Abstract

One typologically unusual characteristic of sign languages around the world is that certain kinds of information can show up in several different places in the clause. In verb sandwiches and serial verb constructions, the information is distributed over two (or more) separate verbs (Engberg-Pedersen 1993:273).

Verb sandwiches were first described for American Sign Language (ASL) by Fischer and Janis (1990), who described them as constructions in which a verb appears twice: once in its sentence-initial position and again in the sentence-final position. See example (1). The verb sandwich constructions in the original analysis were described as one category. Subsequently, it was divided into two categories: the aspectual verb sandwich constructions and the lexical verb sandwich constructions (Matsuoka 1999). In the lexical verb sandwich constructions, the last verb is a classifier construction, i.e. in addition to the verbal action, it is signed with extra lexical information, as reflected in the glossing in example (2).

I describe both types of Verb Sandwich Constructions for Norwegian Sign Language (NSL), and I propose an additional subdivision of the category of aspectual verb sandwich constructions, where the inflectional patterns seems to be different from that of the original analysis, i.e. the aspectual marking is identical on both verbs (Bø 2010). See examples (3) and (4). The Verb Sandwich Constructions are never before described for NSL. Moreover, NSL has never been subject for any syntactic analysis.

Trying to apply Lexical Functional Grammar on these constructions, which has never before been done on any sign language, leaves one paradox apparent: Two verbs that are tightly connected, but not compounds, appear in one clause (Bø 2010). Since the verbs in question can also occur on their own, I argue that they are formed in the syntax.
Given the fact that the sandwich-constructions are only found in sign languages, and seems to be pervasive in the sign languages explored for this purpose, I discuss whether these constructions can be the result of a modality-specific syntactic process.

Examples:

   ‘A student named Sally is typing her term paper (...)’  
   (Fischer and Janis 1990, 280)

2. ELIZABETH EAT R-I-C-E EAT-WITH-CHOPSTICKS+++ (...)  
   ‘While Elizabeth is eating her rice with chopsticks (...)’  
   (Fischer and Janis 1990, 284)

Two types of aspectual Sandwich Constructions (Bø 2010):

3. IX_pro READ_READ[asp:cont]  
   ‘While she was reading (...)’

   ‘I prepare (by cutting the sheets of paper).’
References


