Defective subject agreement in control complement clauses in Russian Sign Language

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Sign Languages (SLs), i.e. languages of communication of deaf people across the globe, have been recently proved to be comparable to spoken languages on all levels of linguistic representations including complex syntax [1]. At the same time, existing research on syntactic subordination in SLs is still avoiding the issue of finiteness in the subordinate clauses since SLs generally lack consistent morphosyntactic marking for TAM categories [2]. The present study, however, reveals that the subject agreement paradigm of embedded agreeing predicates in control constructions (i.e. complement clauses with a covert subject, whose reference is controlled by one of the arguments in the main clause [3]) in Russian SL (RSL) is reduced in comparison with verbal agreement in independent clauses, i.e. it is limited to first person irrespective the actual reference of the subject[1]. In this study, I suggest considering the defective subject agreement on the embedded agreeing predicates as markers of (non-)finiteness.

Methods: (i) corpus investigation using an on-line RSL corpus (http://rsl.nstu.ru/): search for complement clauses involving different semantic types of complement-taking predicates (CTPs): TRY, WANT, LIKE, LOVE, THINK, KNOW, SEE, ASK.FOR; (ii) the grammaticality judgments collected from 4 native RSL signers, who were asked to repeat, evaluate and propose the correction for the stimuli containing signed complement clauses. The example of a stimulus is given in (1):

(1)   ***GIRL**   TRY   GRANNY   **3**-HELP-3
         'The girl is trying to help granny'

Results: Grammaticality judgment task revealed that non-first subject agreement on the embedded agreeing predicate as in (1) is unacceptable in control constructions introduced by TRY, WANT, LOVE but grammatical in complement clauses introduced by other CTPs (2).

(2)   1SG   SEE   [WHAT **MOUSE**   **3**-TEASE-3   CAT]
          'I see {that} the mouse is teasing the cat.'
(3)   **GIRL**   TRY   GRANNY   **1**-HELP-3
         'The girl is trying to help granny'

As correction for the ungrammatical stimuli, the participants suggested sentences involving not third but first person subject agreement on the embedded predicate as in (3): the embedded predicate HELP is inflected for first person although the subject GIRL is third person.
        The corpus investigation also confrimed that if an agreeing predicate is embedded under the control predicate, its subject agreement paradigm is always limited to first-person value.

Discussion: Since the mismatching first person form of subject agreement occurs with canonical control CTPs (i.e. achievement TRY, desiderative WANT and commentative LOVE), I suggest to regard this defective forms on a par with infinitival complement clauses in spoken languages (e.g. Germanic). Although finiteness marking is typically based on TAM categories, the use of subject agreement for finiteness diagnostics is not unheard of in spoken languages (e.g. infinitives in Ancient Greek preserve TAM marking but lose subject agreement in the embedded clause [3]). Instead of the loss of subject agreement marking, however, I suggest that agreeing predicates in RSL possess a

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[1] Predicative signs in all investigated SLs are divided into agreeing and non-agreeing classes, the latter having a fixed form which does not mark verbal agreement [2].The agreeing predicates, however, express verbal agreement by alternating the direction of the movement, usually from the point in space associated with the referent of the subject to the locus associated with the referent of the object (or other way around in backward predicates [2]). Thus, the first person subject agreement is realized as movement from the body of the signer towards the point of signing space associated with an object (i.e. the locus of an object). Conversely, third person agreement is detached from the signer or his/her interlocutor and connects loci associated with the subject and object. On the agreement in SL see [2].

default first person agreement value, which surfaces if the subject-predicate relations are disrupted by a [-finite] feature hosted by TP. Default first-person subject agreement analysis was initially inspired by [5], where the author shows that body-anchored predicates (i.e. predicative signs, whose place of articulation is fixed on the body of the signer) are lexically specified for an inherent feature of first-person subject agreement sitting in the head of IP/TP. In the framework of this research, I suggest extending this analysis to agreeing predicates in RSL. If the inherent feature is assumed to be present in the head of TP in agreeing predicates as well as in body-anchored, this can explain why a first-person value surfaces in control constructions. As in spoken language infinitives, the subject agreement in non-finite clauses is blocked by [-finite] in TP. The loss of subject-predicate relation prevents Agree operation between the predicate and the subject, hence the inherent first-person agreement value is spelled out.
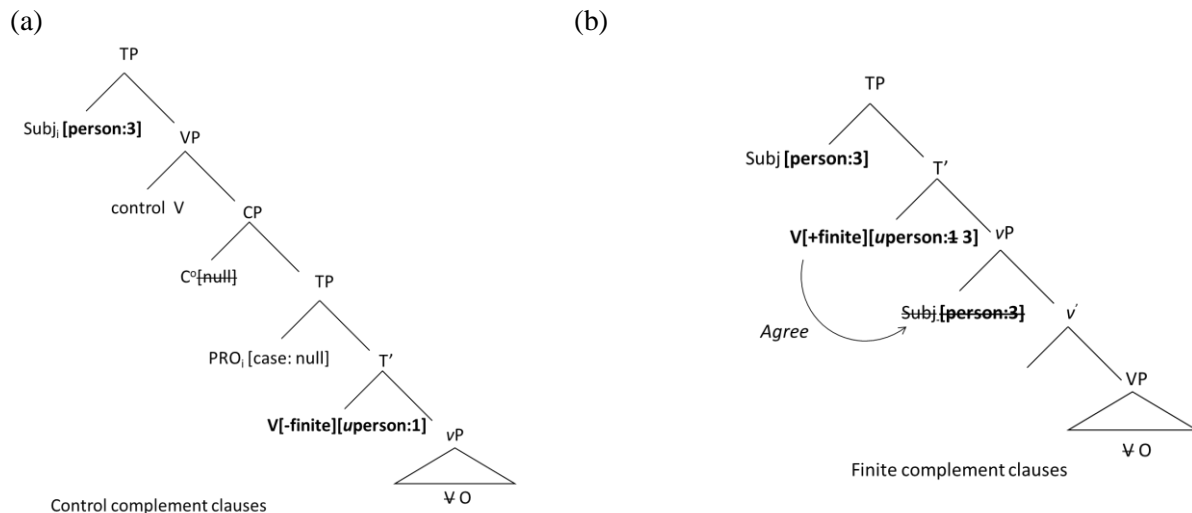
(a)   (b)

Figure 1. The derivation proposed for finite (a) and non-finite (b) complement clauses containing agreeing predicates.

This study therefore presents the first observation of the divergent morphosyntactic properties of agreeing predicates in the main clause and control complement clauses in RSL therefore suggesting the potential mechanism of finiteness marking in this language even though it lacks consistent TAM marking. Future research may thus explore the possibility of applying this analysis to control construction in other SLs.

References: [1] Pfau, R., Steinbach, M. and Herrmann, A., eds. 2016. *A Matter of Complexity: Subordination in Sign Languages*. Sign Languages and Deaf Communities 6. Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. [2] Pfau, R., Steinbach, M. and Woll, B. 2012. *Sign Language: An International Handbook*. Vol. 37. Walter de Gruyter. [3] Polinsky, M. 2013. Raising and Control. In *The Cambridge Handbook of Generative Syntax*, Ed. by Marcel Den Dikken. Cambridge: Cambridge [4] Noonan, M. 2007. Complementation. In *Language Typology and Syntactic Description, vol.2: Complex Constructions*, edited by T. Shopen, 52–150. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [5] Oomen, M. 2020. *Iconicity as a Mediator between Verb Semantics and Morphosyntactic Structure: A Corpus-Based Study on Verbs in German Sign Language*. PhD Dissertation, University of Amsterdam: Amsterdam.