

SHIFTING THE BLAME: ATTITUDE EMBEDDING PREDICATES AND  
INDEXICALS UNDER ROLE-SHIFT  
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Abstract: We discuss novel data involving attitude predicates in American Sign Language.

We offer evidence against the uniform treatment of attitudes by revealing new structural and interpretive differences between *proffering* and *doxastic* embedding predicates. Besides providing evidence for this distinction from a new domain, the data also advance the current understanding of the formal syntactic/semantic/pragmatic properties of sign language loci and role-shift (phenomena frequently occurring in sign languages and much discussed in sign linguistics), namely that 1<sup>st</sup>-person indexicals under doxastics may not shift, and the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person pronoun under role-shift can be evaluated with respect to the matrix context.

Keywords: attitude reports, role-shift, indexicals, sign languages

## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, attitude predicates (e.g. *believe*, *think*, *say*) have as a class been treated as quantifiers over possible worlds (Hintikka 1962), but recent works have highlighted possible different subclasses of attitude predicates with respect to both semantics and syntax (Kratzer 2006, Moulton 2009). One such suggestion comes from the observation that some attitude predicates are sensitive to the sentience of their subjects (as in (1)) and these same predicates interact with epistemics as in (2) (Anand & Hacquard 2009).

- (1) a. {<sup>OK</sup>The book/<sup>OK</sup>Mary} {said/claimed} that he was happy
- b. {\*The book/<sup>OK</sup>Mary} {thought/imagined} that he was happy.
- (2) a. Holmes {#believed/assumed} that every guest might be the murderer.  
 Intended: Holmes believed each had the possibility to be the murderer.
- b. John {believes/\*assumes} that the Earth might be flat. (Anand & Hacquard 2009)

Anand & Hacquard (2009) argue that the paradigm in (1)-(2) reflects a subjectivity requirement that certain predicates impose on their complements, captured in their semantic analysis by having *beliefs* be evaluated with respect to an event involving doxastic alternatives held by the subject, while *claims* are evaluated with respect to alternatives that are active in the common ground after the claim is accepted by all (i.e. not specific to the subject). The former holds for an entire class of verbs that exhibit this type of behavior: *believe, think, wonder, imagine*, i.a. – the *doxastic* verbs. The latter are a class of *proffering* verbs: *claim, assume, mean*, i.a. Anand & Hacquard formalize the contrast as in (3), where  $f_{\text{epistemic}}(e) = \lambda w'.w'$  is compatible with  $\text{CON}(e)$ .

- (3) a.  $[[\text{believe}]] = \lambda e. \lambda p. \lambda x. \lambda w. \text{Holder}(x, e) \& \text{belief}' \forall w' \in \cap \text{CON}(e)[p(w') = 1]$ ,  
 where  $\in \cap \text{CON}(e) = \text{DOX}(\iota x \text{ Holder}(x, e), w)$
- b.  $[[\text{claim } e \ p]] = \text{claim}'(e) \& \forall w \text{ compatible with Goal}(e)[\forall w' \in \cap \text{CON}(e_{CG-w})[p(w') = 1]]$   
 (Anand & Hacquard 2009 [7], [11], [32])

If the suggested doxastic/proffering cut is universal, stemming from the lexical semantics

of the verbs themselves (as suggested by Anand & Hacquard 2009), then we ought to expect it to hold cross-linguistically. We demonstrate, using a new kind of test, that it appears to do so in American Sign Language (ASL), and that manifestation of this difference between predicates (and how their complements are interpreted in discourse) leads to new questions about the nature of two other phenomena in the language – ‘role shift’ and ‘referential loci’.

## 2. Puzzle

We use ‘role shift’<sup>1</sup> (RS henceforth) here descriptively to refer to the addition of nonmanual markers such as torso movement (body shift) and/or a shift in eye-gaze that may accompany attitude reports in many sign languages, including ASL, as in (4)-(5)<sup>2</sup>.

