Indirect object markers in Georgian Sign Language

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This paper presents one of the first studies on Georgian Sign Language (GESL), a sign language that has notpreviously been taken into consideration in typological research on sign languages. We focus on three types of indirect object markers, that is, auxiliary-like elements that introduce an additional argument. We discuss four markers in total. Interestingly, three of these markers do not only introduce an argument but come with additional semantics, namely respect, disrespect, and causation.It will further be shown that the presence of an indirect object marker frees the word order in the sentence.

Keywords: Georgian Sign Language, agreement, auxiliary, indirect object, causation, respect.

1   Introduction

1.1   Georgian Sign Language

Georgian Sign Language (GESL) is the language of Deaf and hard of hearing people – a linguistic minority of Georgia. This language has previously been considered a part of Soviet Sign Language, which was common throughout the former Soviet Union and was based on the Russian system. Thus, in the Soviet period, the sign languages in this region were highly influenced byRussian Sign Language (RSL), the structure of which had in turn been influenced by spoken Russian. This influence was also clear in Georgia. Until today, the influence of RSL is obvious in the lexicon of GESL. In practice, this means that many deaf people can communicate in this "Soviet Sign Language", and they would like to maintainthis possibility. However, the process of nationalization has begun everywhere in post-Soviet regions and national sign languages that have long been under pressure from external influences are re-emerging and are used by an increasing number of deaf people. By now, at least some scientific research on the national sign language has emerged in various of the former Soviet republics. Besides Georgia, such processes are taking place in, for instance, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Moldova.

Until 2011, there has been no research on the lexicon and structure of GESL. In 2011, thanks to support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Tbilisi Office of Save the Children International, the first linguistic research on GESL was conducted. At present, various aspects of GESL grammar are being investigated, and the preparation of a GESL dictionary with 4,500 units is nearing completion. As mentioned

previously, the Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) constitute a linguistic minority in Georgia. The exact number of DHHpeople in Georgia is not known. At present, 2,500 persons are registered at the Union of the Deaf of Georgia, but the actual number of DHH subjects is certainly much higher. There are three schools for DHH children in Georgia (Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi). However, the educational system for these children is faced with tremendous problems appear. A lack of correct educational attitudes in Soviet times resulted in the complete absence of a solid and scientifically informed basis for the education of the DHH population. In fact, for DHH children, these schools were just a place to spendtheir schoolyears without receiving any substantial education.

The main goal of the present paper is to focus attention on the original sign language of Georgia, Georgian Sign Language, which to date has only received very little scientific attention. Therefore,GESL data has never been taken into accountintypological studies on sign languages. In the following, we will add to the typological discussion of sign language agreement and argument structure by presenting GESL data that involve the use of auxiliaries which extend the argument structure of the verb; we refer to these auxiliaries as 'indirect object markers' (IOM). We will first discuss a semantically neutral IOM in Section 2. Subsequently, we present IOMs that express an additional meaning, namely (dis)respect (Section 3) or causation (Section 4). Before turning to the GESL data, however, we will provide some background information on agreement auxiliaries in the next section.

1.2   Agreement auxiliaries in sign languages

Just as in other sign languages (Padden 1988; Mathur&Rathmann 2012), verbs in GESL can be divided into two main groups, namely (i) plain or non-agreeing verbs and (ii) non-plain or agreeing verbs. Agreement (or 'directional') verbs can be spatially modified to indicate the subject and (in)directobject of the action expressed by the verb; spatial modification is achieved by changes in the movement (from source to goal) and/or orientation (towards the object) of the verb (Meir 2002). In contrast, plain verbs cannot be modified in this way, mostly because they are lexically specified for a location on the body.[1] For complexities concerning sign language agreement and the debate concerning the grammatical status of the phenomenon, the reader is referred to Lillo-Martin & Meier (2011 – including peer commentaries) and Wilbur (2013).

What is of interest in the present context is the fact that some sign languages have developed means to realize agreement in the context of plain verbs. In these sign languages, verbal agreement can be expressed by dedicated auxiliaries. In contrast to prototypical spoken language auxiliaries, the main (and often only) function of these auxiliary verbs is to spell-out

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[1]Spatial verbs (like e.g. PUT-ON) are often considered a third verb type, as they do not spatially agree with subject/object but rather with a locative argument. It is noteworthy that the distinction between agreeing and spatial verbs has recently been challenged. Quer (2011:194), for instance, argues that "treating spatial and person agreement verbs in a unified fashion can be a more reliable methodological option in order to understand the modality-(in)dependent aspects of sign language grammars than simply recognizing as agreement the kind that is most widespread across spoken languages". In the following discussion, we will neglect spatial verbs.

agreement, and they are therefore called 'agreement auxiliaries'. Yet, their functions and sources can differ from sign language to sign language (Steinbach &Pfau 2007; Sapountzaki 2012). As for their sources, it has, for instance, been pointed out that they may develop from (concatenated) pronouns, verbs, or nouns – and the same is true for GESL.

