

Linguistics

Verbal Temporal Categories in Georgian Sign Language (GESL)

Tamar Makharoblidze

Ilia State University. Tbilisi, Georgia

Presented by Academy Member Thomas Gamkrelidze

Abstract

GESL verbal morphology has its temporal system. Sign languages (SL) reveal their specific attitude toward spatial and temporal entities. The most shared temporal line in SL is as follows:

←-- distant past --/-- recent past ---/-- present /body--/-- near future --/-- distant future -→

The body is present, the future is ahead and back is past. Near close is the near future, close to the back is close past, and far away forward is a distant future and far away back is a distant past. Such an approach is shared by almost all SL with a very few exception.

Obviously, the GESL has its temporal vocabulary as well. Time-related words often indicate circularity and cycling.

Crucially, GESL also has the morphological verbal markers of tense (future and past), aspect and durative. The presented paper reveals these verbal temporal markers.

Keywords: Tense aspect, sign languages, GESL (Georgian Sign Language)

The Georgian sign language (GESL) is a native language for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people (DHH) of Georgia. These people are the linguistic minority of the country, and their number is about 2500.

Crucially, in spite of a significant influence of the Russian Sign Language, GESL has its individual grammar system. The presented paper is one of the first investigations on the verbal temporal categories in this language. Usually sign languages (SL) demonstrate specific temporal systems with considerable variations. In SL linguistic information is encoded by non-verbal means. Thus, body position, mimic and manual signs display the linguistic content for any grammar category.

Many researchers dedicated their works to the issues of temporal units in SL grammar [1-12]. Freedman [13] and Cogen [14] noted that sign language verbs generally do not inflect for tense, like some spoken languages. In such cases the temporal content is expressed only by the means of adverbs. Although the other authors [15] argue that some signs in SL can be considered as morphological markers of tense. Interestingly, GESL has its own temporal system different from spoken Georgian. GESL widely uses the adverbs of time such as 'now', 'before', 'already', 'tomorrow', 'today', 'yesterday', 'before', 'after' etc. Still, there are some signs in this language, which act as verbal morphemes with temporal content [16].

In many SL body acts as PRESENT and everything in front of the body is FUTURE and everything behind it is PAST. The most shared temporal line in SL is as follows:

←-- distant past --/-- recent past ---/-- present /body--/-- near future --/-- distant future ->.

Near close is the near future, close to the back is close past, and far away forward is a distant future and far away back is a distant past. Such an approach is shared by almost all SL with a

very small exception. As one can see on the figures 1 and 2, the one-handed manual markers appear for meaning the future (with forwarding hand-movement) and past (with hand-movement behind the body).

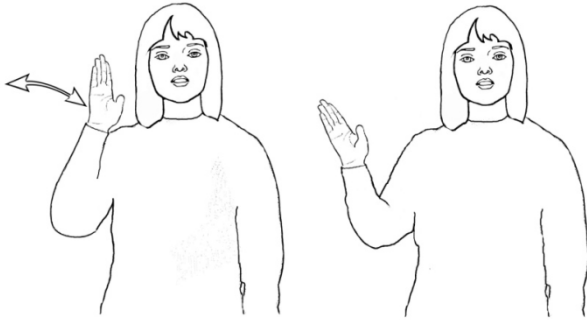


Figure 1. The marker of Future tense

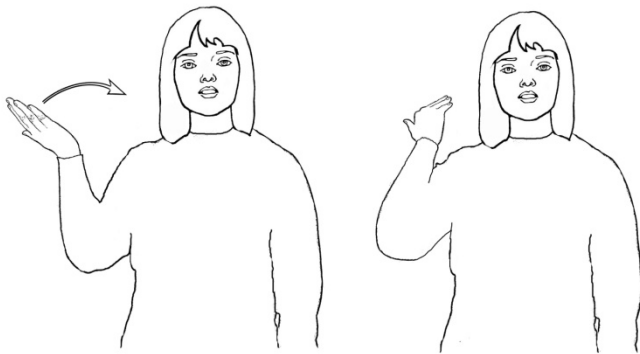


Figure 2. The marker of Past tense

Two-handed sign 'now':



Figure 3. The lexical sign for 'Now'.