- \_\_\_\_\_ RS-a
- (4) a. a-MOM<sub>i</sub> SAY 1-IX<sub>i</sub> BUSY<sup>3</sup>

- \_\_\_\_\_ RS-a
- b. ?? a-MOM<sub>i</sub> SAY 1-IX<sub>i</sub> BUSY
- ‘Mom says she is busy’ / ‘Mom says: I am busy’

- \_\_\_\_\_ RS-a
- (4) a. \*a-MOM<sub>i</sub> THINK 1-IX<sub>i</sub> BUSY

- \_\_\_\_\_ RS-a
- b. a-MOM<sub>i</sub> THINK 1-IX<sub>i</sub> BUSY
- ‘Mom thinks she is busy’/ ‘Mom thinks: I am busy’

Two properties of RS are immediately apparent: (i) role shift occurs concurrently with manual signs and begins after the embedding predicate for *SAY* (4) but on the embedding predicate for *THINK* (5); and (ii) in both the element immediately following the embedding predicate (i.e. the embedded subject) is a first person indexical pronoun (1-*IX*, ‘I’) that refers to someone other than the signer (here: Mom). Typically this type of “indexical shifting” is found in direct discourse (quotation) and not indirect discourse, although a notable exception is some pronouns found in a small number of (unrelated) languages including Amharic (Schlenker 2003), Zazaki (6) (Anand & Nevins 2004), and Ewe (Pearson 2014).

- (6) Hesenij (mi<sub>k</sub>-ra) va kε εz<sub>j/k</sub> dəzletia [Zazaki]  
 Hesen.OBL (I.OBL -to) said that I rich.be-PRES  
 ‘Hesen said that {I am, Hesen is} rich.’ (Anand & Nevins 2004)

A few possibilities arise then for the analysis of the difference in extent of role shift and interpretation of first person pronoun in examples (4)-(5), which we will see below are representative of two classes of attitude predicates in ASL. First, ASL may indeed have a first person pronoun that shifts just as seen in some spoken languages (as has been argued by Lillo-Martin 1995 for 1-*IX*). This, of course, does not explain anything about the extent of role shift, nor does this presence of such a pronoun in ASL offer an account that distinguishes the between its interpretation under *say* vs. *think*. One could also argue that syntactically (i.e. regarding integration of the complement), the difference in the extent of RS marking and indexical interpretation comes from differences originating within the

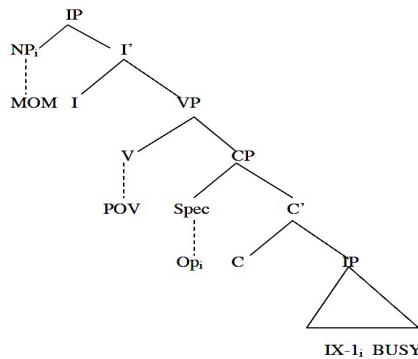
different embedding predicates. To determine the right path, we'll briefly discuss existing formal proposals for the nature of RS.

### 3. Previous Analyses

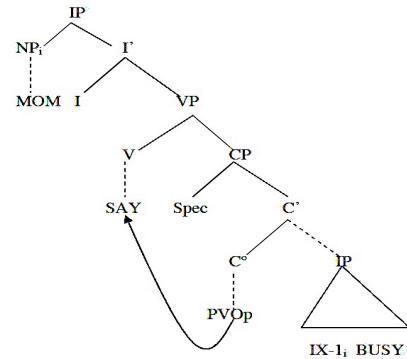
#### 3.1 Role-Shift

Recent formal analyses of RS-related phenomena (Lillo-Martin 1995, Quer 2005, 2011, Lillo-Martin 2012, Schlenker 2014) generally assume that what is responsible for the shift of certain indexicals in the report clause under RS is the interaction of a higher predicate—namely an attitude verb, null or overt—and some sort of operator below.

