



Felicia Fordham

Matt Young

Juliana Garrett

Syntax of American Sign Language (ASL)

Notes on ASL

- Not Indo-European – based on French Sign Language
- CAPS = signs
- Tree Nodes – signs, not words
- Types and aspects of signs
 - Signs
 - Fingerspelling
 - Classifiers
 - Non-manual signs
 - Spacial referencing

ASL does not have . . .

- Do-support
- Expletive forms
- Copular
- Case marking
- *v* or *n* shells
- Free word order
- A lack of grammar

Sentence Structure

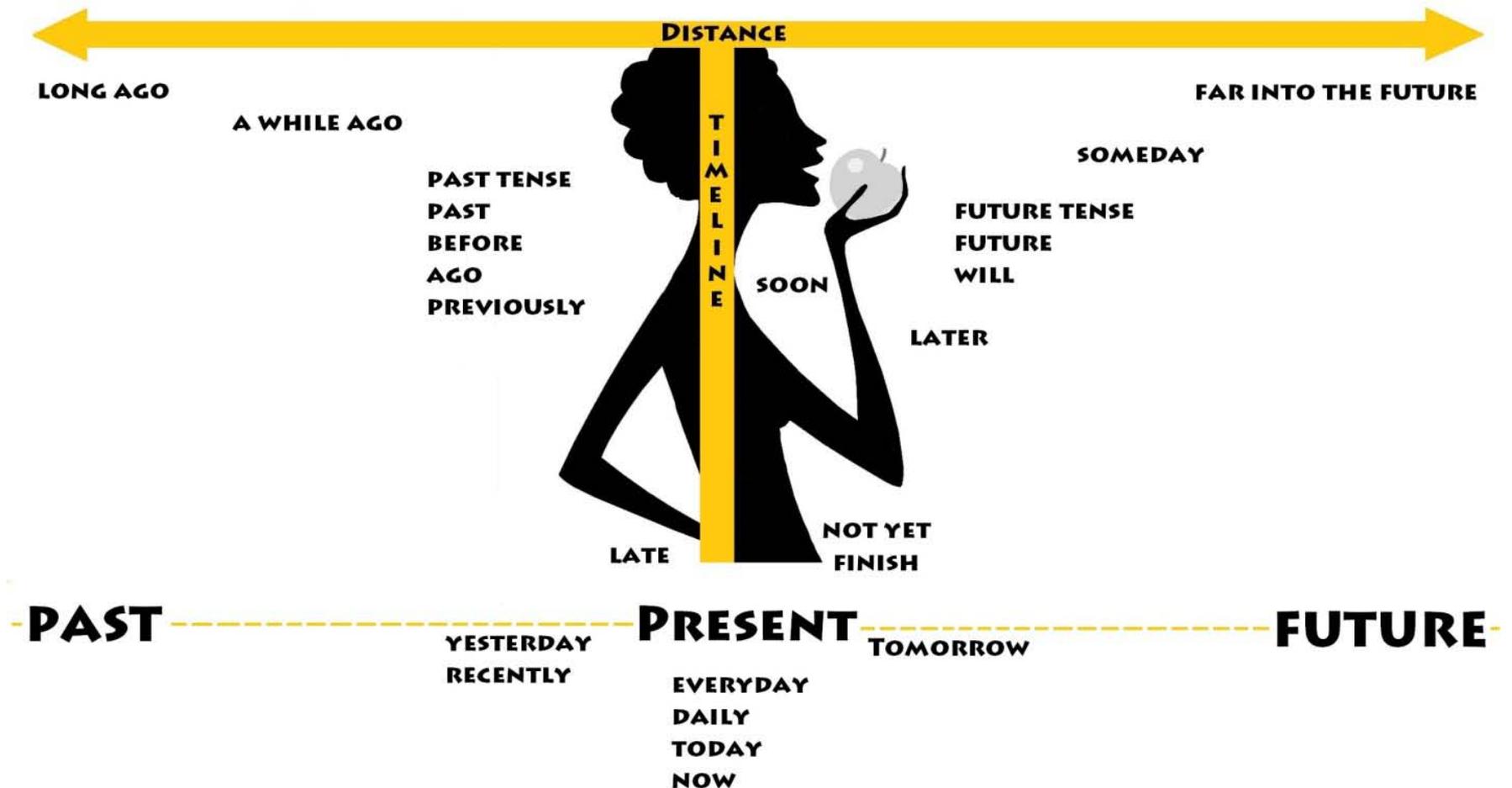
- SVO
 - BOY LIKE CANDY
- OSV
 - CANDY BOY LIKE

- (*)SOV
 - BOY CANDY LIKE
- (*)OVS
 - CANDY LIKE BOY
- (*)VOS
 - LIKE CANDY BOY

Non-manual signs (Features)

- Tense
- Number
- Gender
- Person
- Category
- Questions
- Negation
- Yes/No questions
- Rhetorical Questions
- Embedded clause
- Topicalization
- Mini-Topicalization