The elements we describe in the following sections share interesting characteristics with agreement auxiliaries, in that they combine with lexical verbs and target loci associated with arguments in the signing space.Still,they are different, as theyextend the argument structure of the verb by adding an indirect object, sometimes in combination with an additional semantic component.This is why we avoid referring to them as "agreement auxiliaries", but rather label themindirect object markers.[2]

We hope that our study will increasethe interest in GESL, and that the data we present will be informative for future typological investigations.

2   Neutral marking of indirect object

The indirect object in GESL canbe expressedby nouns or personal pronouns,and in many cases, its appearance constitutesa valency-increasing process for the respective verb. As pointed out in Section 1.2, in some sign languages, certain verbs can mark the indirect object by modifying the verb's movement. GESL,however, in addition features dedicated markers of the indirect object which are separate auxiliary-like elementsand which vary depending on their semantic content and the relevant lociin the signingspace (Makharoblidze 2012). We will first address the neutral IOM – "neutral" because it does not carry any additional meaning. Figure 1 shows that the neutral IOM (glossed as IOM-NEUTRAL) is articulated with an extended index finger that moves towards the locus of the indirect object; the movement is slightly arc-shaped. Crucially, it is the movement that distinguishes IOM-NEUTRAL from a pronoun, which has a much shorterstraight movement trajectory. The shape of IOM-NEUTRAL is reminiscent of the shape of agreement auxiliaries described for other sign languages, and it is therefore likely that it also grammaticalized from a pronoun or from a movement verb (Steinbach & Pfau 2007).Note, however, that it does not involve an orientation change from the locus of the subject to the locus of the indirect object, as has been described for some agreement auxiliaries (e.g. in Japanese Sign Language and Catalan Sign Language).

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[2]Steinbach (2011) shows that the German Sign Language auxiliary PAM (person agreement marker), which usually expresses agreement with transitive plain verbs (e.g. LOVE) can also be used to extend the argument structure of the verb, as is shown in the following two examples, where it introduces and indirect object (Steinbach 2011:215).

(i)   INDEX$_1$ LAUGH $_1$PAM$_2$ (ii)   INDEX$_1$ LETTER WRITE $_1$PAM$_2$
       'I laugh at you.'   'I write a letter to you.'
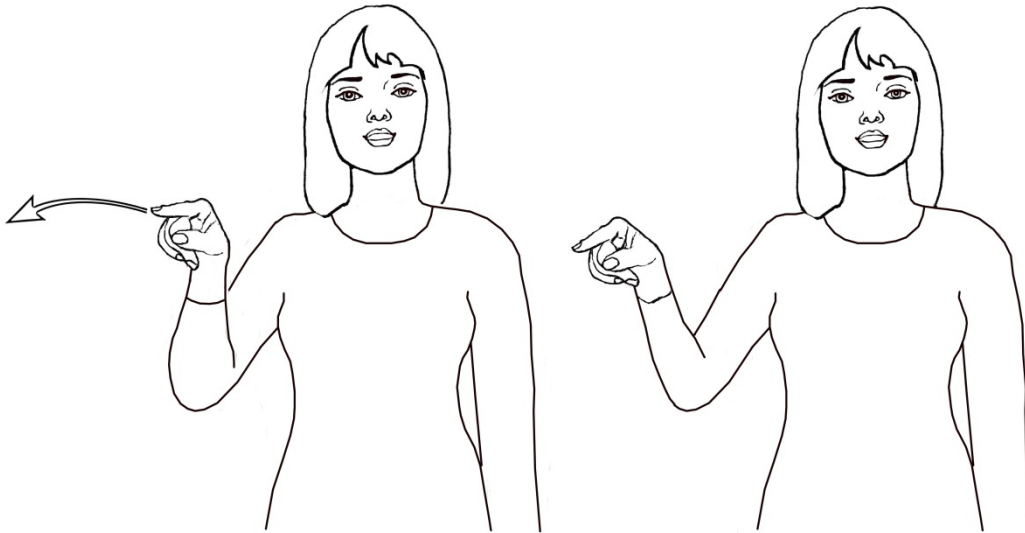
Figure 1. The marker of relation IOM-NEUTRAL.