(7) a. Lillo-Martin (1995)



b. Quer (2011) (adpt. Quer 2005)



Both (7a) and (7b) are syntactic proposals. On the analysis represented by (7a), RS occurs with/is licensed by the Point of View (PoV) predicate – essentially an attitude, which takes as its complement a CP whose Spec is filled with an operator binding the indexicals in the IP below. In contrast, in (7b), the relevant operator is in the head of the lower CP. This

head then is stipulated to compose with the embedding predicate, the precise mechanism for which remains left for future research. (7a) does not demonstrate how this attitude and the  $Op_i$  might combine to license the relevant nonmanual markings over the predicate itself; on the alternative view, RS markings indiscriminately apply to all attitude predicates. Thus, the pattern in (4)-(5) is unexplained by Lillo-Martin (1995) in (7a) and unpredicted by Quer (2005) in (7b).

Semantically, for Quer (see also Zucchi 2004), RS is an overt instantiation of the context-shifting operator proposed by Schlenker (2003) and expanded for sign languages in Schlenker (2014a-b). As such, RS changes the context of evaluation for a clause in its scope. This approach predicts that when under RS, indexicals will *necessarily* shift, irrespective of the type of attitude predicate in the complement of which they are found.<sup>4</sup> Yet, in our data, the aforementioned only holds for *SAY*- and not for *THINK*-verbs, as in (8), with which indexicals can but need not shift.

(8) *Context: You walk into a conversation and see Mary signing to John...*

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RS-a

a.  $Mary_i$ : WOMAN<sub>j</sub> a-IX<sub>j</sub> SAY 1-IX<sub>\*ij</sub> PLAY-PIANO

‘A woman said that she[≠ Mary, = woman] was playing the piano’

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RS-a

b.  $Mary_i$ : WOMAN<sub>j</sub> a-IX<sub>j</sub> IMAGINE 1-IX<sub>ij</sub> PLAY-PIANO

‘A woman imagined that she[= Mary, = woman] was playing the piano’

Extending the use of such operators, Schlenker (2014) has proposed that a context shifting operator occurs not just in cases of reported attitudes but also in reported actions ("action role shift"). In some cases of reported actions, RS occurs on the predicate if the predicate is "iconic", while for noniconic predicates RS occurs only in the following complement clause. For Schlenker, this difference is due to the action role shift predicates being embedded under a (covert) matrix predicate that licenses a context shifting operator, while attitude context shifting operators are themselves part of a matrix clause that licenses context shifting operators within their scope (see Davidson 2015 for an analysis of action role shift that places the action predicate itself in the matrix clause). Since this is one of the few cases in the literature where RS has been discussed as occurring *on* the predicate and not *after*, we might wonder whether the verbs we discuss here fall into Schlenker's categories. However, while *THINK* and *DREAM* might be considered iconic, *BELIEVE* and *IMAGINE*, which behave on a par, are arguably not, and we have more generally found no relationship between iconicity and *SAY-* versus *THINK*-type attitude predicates. So, while it is certainly possible that some cases of more iconic attitude predicates might also involve action role shift (and thus increase pressure for RS to begin on the predicate), it does not seem to explain the cut that we find, nor the behavior of the indexicals under these verbs.

Let us now summarize the findings: *SAY-* and *THINK*-type attitude predicates both allow their complements to be marked (with different durations) with RS – typically taken to indicate the person to whom the attitude is ascribed – which *may* result in indexical shift.

### 3.2. Direct or Indirect Discourse (a.k.a. Quote or Clausal Embedding)?

To capture the difference in nonmanual marking and indexical interpretations seen in ASL in (4)-(5) and (8), one might hypothesize a difference in syntactic integration – i.e. one is direct/quotation (nonintegrated) and the other indirect (integrated) discourse. Suppose that for direct discourse, RS begins after the matrix predicate precisely because the complement of this predicate (e.g. *SAY*) is not integrated – i.e. a “quote” that is not syntactically and semantically embedded under the matrix verb; otherwise, RS is expected to spread over the attitude predicate. This, essentially, is the upshot of the analysis in Quer (2005, 2011). However, while this path is plausible, it runs into a problem: some role-shifted complements of *SAY* bear characteristics of clausal embedding even when the nonmanual difference holds.

