Conditional and concessive constructions in Russian Sign Language

Svetlana Burkova  burkova_s@mail.ru

Introduction

Conditional constructions express causal relations between two situations. A prototypical conditional sentence "if P, then Q" consists of two clauses, one of which (the protasis) expresses a proposition whose fulfillment or non-fulfillment is relevant to the degree of reality assigned to the proposition expressed by another clause (the apodosis) (Trask 1993: 55).

Conditional constructions still remain poorly investigated. There are a number of special studies, narrowly focused on non-manual markers of conditional relationships1, however, thorough works, taking into account both formal and semantic features of conditionals are rare.

Concessive constructions are somehow the "contradictory counterpart of causal constructions" (König & Siemund 2000: 341). A prototypical concessive sentence 'although P, Q' consists of two clauses, one of which expresses a proposition which is unexpected in light of some other proposition expressed by another clause. Unexpectedness is based on a presupposition 'if/when P, then normally not-Q'.

Concessives in sign languages are hardly mentioned in the literature and remain virtually unexplored so far.

Research questions and methods

- How conditional and concessive relations are expressed in RSL?
- What are the typological implications of the RSL data?

Annotations data

Sources (total examples: 518):
- RSL Corpus (http://rls.nstu.ru),
- 182 texts, 59 signers
- Elicitation

Conditional in RSL

General features
- Clause order: the protasis always precedes the apodosis.
- Markers of conditionality are located in the protasis clause.

Potential conditionals (situation described in the protasis is represented as potentially realizable)
- Markers of conditionality
  - Lexical sign if (optional) always takes the initial position in the clause (Picture 1); a likely path of its grammaticalization: WEIGH > PROBABLY > (if)
  - NMMs (obligatory): "raised brows" (br) and "headthrust" (thh). The scope of (br) is typically the entire clause; (thh) accompanies the final sign of the clause (Picture 1). NMM (br) also regularly occurs in polar questions and marks some kinds of topics; NMM (hh) occurs at the end of the other types of dependent clauses.
  - Some other NMMs (Picture 2) can additionally occur in the protasis, carrying emphatic, modal, or structuring functions.

Counterfactual conditionals (situation described in the protasis is represented as unreal/unrealizable)
- Non-manual marking in the protasis is similar to that in the potential conditionals (Picture 2).
- Marker of counterfactuality is #B-Y – a lexicalized borrowing from Russian of a counterfactual modal clitic 6u. Typically, it occurs at the absolute beginning of both clauses (1), or, at least in the protasis (2).

1. #B-Y COME EARLIER #B-Y MOVE STARE
   'If you had come earlier, we would have watched a movie.'
2. #B-Y CLF(round) CLF(round)-THROW,HEAD DIE MAY
   'If I had thrown a stone at your head, you could have died'.

Non-prototypical (peripheral) conditionals
- Inferential conditionals (if P, therefore Q) have in the apodosis a specific set of NMMs: the head slightly tilted aside + frowned brows + eye gaze directed away from the addressee. Optionally, lexical markers of inferentiality can be used: THINK/ASIDE 'therefore', KNOW 'therefore/so', CONCLUDE 'therefore' (Picture 3).

Concessive in RSL

General features
- Clause order seems to be rather rigid: the dependent clause (DC) in all the examples precedes the main clause (MC).
- Non-manual marking of the DC is similar to that in the conditionals.
- A specific set of NMMs regularly occurs in the MC (also typical for contexts of obstinacy or negation): raised and slightly frowned brows and lowered corners of the mouth.
- Optionally a lexical sign YES (in the meaning 'although') and THE.SAME/USELESS can be used in DC and MC correspondingly (4).

Non-prototypical concessives
- "Conditional" concessives 'even if P, Q' typically have in DC a combination of lexical markers KNOW and HAPPEN (5)
- "Alternative" concessives 'whatever/however/... R, Q' employ in DC a free-choice quantifier ANY and/or reduplication (6).

Summary

- RSL formally distinguishes between different semantic types of conditionals and concessives.
- The grammaticalization paths for conditional and concessive markers in RSL are virtually the same as those in spoken languages2.
- Manual markers of conditionality and concessivity in RSL are optional. A key role in building conditional and concessive sentences is played by NMMs.
- None of the NMMs used in conditionals and concessives in RSL is specialized to express the conditional or concessive relationships, the latter rather result from a combination of several NMMs, each of which contributes in its own way to the structural and semantic frame of the construction.

References

2. For e.g., Frey 1998: 48 & 65. For sign languages in Russian see Svetlana Burkova 2013: 26-28 September, Hamburg

Picture 1. 'If I let you in, I will be immediately fired.'

Picture 2. NMMs used in the protasis clause of conditionals

100,0%
50,0%
0,0%
Potential conditionals
Counterfactual conditionals

| Picture 1. "If I let you in, I will be immediately fired." |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Markers of conditionality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raised eyebrows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head thrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moulting &quot;yes&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised chin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes wide open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrowed eyes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Picture 3. 'If the window is open, there is somebody at home'.

'If/whenever P, Q' employ reduplication of a predicate and/or adverbial signs ALWAYS, CONSTANTLY, etc., in the apodosis clause (3).

1. IF NEED TRANSLATE ALWAYS FIND+ GIVE+
   'If whenever a person needs the translation, they provide it.'

2. OPEN WINDOW THINK+NEED HOME INDEX
   'If the window is open, there is somebody at home'.

3. YES IX+ LATE THE.SAME IX+ ANGRY NEG
   'Although he is late, I'm not angry with him'.