

Categorical Status of Adjectives in Russian Sign Language

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Introduction

Property signs in RSL can function without any specific marking as argument modifiers, modifiers of a predicate, and as intransitive verbs (even in the embedded clause).

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL PAST 'The house was beautiful'
GIRL BEAUTIFUL WALK '[I saw] a beautiful girl walking'
INDEX DANCE BEAUTIFUL 'They dance beautifully'
REMEMBER KREMLIN WALL RED 'I remember that Kremlin wall is red'

Moreover, in elliptic contexts they can be headless:

BROTHER / INDEX INDEX₁ ALREADY FED.UP / INDEX GIFT MANY GIVE.PRESENTS.LOC:1SG
GOOD KEEP BAD GIVE.AWAY '[My] brother, I am fed up with him. I got presents, good ones I kept for myself, bad ones gave [him].'

While serving as an intransitive predicate, property signs in RSL can take verbal tense and aspect marking.

- Do adjectives exist in RSL as a separate part of speech?

Methods

Procedure: Sign language interpreter described to the informants a particular situation in RSL and asked them to retell it. Most of the informants worked in pairs, so they could elaborate and correct each other.

Stimuli: We elicited signs of four semantic types, which are typically expressed by adjectives even in languages with a small adjective class [3,4]: dimension, age, value, color. We used Dixon's [4] questionnaire for our examples.

18 informants in Novosibirsk, 4 in Moscow

Property signs as gradable predicates

• Comparatives

RSL uses conjoined comparatives (as well as other SLs [1,5]):

BOY FAT / GIRL SLIM 'a boy is fatter than a girl'

Verbs as gradable predicates:

INDEX_a WORK.HARD INDEX_b LAZY REST 'One [student] works hard, and the other one is lazy, he chills out.'

Apart from antonyms, modifiers like STRONG/WEAK are used:

INDEX_a STRONG JUMP INDEX_b WEAK JUMP 'one [boy] is jumping better than the other'

INDEX_a RED STRONG BRIGHT INDEX_b WEAK '[The sofa] is very red, and [the bag] is less red.'

BOY A.BIT FAT GIRL FAT TOO.MUCH 'a girl is fatter than the boy'

BOY BETTER SMART BETTER GIRL SO.SO 'a boy is smarter than a girl'

Signs denoting size, however, behave differently, as they allow simultaneous expression of comparison



'The house is shorter than a tree'

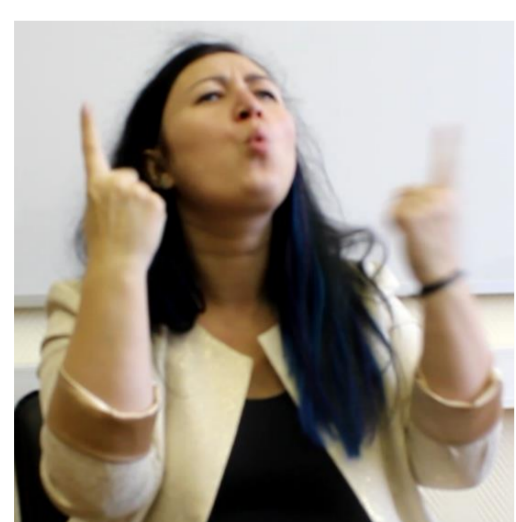
• Superlatives

While the sign THE.MOST is used only with gradable signs like BEAUTIFUL, the sign OF.ALL is also compatible with verbs:

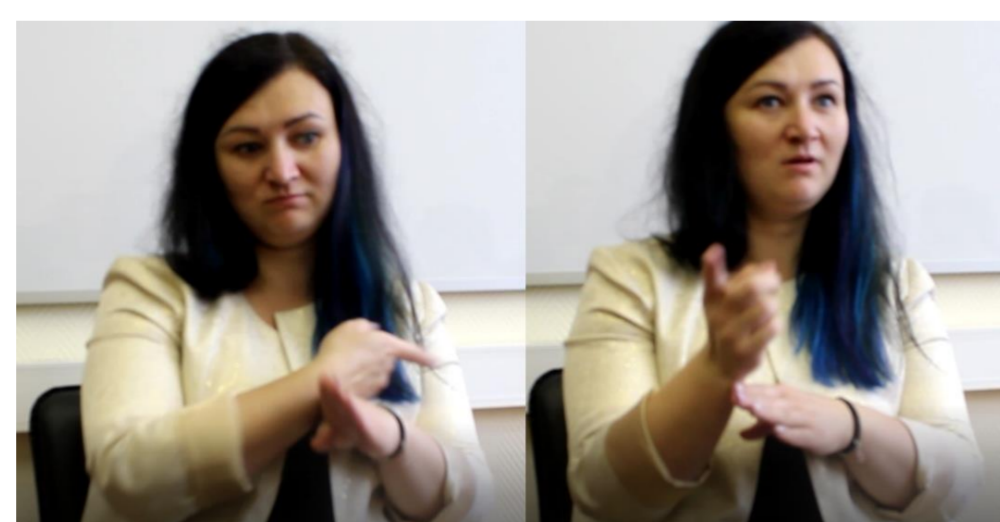
FATHER SEARCH THE.MOST BIG TREE CUT 'father cut the biggest tree [in the garden]'

BOY APPLE BIG OF.ALL TOOK ATE 'a boy ate the biggest apple'

OF.ALL INDEX GIVE.BIRTH.TO BABY 'she is the only one [of us] who gave birth to a child'



THE.MOST



OF.ALL



Attenuative

- **Attenuatives** are not restricted to adjectives and they are compatible with both nouns and verbs:

HOUSE RED ATTEN 'The house is reddish'

BOY DANCE ATTEN 'The boy is dancing **not very good**'

BOY BUY HOUSE ATTEN 'The boy bought not a very good house'

Verbal morphology on property signs

- Resultative construction – both verbs and adjectives
- There are turned out to be no progressive markers on adjectives, however, there might be non-manual marking of this aspect:

___long

INDEX READ READ LITERATE / MIND.GROWS 'The more he read the more intelligent he got.' (roughly: 'He reads, reads, gets very clever, intelligence grows.')

- Adjectives do not occur with imperative

NEED BE KIND → imperative meaning

* IMP KIND

INDEX₂ SLEEP IMP / TIME A.LOT 'Go to sleep, it's late!' [2]

INDEX NEED SLEEP → 'You need sleep'

- BEGIN – inceptive marker:

MOTHER BEGIN OLD 'the mother has started to turn old'

BOY BEGIN FAT 'a boy has started to get fat'

INDEX BEGIN RUN 'I started running'



BEGIN



BECOME

- BECOME is used with nouns and adjectives, but not with verbs:

A.LOT EAT BECOME FAT

BOY BECOME MAN

* BOY BECOME RUN

Results and future directions

Results:

The sets of markers applied to verbs and adjectives are not fully identical:

- adjectives do not combine with imperative
- verbs are not compatible with BECOME and THE.MOST.

Adjective class is not homogeneous: adjectives of size in comparative constructions behave differently from both verbs and other adjectives.

Non-manual/manual adverbials which usually occur on verbs can also occur on predicative adjectives.

Property signs form a separate part of speech that lacks categories unique to it but is defined by a set of compatibility properties not attested elsewhere

Future perspective:

- Investigate in more detail non-manuals
- Check other TAM markers (e.g. prospective aspect, past tense)

Selected References

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