Arguments to determine the status of the syntactic embedding (vis-à-vis direct discourse) of role-shifted (parts of) utterances are presented in detail in the recent work by Schlenker (2014). The argumentation is based on the finding that wh-extraction (9), NPIs licensing (10), and VP-ellipsis (11) are possible only in syntactic embedding/indirect discourse cases, in contrast to their ungrammatical status in English quotation.

- (9) a. What did John say he understands \_?
- b. \*What did John say ‘I understand \_’?
- (10) a. John didn't say he understands any chemistry.
- b. \*John didn't say ‘I understand any chemistry.’
- (11) *Context: ... The addressee and John have never met each other.*
  - a. You love Obama. John told me that he doesn't [love Obama].
  - b. (#) You love Obama. John told me: ‘I don't [love Obama].’ (Schlenker 2014)

Diagnostics along the lines of (9)-(11) remain under investigation, complicated by the fact that (i) our consultants appear to lack clear NPIs and (ii) VP-ellipsis in ASL raises independent questions regarding the possibility of the bound-variable interpretation with (vs. without) previously assigned loci (Koulidobrova 2013b, Koulidobrova & Lillo-Martin 2015). Here, we offer preliminary VP ellipsis data in (12) and wh-extraction data in (13).<sup>5</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_t \_\_\_\_\_RS-a

- (12) a. 1-IX LOVE BROCCOLI COOKIES. 1-POSS KID<sub>i</sub> a-IX<sub>i</sub> SAY a-IX<sub>i</sub> NOT BUT LIE EAT-UP  
'I love broccoli cookies. My kid says he doesn't [love broccoli cookies], but he is lying, he'll eat them up'

\_\_\_\_\_t \_\_\_\_\_RS-a

- b. 1-IX LOVE BROCCOLI COOKIES. 1-POSS KID<sub>i</sub> a-IX<sub>i</sub> THINK a-IX<sub>i</sub> NOT  
BUT WATCH WILL EAT-UP  
'I love broccoli cookies. My kid thinks he doesn't [love broccoli cookies], but watch, he'll eat them up.'

\_\_\_\_\_RS-a

- (13) a. WHO WOMAN<sub>i</sub> SAY YESTERDAY<sup>6</sup> WHO BUSY WHO  
'Who did the woman say yesterday was busy?'

\_\_\_\_\_RS-a

- b. WHO WOMAN<sub>i</sub> THINK YESTERDAY WHO BUSY WHO  
'Who did the woman think yesterday was busy?'

In addition to this, however, we suggest another piece of evidence coming from the use of pronouns. Existing literature has tended to focus on the 1<sup>st</sup> person indexical and its shiftability in the context of utterance vs. report; no one would expect the same of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun. In fact, fairly uncontroversially,<sup>7</sup> a 3<sup>rd</sup> person subject in the complement of an attitude predicate, when co-indexed with some NP serving as an argument of that predicate, signals indirect discourse (as in (a.) sentences in (9)-(11)). Thus, if we demonstrate that the phenomenon under discussion holds with a 3<sup>rd</sup> person embedded subject (*a-IX*), then it is rather unlikely that we are dealing with direct discourse but, instead, with a case of clausal embedding. Consider (14) (see Appendix for the illustration): although grammatical without any RS markings across the embedded clause, it is also acceptable with them.