The use of IOM-NEUTRAL is illustrated in Figure 2 (the last two photos illustrate the begin and end point of the IOM). In this example, it is only the IOM that realizes the indirect object. Crucially, the example does not mean 'I paint him/her' but rather 'I paint for him/her'. However, IOM-NEUTRAL may also co-occur with an indirect object expressed by a full noun, and it could therefore be considered a dative case marker. In the example in Figure 2, for instance, a noun like MAN could intervene between the verb and the IOM-marker. Note, however, that IOM-NEUTRAL never combines with a pronoun referring to the indirect object. Further note that IOM-NEUTRAL may either follow (as in Figure 2) or precede the verb.

INDEX$_1$ PAINT   IOM-NEUTRAL$_3$

'I paint (it/something) for him/her.'

Figure 2. Use of IOM-NEUTRAL with the verb PAINT to indicate a neutral indirect object (benefactive).

Note, that there is no adposition (*for* or *to*) or any related sign in this example, and thus the indirect object (the benefactive) that is added to the verb's argument structure is only marked on the IOM as a verbal person.

3 Indirect object markers expressing(dis)respect

Besides the common situation in sign languages in which an indexical sign only targets the spatial location of the indirect object, as also observed with the sign IOM-NEUTRAL, GESL has at its disposal additional IOMs that are non-neutral in the sense that they carry additional meaning. The first one of these is a marker that not only introduces an indirect object but also adds the meaning of respect, that is, it implies that an action is performed for the indirect object with respect.This marker, which we gloss as IOM-RESPECT, has a handshape with thumb and pinky extended, palm facing the body of the signer,and it can be articulated with one hand (Figure 3a) or both hands (Figure 3b).The two-handed version is used when the signer wants to outline his/her great respect to the indirect object, that is, it appears to convey a stronger meaning. Just like IOM-NEUTRAL, both variants have an arc-shaped movement and move towards the location of the indirect object in the signing space.
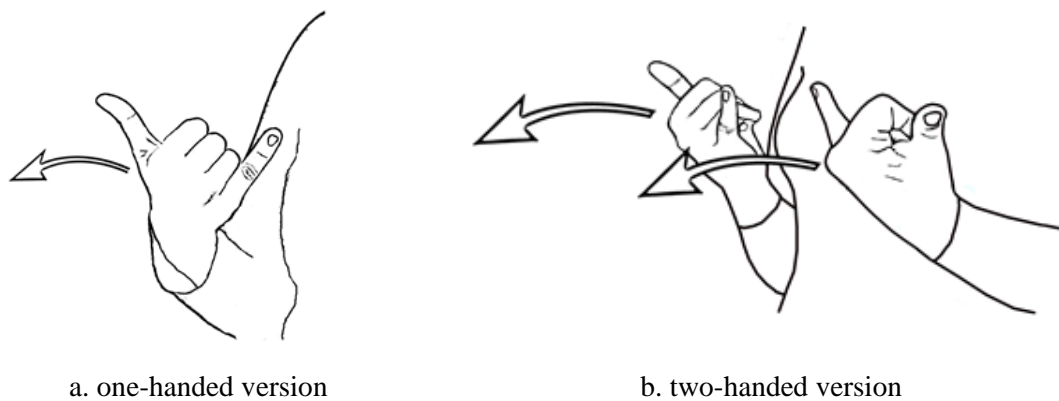

a. one-handed version   b. two-handed version

Figure 3.IOM-markerIOM-RESPECTfor arespected indirect object.

The examples in Figures 4 to 6 illustrate various interesting aspects concerning these markers. First of all, Figures 4 and 5 show that IOM-RESPECTcan either precede (Figure 4) or follow (Figure 5) the verb. Crucially, the one-handed and the two-handed variantcan be used interchangeably, but they can never co-occur within a clause.It further appears that the one-handed version ofIOM-RESPECT, in contrast toIOM-NEUTRAL, can neither co-occur with a noun nor a pronoun referring to the indirect object within the same clause.

INDEX$_1$ IOM-RESPECT$_3$ WRITE

'I write (it)for/to him/her.'

Figure 4. One-handed version of IOM-RESPECTin pre-verbal position.

INDEX₁ WRITE IOM-RESPECT₃

'I write (it)for/to him/her.'

Figure 5. One-handed version of IOM-RESPECTin post-verbal position.

Interestingly,use of IOM-RESPECT frees the word order in the sentence. In the above figures, we only illustrate two word orders, but actually, in the presence of IOM-RESPECT, basically all word orders are possible (e.g. IOM – VERB – SUBJECT), since the IOM makes clear that another INDEX within the same clause refers to the subject. Still, there is a preference for the subject to appear in preverbal position.

