

# RRG mapping of complex sentence constructions with simultaneous units in German Sign Language (DGS)

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**Aim.** So far, there has been little work on natural and complex signed sentences as found in sign language corpora. RRG might be a suitable analysis tool due to its high compatibility with typologically diverse languages.<sup>1,2</sup> Several works have shown that RRG is a framework that is able to display many forms of complex sentences.<sup>3</sup> I explore RRG as a tool for the analysis of natural signed sentences in DGS and discuss examples of complex sentence constructions containing so called depicting signs<sup>4</sup>, having chosen one of them as an example for this abstract (Fig. 1). This example shows the simultaneous production of multiple predicates by two different articulators, the left and the right hand. **Analysis.** From the Public DGS Corpus<sup>5</sup>, containing natural, spontaneous DGS data, a retelling of the Pear Story<sup>6,7</sup> by a native signer was selected for analysis. The selected example translates to: ‘A person climbs a ladder and while holding onto it, picks pear after pear, putting them into his/her apron.’ A sequence of complex actions is depicted through two sequential verbs on the dominant hand of the signer and a simultaneous third verb on the non-dominant hand: holding the ladder with one hand while simultaneously picking and pocketing pears with the other hand. The verbs in both hands are characterised by a complex verb structure including the actor (embodied by the signer), the undergoer (encoded in the hand shape representing the pear) and the handling of the object (encoded in the movement: being picked and thrown into an apron). This sequence is then repeated with alternating hands two times. **Discussion.** I propose the analysis seen in Figure 1, with the simultaneous signs analysed as a case of peripheral subordination. The entire example is analysed as one sentence, since there is no prosodic evidence for an earlier sentence boundary. It contains a complete informational unit (the following sentence contains a different event: a pear falls down), and all necessary elements to build a syntactically well-formed sentence are present. While manual signs for some conjunctions do exist in DGS, many of them are usually omitted. I suggest analysing the parallelism of the sign PERSON-LADDER-HOLD. ONTO as a form of subordination and thus the corresponding core as peripheral. The individual signs were analysed as a core each, as all the required elements of a core are contained in each sign: a nucleus, as well as the obligatory arguments that result from the verbs’ semantics and are represented by the signers’ body<sup>8</sup>. Each sign/core stands for a self-contained event and is analysed as a clause-like unit itself. The tripartite repetitive structure evokes the iterative reading of the complex action. I will show that RRG is a suitable tool for the analysis of complex DGS sentences and discuss the representation of sentences using multiple articulators simultaneously, resulting in sequentially and simultaneously produced predicates. An open question regards subjunctions (especially the complex cores with peripheral subordination). Junctions are seldom expressed overtly in DGS. However, null elements are not assumed in RRG.

## References:

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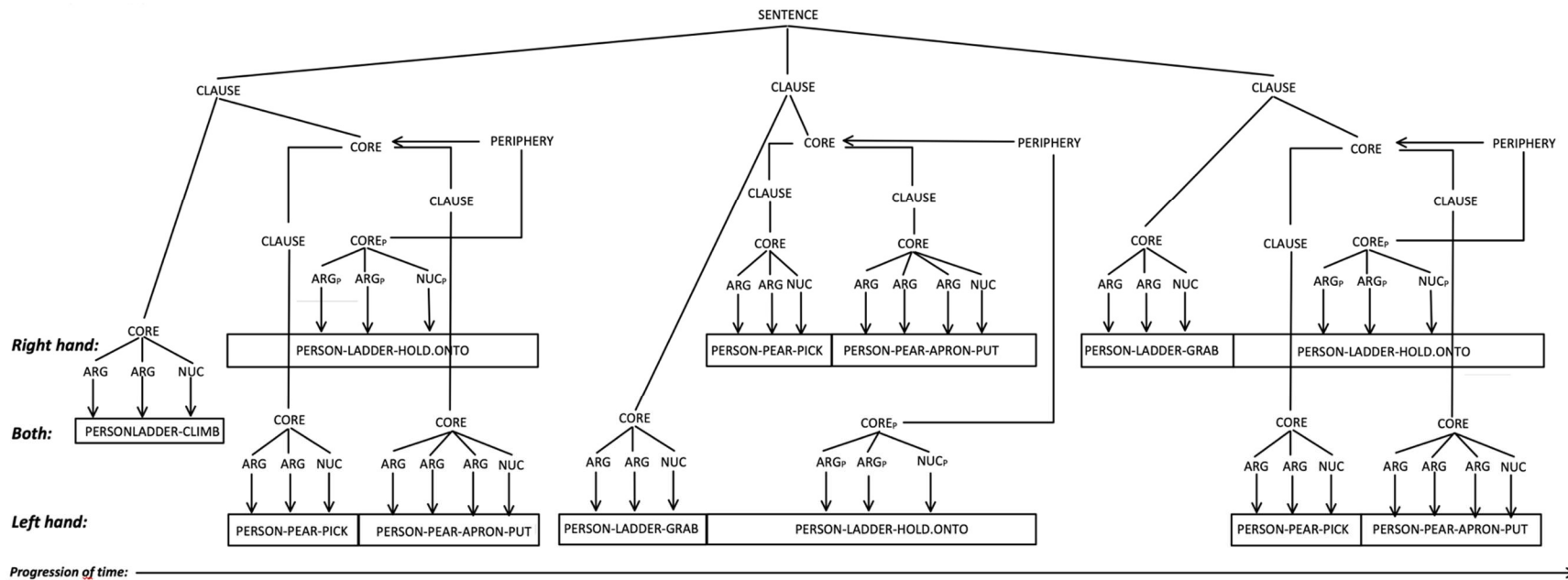


Figure 1: 'A person climbs the ladder and while holding onto it, picks pear after pear, putting them into his/her apron.' A box indicates an individual sign; the length of the boxes roughly represents the duration of signs. All of the arguments are incorporated in the predicates and are not realised as explicit noun phrases, but refer to entities previously introduced by means of explicit noun phrases. An open question concerns the fact that junctions are seldom expressed overtly in DGS, resulting, for example, in missing nuclei underneath the three cores, where the periphery is being linked.

PERSON-LADDER-CLIMB	PERSON-LADDER-HOLD.ONTO			PERSON-PEAR-PICK	PERSON-PEAR-APRON-PUT	PERSON-LADDER-GRAB		
	PERSON-PEAR-PICK	PERSON-PEAR-APRON-PUT	PERSON-LADDER-GRAB	PERSON-LADDER-HOLD.ONTO			PERSON-PEAR-PICK	PERSON-PEAR-APRON-PUT

Figure 2: Stills from the Public DGS Corpus.