- \_\_\_\_\_  
RS-a
- (14) a. a-MOM<sub>i</sub> SAY a-IX<sub>i</sub> BUSY  
           ‘Mom<sub>i</sub> says she<sub>i</sub> is busy’

- \_\_\_\_\_  
RS-a
- b. a-MOM<sub>i</sub> THINK a-IX<sub>i</sub> BUSY  
           ‘Mom<sub>i</sub> thinks she<sub>i</sub> is busy’

Example (14) poses a problem for existing analyses of role shift. First, it cannot be analyzed as direct discourse, since to quote the Mom would be to use a first person pronoun *1-IX*. There is also no obvious analysis of this as a full context shifting operator (Zucchi 2004; Schlenker 2014), since nothing throughout the “role shift” actually shifts interpretation. Finally, we can hardly analyze the RS here as a manner adverbial (Davidson

2015), since no extra manner seems to be demonstrated.

We argue here that any analysis of RS must consider data like those in (14).

Although we are not offering a complete analysis, we suspect that a solution will depend on increasingly sophisticated separations of the *locus* itself from the *point to the locus (IX)*, as begun in work by Barberà (2012) and Koulidobrova & Lillo-Martin (2015). For now, we note that (14) is important for our larger point about embedding predicates because a pure direct discourse analysis of the RS-markings in our *SAY* vs. *IMAGINE* examples is difficult to maintain. Moreover, this pattern in (14) can be observed with other clearly nonquotational predicates: *ASSUME, SHOW, MEAN, INFORM, CLAIM* vs. *THINK, BELIEVE, IMAGINE, DREAM, WONDER*.

\_\_\_\_\_  
RS-a

- (15) a. a-MOM<sub>i</sub> {ASSUME/CLAIM/MEAN/INFORM-2 } a-IX<sub>i</sub> BUSY      ≈ (4)

'Mom assumed/claimed/meant/informed-you she was busy

\_\_\_\_\_  
RS-a

- b. a-MOM<sub>i</sub> {BELIEVE/DREAM/WONDER IF} a-IX<sub>i</sub> BUSY

'Mom believed/dreamed/wondered if she was busy'

The data offered here point towards the analysis of at least some sentences involving RS as instantiating clausal embedding which deserve further analysis, and a puzzle involving extent of nonmanuals.

#### 4. Towards an account

Recall that the difference among the predicates in (15) follows precisely the one found in

Anand & Hacquard (2009): profferings vs. doxastics. As mentioned at the outset, they argue that this division is based on how the complement clause enters the common ground and the role it plays: for proffering verbs, the worlds in which the proposition expressed by the complement must hold are considered with respect to the existing common ground, while the truth of the proposition expressed by the complement of doxastics is evaluated with respect to the private intensional domain of the subject/belief-holder and his/her conversational goals, not the overall common ground. Formally then, the account along these lines follows (3):

- (16) a.  $[[\text{MOM IMAGINE IX\_a BUSY}] = 1 \text{ iff } \text{Holder}(\text{mom}, e) \& \text{imagine}'(e, w) \&$

$$\forall w' \in \cap \text{CON}(e) [\text{Busy}(\text{mom})(w')],$$

where  $\cap \text{CON}(e) = \text{DOX}(\iota x \text{ Holder}(x, e), \text{World}(e))$

- b.  $[[\text{MOM SAY IX\_a BUSY}] = 1 \text{ iff } \text{Holder}(\text{mom}, e) \& \text{say}(e, w) \& \forall w' \in \text{Goal}(e)$

$$[\forall w'' \in \cap \text{CON}(e_{CG-w'}) [\text{Busy}(m))(w'')]],$$

where  $e_{CG}$  = proposed common ground state resulting from accepting  $B(m)$  to CG

(Koulidobrova & Davidson 2015)

Pragmatically, what results from the Anand & Hacquard-style account is the suggestion that the two classes of predicates interact with the question under discussion (QUD, Roberts 1996) in different ways: the argument of the proffer (the complement) is what is up for discussion “proffered” to be entered to the common ground (16a); doxastics offer up for discussion the entire proposition (as given in the main clause), (16b).

