Thoughts vs. actions: Particle choice in Adamorobe Sign Language negation

Background: This research explores sentential negation in Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL), a shared sign language (SL) from Ghana, whose patterns of sentential negation had not been studied before, with a primary focus on a semantic effect on the choice of manual negator. We situate AdaSL within the well-known manual dominant vs. non-manual dominant typology of SL negation and, having identified two commonly used manual negators, we address the intriguing fact that the choice of negator seems to be semantically determined.

Method: We analyzed 23 videos from the AdaSL Corpus (Nyst 2000-20004), totalling 11.23 hours of naturalistic data from 19 signers. Using ELAN, we annotated the data for type of manual negator, incl. its syntactic position, handshape, location, and non-manual activity. Furthermore, predicates were coded for the phonological features body-anchoredness and handshape, and for their semantic category: 'CE' for cognitive/emotive (e.g., KNOW, CRY) and 'AM' for action/motion (e.g., BEAT, COME).

Results: Of 319 instances of sentential negation, a manual negator (NEG) was employed 99.3% of the time. Additionally, a rich set of non-manual markers co-occurred with NEG in various combinations, but their presence optional. As for manual markers, we identified two: NEG1 and NEG2. A statistical analysis revealed a significant correlation between semantic class and the choice of manual negator (p value <0.001): NEG1 ((1)) combined with CE- and NEG2 ((2)) with AM-predicates. Further analyses on a possible correlation between semantic class, body-anchoredness and type of negator revealed no correlation.

Discussion: AdaSL aligns with manual-dominant SLs, requiring a manual negator for sentential negation. The semantic bias observed in the choice of manual negator suggests a link between predicate meaning and negation strategy, providing a unique contribution to SL typology. The availability of multiple manual clause negators has also been reported for some other SLs (e.g., Geraci 2005 for LIS; Oomen & Pfau 2017 for NGT) but, to the best of our knowledge, the choice of one negator over another has never been accounted for in semantic terms. Miestamo (2005), in his seminal work on the typology of negation in spoken languages, describes cases of 'asymmetric' negation', where the choice of negation strategy depends on morphosyntactic factors like tense or aspect, but he, too, does not report instances where semantic factors would impact the choice of negator.

(1)

CRY   NEG1
'You will not cry'

(2)

BURY   NEG2
'He will not be buried [there].'

References

Geraci. 2005. Negation in Italian Sign Language. In *Proceedings of NELS 35*, 217-229. **Miestamo.** 2005. *Standard negation: The negation of declarative verbal main clauses in a typological perspective*. Mouton. **Nyst.** 2000–2004. Adamorobe SL Corpus, in collection "African Sign Languages". The Language Archive. https://hdl.handle.net/1839/00-0000-0000-0016-3693-A. **Oomen & Pfau.** 2017. Signing NOT (or not): A typological perspective on standard negation in Sign Language of the Netherlands. *Linguistic Typology* 21, 1-51.