Intro: Event Visibility Hypothesis

Much recent attention given to idea of a universal “iconic” relationship in sign languages between form of verbs and their corresponding event structure

- Wilbur (2008): Presence of EndState morpheme (abrupt deceleration) indicates bounded event
- Strickland et al. (2015) argue that this relationship is even transparent to non-signers

(Notes on tense & pluractionality)

- No dedicated tense marking in ASL (incl. future)
- Pluractionality in ASL interacts with Endstate (Klima and Bellugi 1979, Rathmann 2005, Kuhn and Aristodemo 2017), so focus on singular events

Critical ingredients of the Event Visibility Hypothesis

- Verbal form reflects telicity value
- Universal across verbs and sign languages
- Method of marking telicity is iconic

Implementation varies with focus on (i) iconic endpoint (Wilbur 2008, Malia and Wilbur 2012), or (ii) iconicity of subparts of processes (Wright 2014), or (iii) overall measure function of event progress/form expression (Kuhn 2017)

Three reasons for rejecting strong forms of Event Visibility Hypothesis

1. Independent tests for telicity

Wilbur (2008) and Strickland et al. (2015) assume telicity based on spoken language (English) glosses. Instead we use two complementary strategies:

- Lexico-conceptual test applied to ASL:
  - Context: Mary . . . is working on an essay, which she started on Monday and finished on Friday.
  - (1) Q: What did Mary do this week?
    A: IX-Mary WRITE-Endstate ESSAY
  - (2) Q: What did Mary do on Tuesday?
    A: # IX-Mary WRITE-Endstate ESSAY
- ASL specific tests (Rathmann 2005):
  - (3) BOY-a IX-a NEED 5 MIN WALK #(3 ROUND)
  - (4) STILL RUN? vs. #STILL PUBLISH?

→ Conclusions summarized in Table 1

2. Lexical coverage

Previous work focuses only on extreme endpoints like STEAL and PLAY (equivalent in mass/count of English milk, cat, ignoring furniture and stone(s)).

- Instead, include 23 verbs based on agreement by 3 Deaf signers of American Sign Language:

3. Telicity vs. Aspect

For lexico-conceptual test (see above) to really track telicity, need to be sure not in imperfective aspect

- Some ASL verbs clearly not in imperfective since they “fail” test, which requires telic predicates + non-imperfective aspect, but...

Might Endstate track perfectivity?

- ASL has many aspect markers (Rathmann 2005)
- 50% of spoken languages (according to WALS) have perfective/imperfective marking
- Alternating verbs like WRITE (Table 1) may be evidence in favor, given interpretation

Still open: Morphological status

In its original formulation, the EVH is also a claim of morphemic status of EndState marking

- Kuhn (2017) focuses on ambiguity not predicted by Wilbur (2008)’s morphemic account:

  (5) a. DIE{with small movement} start to die
     b. DIE{with fuller movement, missing endpoint} almost/close to dying

- GIVE{fast}-GIVE{slower} GIVE{slowest}

Proposes a lexical-conceptual account, with an iconicity function in the lexical entry for a subset of predicates in ASL, by which telicity is a by-product of reaching the boundary

- What determines which verbs take this function?
- Why available only in sign languages? What role does gesture play?
- Alternators instead suggest morphemic analysis

Insights from alternating verbs

We highlight the pattern seen in alternating verbs (e.g. WRITE, READ, DRIVE, TYPE, SKI)

- Suggest paradigmatic contrast, supporting the idea that presence/absence of EndState does involve a morphological alternation
- The No-End-State form consistently involves (non-pluractional) internal repetition, may itself be marker of progressive or general imperfective

Conclusions

“Event Visibility” is overly simplistic

Sign languages are more similar to spoken languages in this area than generally assumed

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References


Kuhn, J. (2017). Telicity and iconic scales in ASL.


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