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RS-a

- (16) a. MOM a-IX {SAY/CLAIM/ARGUE/ASSUME} a-IX BUSY

→ Question under discussion: *Is mom busy?*

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RS-a

- b. MOM a-IX {THINK/BELIEVE/IMAGINE} a-IX BUSY

→ Question under discussion: *Does Mom {think/believe/imagine} she is busy?*

Perhaps then the difference in the duration of RS marking associated with different types of predicates in ASL may not be syntactic but rather semantic and pragmatic. One way to refer to a proposition in ASL discourse is to assign it to a locus, which can be done through RS. By extending RS over only the embedded clause in (16a), the signer makes the proposition *that Mom is busy* a target for later anaphora. This is in contrast to (16b) where RS extends over the matrix predicate and thus can make the entire proposition *Mom thinks she is busy* a target for later anaphora by later indexical points (*IX*) to the locus provided through RS.

Finally, sign languages also allow (and perhaps even prefer in spontaneous discourse) the attitude embedding predicate to remain phonologically null. Lillo-Martin (1995) dubs this (null) embedding predicate *PoV* (see (7a)), typically translated as ‘be like.’ More recently it has been analyzed as a classifier predicate that takes a demonstration as an argument (Davidson 2015). A natural question arises which class of the two classes of verbs we have been discussing this predicate belongs to. Of course, since the predicate is phonologically null, the extent of RS-marking over this predicate cannot be determined. Yet, the data offered here provide another avenue for better understanding the nature of this predicate: are the available readings compatible with proffering or doxastic verbs?<sup>8</sup> Preliminary data (three

signers but not as part of the full paradigm) suggest the former (compare (17) with (8)).

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RS-a

- (17) Mary<sub>i</sub>: MOM<sub>j</sub> 1-IX<sub>\*i,j</sub> BUSY ≈ (8a)

‘Mom is like I[≠ Mary, = mom] am busy’

## 5. Conclusion

While the main focus of this paper has been the nature of so-called ‘lexical nonmanuals’ that vary depending on embedding predicates (unsystematically, albeit frequently, noted in the SL literature, Sandler & Lillo-Martin 2006), the data presented here offer a path previously unexplored in the examination of RS and morpho-syntactic realization of indexicals in sign languages. The upshot is this: shift-related phenomena have been considered to be a defining property of a particular type of discourse: direct, indirect, or ‘mixed’ (Zucchi 2004). However, if the analysis presented here is on the right track, the nonmanuals associated with RS may be independent of these categorizations. Instead, they depend in part on the embedding predicate, which means that the ‘doxastic-proffering cut’ ought to reveal itself, for instance, in interaction with epistemics as well as with other quantificational elements. The suggestion for the analysis of RS markings put forth here should also revive the debate regarding the views on nonmanual spreading, since in some embedded questions (e.g. with *WONDER* and *KNOW*), nonmanual markings begin on the embedding predicate and extends over the embedded clause (Sandler & Lillo-Martin 2006). We suggest that the difference of interpretation and duration between doxastic and proffering verbs, as well as new data concerning the shiftability of a third person pronoun associated with a locus, brings a new perspective to these issues.

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<sup>1</sup> See Cormier et al (2015) for detailed discussion of related terminology, including *constructed action*, *constructed dialogue*, etc. Formal syntax/semantics literature has been primarily concerned with shiftable properties of indexicals in RS and so has used “role

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shift” as the primary term, a convention which we follow here.

<sup>2</sup> The core data were originally a part of a language sample collected in early 2000s from Deaf signers residing in California (we thank J. Pyers for sharing the data). The elicitation paradigm was later developed and administered to two other Deaf individuals who grew up with Deaf signing parents in the Northeast and Midwest of the US, respectively. Each judgment was later verified with at least one additional native (hearing or Deaf) or near-native (Deaf) signer.

<sup>3</sup> Following conventions in sign language linguistics, all ASL glosses are in SMALL CAPS. The line above the utterance indicates the spread/duration of the nonmanual marking associated with either role-shifted material (RS) or topicalization (t); the letter/number separated with a dash (e.g. *a-*) indicates the area of signing space dedicated to a particular referent (the Mom) and, thus, the locus of the shift. Subindices *i*, *j*, *k*, ... on the right indicate coreference.