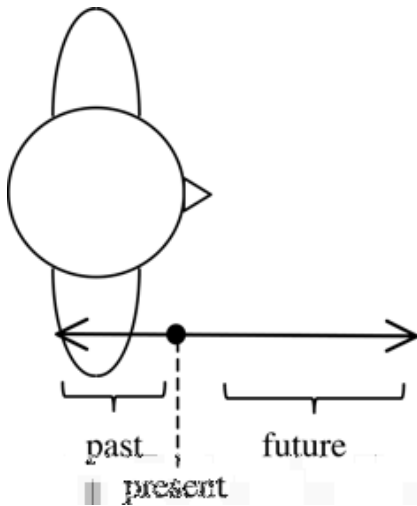


Figure 4. Time line, showing points of reference for past, present, and future [15]

Such a time line (Figure 4) is widely accepted in SL, although there are a few number of SL which did not follow this time-line, for example, Kata Kolok, a sign language used in a village in Bali [15].

The three examples below (1 and 2) clearly show the tense-changing strategy in GESL.

(1) PAINT

He/she paints.

(2) PAINT FUTURE

He/she will paint.

Interestingly, in SL body acts as a subject and the subject is often missing in the sentences, especially if it had already been mentioned above.

The lexical sign 'already' is two-handed symmetric dynamic sign accompanied with mimics (see Figure 5). For perfect tense the reduced one-handed sign is used. This is a typical process of grammaticalization with sign erosion process. Thus, GESL has a marker of aspect for the perfect tense (see Figure 8).

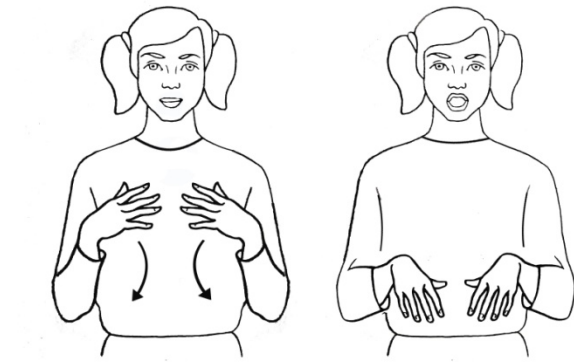


Figure 5. The sign 'already'

(3) PAINT ALREADY(Singlehanded)

He/she painted/ has painted.

In such verbal forms, where the marker of aspect occurs, no additional markers are required for past tense.

GESL also has a morphological marker for durative forms:

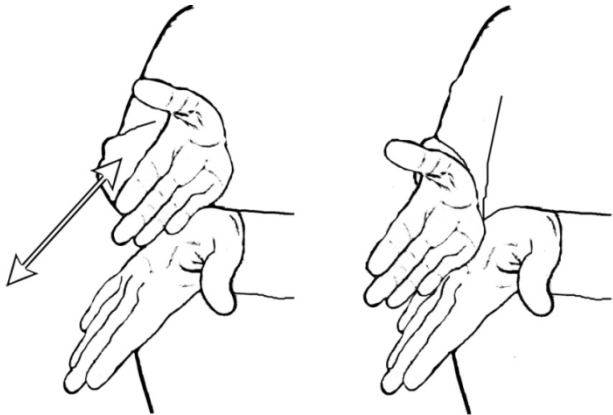


Figure 6. The marker of duration

(4) WRITE PAST DURATION

(He/she) was writing (for a long time).

The example 4 conveys the meaning of past durative with the three signs – it means that (he/she) was writing (in past) during a long time. The same meaning can be also exposed by the repeated verbal signs as well, see the examples bellow (5 and 6).

(5) WRITE WRITE PAST

(He/she) was writing (for a long time)

(6) DO DO DO

(He/she) is doing (it).

Interestingly, the verbal temporal markers may change the places. They can appear before or after verbs. Although there is no standardization in GESL, the advantage is given to the cases where these temporal morphemes follow (and not precede) the verbal signs.

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Acknowledgment

I would like to express the my deep gratitude to my Deaf source Natia Japoshvili and GESL interpreter Tamar Jikidze.

This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli national Foundation (SRNSF), 216702 “The Georgian Sign language Verbal Morphology”.

ენათმეცნიერება

ზმნის დროითი კატეგორიები ქართულ ჟესტურ ენაში

თამარ მახარობლიძე

ილიას სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, თბილისი.

tamar.makharoblidze@iliauni.edu.ge

აკად. თამაზ გამყრელიძე

რეზიუმე

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ციკლორობაზე. ამასთან მნიშვნელოვანია, რომ ქართულ ჟესტურ ენას გააჩნია დროითი კატეგორიის მორფოლოგიური ზმნური მარკერები. კერძოდ, წარმოდგენილ ნაშრომში გამოვლენილია წარსული და მომავალი დროის მარკერები, ასევე სრული ასპექტისა და დურატივის რეფერენტები.