

The Expression of Oxymoron in Taiwan Sign Language

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This study focuses on studying how the concept of oxymoron is linguistically encoded through the visual-gestural channel, with the hope of introducing typological implications based on this signed language research. Oxymoron is defined as the ability to combine and blend two contradictory and divergent concepts to describe events and experience (e.g., *sweet sorrow* in English) (Ruiz, 2015). It is noted that Taiwan Sign Language (TSL) signers do not employ condensed expression, such as *sinful pleasures* in English and *huó sǐ rén* ‘a living dead’ in Mandarin. The result revealed that four strategies are employed to encode the contradictory semantic units, such as serial verb constructions (i.e., MARRY and SINGLE in (1)), biclausal construction (i.e., BAD and GOOD in (2)), equal comparatives (i.e., CHILD and ADULT in (3)), and simultaneous construction (i.e., BURDEN and smiling facial expression in (4)). It was noted that different constructions lead to different types of oxymoronic interpretations. Sentence (3) and sentence (5) have the same contradictory lexicons, namely BAD and GOOD, while sentence (5) has temporally sequential interpretation rather than blended meaning as in (3). This study aims at providing a systematic account for the expression of oxymoron in TSL within the framework of Role and Reference Grammar, illustrating how two incompatible semantic units in semantic representation are visually linked to the syntactic representation.

- (1) HE WIFE SEPARATE. HE LOOK-LIKE **MARRY FINISH SINGLE**
‘He doesn’t live with his wife. He looks like a married bachelor.’
- (2) HE_i STEAL WHAT GIVE_{i→j} POOR_j. HE **PERSON BAD HEART GOOD**.
‘He stole things to give to the poor. He is a bad good man.’
- (3) SISTER_i HE_j TAKE-CARE_{j→i}. HE **SAME CHILD EQUAL ADULT**.
‘The child takes care of his sister. He looks like a little adult.’
- (4) _____ smiling facial expression
TUITION EXPENSIVE MY **BURDEN**
‘The expensive tuition fee is a labor of love.’
- (5) HE_i STEAL WHAT GIVE_{i→j} POOR_j. HE **PERSON BAD FINISH HEART GOOD**.
‘He stole things to give to the poor. He used to be a bad guy, but now he has a good heart.’

References:

Ruiz, J. H. (2015). Paradox and oxymoron revisited. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 173, 199-206.