<sup>4</sup> Some analyses (Shan 2010, Maier 2014) have been proposed that cover cases of mixed (where a single clause includes both shifted and unshifted interpretations, contra, e.g., Anand and Nevins 2004) indexicals, found in other sign languages, including Catalan (LSC, Quer 2005) and German Sign Languages (Hermann and Steinbach 2012).

Incidentally, the asymmetry under examination here is briefly recorded, albeit not overtly discussed in Quer’s work on LSC (there, Quer demonstrates that (i) is a case of indirect discourse):

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- RS-i
- (i) ANNA<sub>i</sub> 3-SAY-2 IX-1<sub>i</sub> FED-UP LOSE+++  
‘Anna told you that she was fed up with losing so often’

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role-i

- (ii) MANEL<sub>i</sub> THINK IX-1<sub>i</sub> 1-GIVE-2 AT ALL

‘Manel thinks that he won’t give me anything at all.’ (Quer 2011)

His examples always show RS starting on, not after, the embedding predicate, suggesting a relation to the cut we discuss here. At this stage, however, the fact that (i)-(ii) show the split in distribution of RS nonmanuals remains suggestive until the language is examined systematically. We are currently conducting a cross-linguistic investigation involving Catalan, Italian, French and Spanish Sign Languages.

<sup>5</sup> As pointed out by a reviewer, there is, of course, a possibility that *a-IX NOT* in (12a), e.g., is a case of ellipsis in direct discourse – i.e. that the child says ‘I don’t.’ However, here, such ellipsis is not licensed in the same way ‘I don’t’ is not licensed in (10b). For an extensive discussion of ellipsis in ASL, see Koulidobrova (2014).

<sup>6</sup> *YESTERDAY* marks clausal boundary in ASL (Braze 2004).

<sup>7</sup> We make this generalization with some caution. Consider, for example, a situation when a mother, talking to her son, utters: ‘Be nice to Mommy; you know she wants you to be quiet!’ In such a case, the speaker refers to herself in 3<sup>rd</sup> person (we thank an *LI* reviewer for pointing this out). However, we suggest that this is not a typical case of reference to the self in general and in ASL in particular. Consider (i) below, used in a similar context:

- (i) *Context: Mother to a crying child*

\*MOM HERE a-IX LOVE 2-IX  
‘Mommy is here. She loves you’

<sup>8</sup>This offers additional testing ground for both the *PoV* and *SAY*. In particular, while our informants overwhelmingly reject *SAY* under RS, their reactions to such sentences contrast

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with those involving lack of RS-markings on *THINK/IMAGINE*. The next step here is contrasting *SAY* with and without RS-marking in order to test the possibility of subjective stance. We thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing this to our attention.

Appendix: Illustration: locus *a* has been previously assigned to MOM

Figure 1: MOM

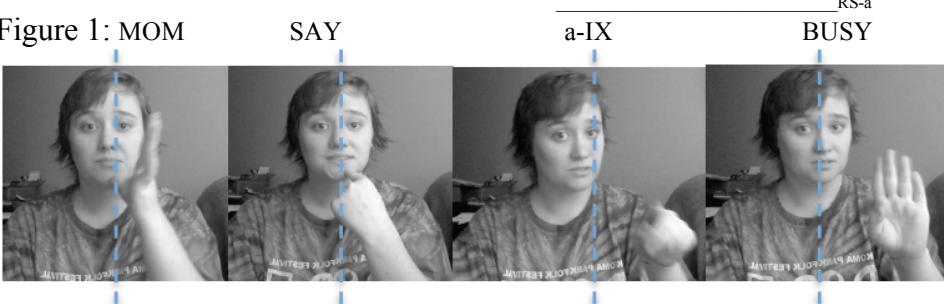


Figure 2: MOM