In Figure 6, we provide an example featuring the two-handed version of IOM-RESPECT. This example is interesting, as it involves double marking of the indirect object. First, a third person singular pronoun referring to the indirect object appears in the second position; second, IOM-RESPECT follows the verb. That is, in contrast to the one-handed version, the two-handed marker can co-occur with an overt indirect object, be it a pronoun or a noun.

INDEX₁ INDEX₃ WRITE IOM-RESPECT₃

'I write (it) for/to him/her.'

Figure 6. Two-handed version of IOM-RESPECTin post-verbal position.

It is important to point out that INDEX₃ in Figure 6 cannot refer to the direct object ('it'). Actually, the third person singular direct object is only rarely expressed in GESL. Interestingly, in modern spoken Georgian, the third person direct object does not receive morphologicalmarking either (Shanidze 1926, 1980; Deeters1930;Kavtaradze 1954; Chikobava 1950). As before, various word orders are possible for the sentence illustrated in Figure 6, thanks to the use of the IOM, but the one illustrated is the preferred order.

The source for the two-handed marker is the nounRESPECT, which has the same handshape and movement. It is thus likely that we are dealing with a process of grammaticalization (from noun to auxiliary), and that the one-handed variant is a reduced

form of the original sign, given that phonological erosion is a typical characteristic of grammaticalization (Heine &Kuteva 2002).

Let us now turn to the second marker with additional meaning. The respectful forms we discussed are in semantic opposition with the disrespectful form (Makharoblidze 2012). The shape of this IOM, which we gloss as IOM-DISRESPECT, is illustrated in Figure 7: index finger and pinky are extended, palm facing down, and the movement proceeds from in front of the chest forward and to the right;this IOM is always one-handed. Importantly, this marker has properties different from those of the two IOMs previously discussed. Crucially, it cannot be spatially modified to target a location associated with the indirect object.IOM-DISRESPECTusually follows the verb, just like the two-handed version of IOM-RESPECT.
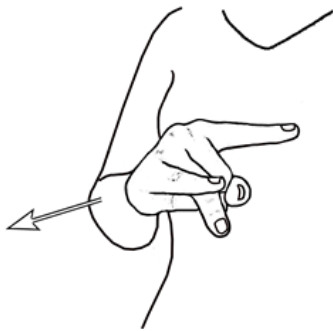

Figure 7.IOM-markerIOM-DISRESPECTfor adisrespected indirect object.

IOM-DISRESPECTexpresses the meaning that the subject performs the action encoded by the verb against the interest of the indirect object; that is, the action is unpleasant or in some way negative for the indirect object. In this sense, its meaning also implies disrespect. An example is provided in Figure 8. In this case, we must assume that the act of writing is against the interest of the indirect object. Note that the indirect object is expressed by a pronoun in second position; alternatively, it could be expressed by a noun; actually with IOM-DISRESPECT the use of a noun or pronoun referring to the indirect object is obligatory.

INDEX$_1$ INDEX$_3$ WRITE   IOM-DISRESPECT
'I write (it) for/to him/her.'

Figure 8. Use of IOM-DISRESPECTin post-verbal position.

As for grammaticalization, it appears that IOM-DISRESPECT originated from the verb HARM. Given the lack of spatial modification (i.e. of agreement), it might be argued that the grammaticalized element is an adverbial ('disrespectfully') rather than an auxiliary. However,

the fact that it can only refer to the indirect object and is thus in systematic morpho-semantic opposition with IOM-RESPECT, strongly suggests that it is a verbal morpheme.

