

## DOUBLING IN RSL AND NGT – A UNIFIED ACCOUNT

Russian Sign Language (RSL) and Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT), as well as other sign languages including American Sign Language (ASL) [1], use doubling of different constituents as a grammatical mechanism. In this talk, we offer a pragmatics-based explanation of doubling in RSL and NGT.

Methodology: Small corpora of narratives by native signers in RSL (10 minutes) and NGT (30 minutes) have been analyzed and all potential instances of doubling collected (45 for RSL and 73 for NGT)<sup>1</sup>.

Properties of doubling in RSL and NGT: 1. A great variety of constituents can be doubled in RSL and NGT: verbs (1), subjects and objects, adverbs (2), adjectives, wh-words, and, importantly, clauses (3). NGT has a phenomenon of topic copy [2] when a pointing sign referring to the sentence topic occurs at the end of the sentence (4).

2. In most cases, the two occurrences of the doubled element are identical (38 cases in RSL and 45 in NGT) as in (1a). Occasionally, they differ in inflection: for instance, the second occurrence can be marked by aspect as in (1b) or by a different classifier handshape.

3. In RSL and NGT the constituent that is placed in between the copies almost always expresses new information (see also [3] for RSL).

4. Doubling can be used to express emphasis (5) but this is observed in only a small number of cases.

Potential accounts of doubling: Several explanations have been offered for doubling in other SL. These explanations, however, cannot account for the whole range of RSL and NGT data.

1. Limitation on inflection. According to [4], verb doubling in ASL occurs when a verb becomes too heavy due to the presence of both aspect marking and an overt object. The burden of grammatical marking is then divided between the copies. This explanation can neither account for a considerable number of examples from RSL and NGT which involve identical verbal copies and no aspectual marking (1a) nor for doubling of constituents other than verbs.

2. According to [1], doubling of different constituents in ASL is related to emphatic focus. However, in RSL and NGT emphasis is present only in a minority of sentences with doubling.

3. According to [3], predicate doubling in RSL happens because of the limitation on the amount of new information in one prosodic unit. When both the object and the verb represent new information, the object moves into the post-verbal position where it forms a separate prosodic unit, while the verb is repeated after it for cohesion. This analysis cannot account for NGT topic copies as topics are not new information.

Proposal: Clause-internal doubling (doubling of any constituent smaller than clauses) in RSL and NGT is used to *background* [5] new information placed in between the occurrences of the doubled element. The doubled element, in contrast, is *foregrounded*. This mechanism is used when a part of the new information introduced in the clause will not be important for the further discourse.

This analysis is confirmed by the fact that in the RSL and NGT data, the information introduced between the occurrences of the doubled element was never referred back to in the further discourse. As foregrounding is orthogonal to activation status [5], both topics and (parts of) foci can be foregrounded; thus, topic copy in NGT can be accounted for, too. Topic doubling is mostly used for continuous topics, which can be a reason for foregrounding. Identical occurrences of the doubled constituent do not present any problem for this account.

Finally, clause doubling might be a phenomenon that is the source of grammaticalization for the clause-internal doubling. Sometimes the signer purposefully or unintentionally breaks

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<sup>1</sup> Here we only discuss cases in which some constituent intervenes between the two occurrences of the doubled element (X Y X) and thus neglect cases in which the sign is repeated several times in a row.

the chain of events, so that the clause Y that follows clause X describes a situation that does not follow the situation of X temporally or logically. For instance, the Y clause can clarify some unclear situation (3). Then the signer/speaker may want to repeat clause X to return to the chain of events. The function of clause doubling as a strategy of resuming the chain of events could have been grammaticalized into the foregrounding function of doubling on the clause-internal level: on the discourse level, the signer returns to the central chain of events, while on the clause-internal level, the signer foregrounds the more important information that is used in further discourse by doubling. This hypothesis seems plausible also because both in RSL and NGT null arguments are allowed. Therefore, a sequence of clauses consisting of one predicate each ( $C_1 C_2 C_1$ ) could be easily reanalyzed as a sequence of verbs ( $V_1 V_2 V_1$ ), and this model of doubling could then spread to other types of constituents.

**Examples:<sup>2</sup>**

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|--------|--|-------|
| (1) a. | ONE BRING SCHOOL BRING   | [NGT] |
|        | ‘At 1 I brought her back to school’  |       |
|        | b. CLOSE CL:GO THERE CL:GO-ASP.CONT  | [RSL] |
|        | ‘There he is going now’ (progressive meaning)  |       |
| (2)    | IX-1 ALSO CALMLY DRINK CALMLY  | [NGT] |
|        | ‘I also drank calmly’  |       |
| (3)    | CAR CL:POUR.WATER. CAR CL:RIDE. CL:POUR.WATER.   | [RSL] |
|        | ‘The car poured water over him. There was a car riding there. So it poured water over him’ |       |
| (4)    | IX-1 STILL IX-1  | [NGT] |
|        | ‘I’m still’  |       |
| (5)    | FEAR OF IX BEAR FEAR   | [NGT] |
|        | ‘He was really AFRAID of the bear’   |       |

**References:**

- [1] Lillo-Martin, D. & R.M. de Quadros. 2008. Focus constructions in American Sign Language and Lingua de Sinais Brasileira. In: Quer, J. (ed.), *Signs of the time. Selected papers from TISLR 8*. Hamburg: Signum, 161-176.
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<sup>2</sup> CL – classifier predicate; IX-1 – index, pointing to the signer; ASP.CONT – continuous aspect.