temporal clause is a type of adverbial clause expressing a temporal relationship between two clauses. The time of the event in the adverbial clause can be before, after or simultaneous with the time of the event in the main clause.

Tense

Tense is a morphosyntactic category that refers to the reference time of an event with respect to utterance time. The reference time can either be identical to the utterance time, precede the utterance time (past) or be located after the utterance time (future).

Thematic role

Thematic roles encode the general semantic interpretation of an argument as a specific participant in an event/action described by the predicate. Typical thematic roles are agent, stimulus, experiencer, patient, theme, benefactive, recipient or instrument.

Topic

If the content provided by the sentence can be divided in old information and new information, a topic is the constituent that the rest of the sentence talks about. A topic can be a constituent familiar from the previous sentence but it can be a new argument of conversation. The latter case involves so-called topic shift and is a way to switch to another topic in discourse.

Transitional movement

A movement that is phonetically required to move the hand from the end point of one sign to the beginning point of the next sign, i.e. a movement that is not part of the lexical specification of either of the two adjacent signs.

Transitive

Refers to argument-taking properties of a verb; a transitive verb requires an internal and an external argument (e.g. visit, love).

Turn-taking

Turn-taking refers to a change in the role of discourse participants: from addressee to active speaker/signer, and vice versa; turn-taking signals are used to initiate turn-taking.

Unaccusative

An intransitive verb whose only argument is assigned the thematic role patient or theme instead of agent (e.g. melt, fall).

Unergative

An intransitive verb whose only argument is assigned the thematic role agent (e.g. run, swim).

Voice

The voice of a verb refers to the relation between the event expressed by the verb and the participants identified by its arguments. Typically, when the subject is the agent or

experiencer, the verb is in the active voice; when the subject is the patient or undergoer, the verb is said to be in the passive voice.

Wh-phrase

The wh-phrase is a constituent of a clause that is characterized as a question operator. A wh-phrase can be a word, as 'what' in 'What do you see?' or an entire phrase, as 'which girl' in 'Which girl do you see?'.

Wh-question

Content interrogatives or wh-questions are used to ask the addressee to fill in some specific missing information and thus elicit a more elaborate answer than just 'yes' or 'no'. In many languages, they contain a specialized set of interrogative words or phrases that have a common morphological marking (what, which, who, why, when etc.). Since in English this marking is the morpheme wh-, these interrogative phrases are called wh-phrases, and content interrogatives are often called wh-questions.

Word

Word is a term which is sometimes used interchangeably with 'word form'; otherwise it has to be qualified by the terms 'phonological' and 'grammatical'.

Word form

A word form is the realization of a lexeme in a grammatical context; word forms carry grammatical information and are inflected for number, tense, etc.