4. Indirect object marker expressing causation

The last IOM we introduce adds to the clause a meaning of causation, that is, it conveys the meaning that the subject makes the indirect object perform the act expressed by the verb. Thus, the subject is an initiator while the indirect object is an executor (Makharoblidze 2012:388). Primarily, this sign is a marker of obligation conveying the meaning of causation – the subject forces the indirect object to do something.[3]The marker of causation, which we gloss as IOM-CAUSE, is an asymmetric two-handed sign. Figure 9 shows that the dominant hand rests on the non-dominant hand, which has a fist handshape. The dominant hand is characterized by a handshape change: at the outset, it also has a fist handshape, but then the index finger is extended quickly, pointing in the direction of the indirect object.
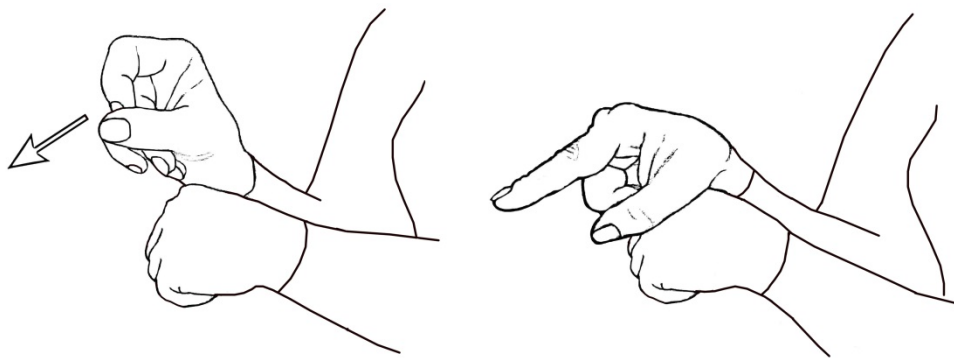

Figure 9.IOM-markerIOM-CAUSE expressing causation.

The following two figures illustrate the opposition between the non-causative (direct) form (Figure 10) and the causative form (Figure 11). Crucially, the causative form always has to be marked.In the non-causative example in Figure 10, the first photo shows the first person subject pronoun while the second and third photo show the lexical verb. Note that the third person direct object is not overtly expressed.

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[3]A causative auxiliary has also been described for Greek Sign Language (Sapountzaki 2005) and Catalan Sign Language (Quer&Frigola 2006). However, these auxiliaries, both of which grammaticalized from the verb GIVE, are different from the GESL marker considered here, as they only combine with psychological predicates and express causative change of state (e.g. 'to make happy/calm/nervous'; also see Sapountzaki (2012) and Pfau& Steinbach (2013) for discussion).

INDEX$_1$ DO

'I am doing/do (it).'

Figure 10. Non causative, direct form.

The first two signs (i.e. the first three photos) in Figure 11 are the same, but IOM-CAUSE appears in post-verbal position. In this example, the indirect object is not expressed by a noun or pronoun, but the IOM (i.e. the index finger) points towards the locus associated with the indirect object.Alternatively, IOM-CAUSE may combine with an overt pronoun.

INDEX$_1$ DO   IOM-CAUSE$_3$

'I make him/her do (it).'

Figure 11. Use of IOM-CAUSEin post-verbal position.

Interestingly, IOM-CAUSE may combine with other auxiliaries that we previously discussed.In the example in Figure 12, IOM-CAUSE combines with IOM-NEUTRAL, and except for the first person subject pronoun, no pronoun is used. The indirect object is thus doubly marked in this example, as both IOMs target the locus associated with the indirect object. Similarly, in Figure 13, IOM-CAUSE combines with IOM-RESPECT.In both examples, the order of the two IOMs could be reversed. Note that the combination of IOM-CAUSE with IOM-DISRESPECTis also possible but appears to be rare.

10

INDEX$_1$ DO   IOM-CAUSE$_3$ IOM-NEUTRAL$_3$

I am make him/her do (it).'

Figure 12. Combination of IOM-CAUSE with the neutral indirect object marker.

INDEX$_1$ DO   IOM-CAUSE   IOM-RESPECT$_3$

'I make him/her do (it) with respect.'

Figure 13. Combination of IOM-CAUSE with IOM-RESPECT.

As for its lexical source, IOM-CAUSE appears to have developed from a verb meaning "to give an order/task", which is similar, if not identical, in form. Hence, it is once again likely that we are dealing with a grammaticalization path from lexical sign to auxiliary.

5. Conclusion

The preceding discussion shows that GESL features various auxiliary-like elements that can mark the indirect object – hence the label 'indirect object markers' (IOM). It has previously been demonstrated that other sign languages (for instance, German Sign Language) employ so-called 'agreement auxiliaries' that can also be used to extend the argument structure of the verb by introducing an indirect object. We have shown that GESL features a similar neutral IOM. However, GESL is special in that, in addition, it has various IOMs that do not only express the indirect object but come with additional semantics. We described three IOMs of this type which express respect, disrespect, and causation, respectively. The markers of (dis)respected indirect object could be considered as benefactive and malefactive markers. These IOMs are grammaticalized from various sources, and they may free the word order in the sentence. It is noteworthy that GESL does not simply copy the polypersonal verbal

structure of spoken Georgian, but just like Georgian, it displayscomplex agreement patterns. In future studies, we aim to further investigate the GESL verbal system and to provide a more detailed overview of the verbal categories in GESL, including the morphological categories of version and causation in this language.

Acknowledgments

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