Features: Tense



Features: Number, Gender

NUMBER

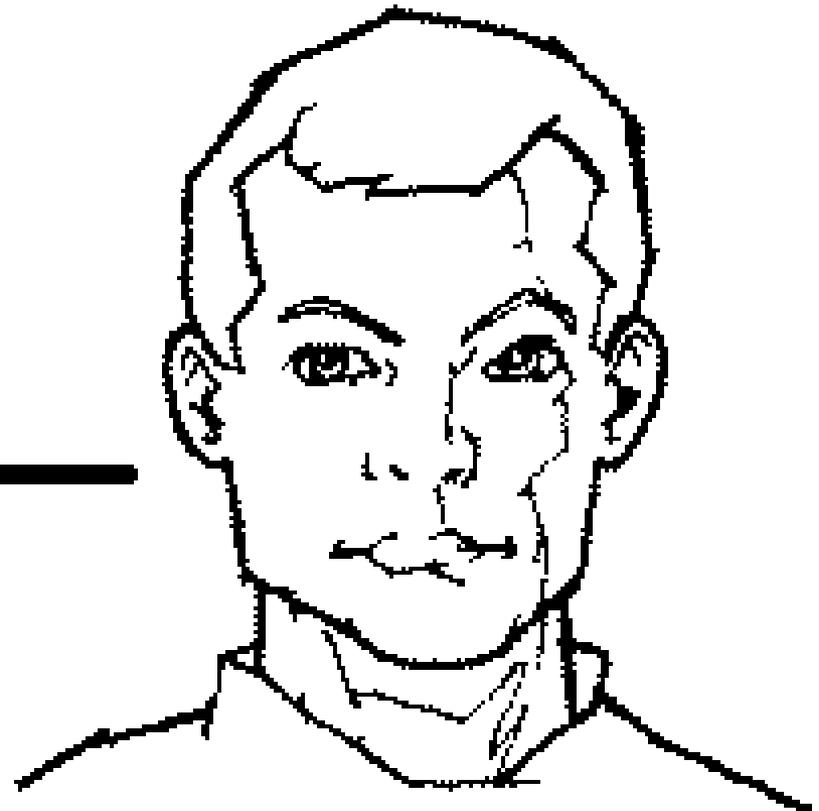
- Quantifier
- Spatial indexing

GENDER

Male



Female



Features: Person, Category

PERSON

- 1st Person
- 2nd Person
- 3rd Person
- 4th Person (plural only)

CATEGORY

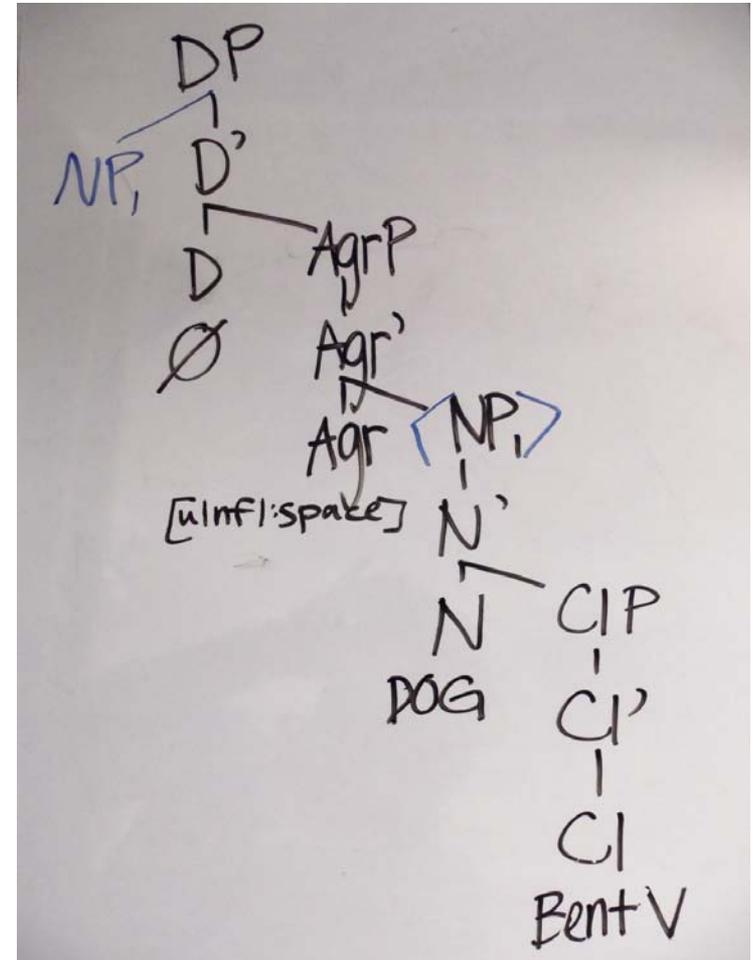
- Nouns vs. Verbs
- Adjectives
- Adverbs

Sentence Types – Non-manual signs

- **Negation – NOT (optional)**
- **Question – requires specific word order**
 - Yes/No
 - WH
 - Rhetorical
- **Command – drop subject or use as pronoun**
- **Conditional – IF (optional)**

DP

- DP > AgrP > (ModP) > NP > (CIP)
- Determiners
- Nominals
 - Proper – FS or name sign
 - Mass – quantifier classifier
 - Count – quantifier classifier
- Possession
 - Possessive pronouns
 - Saxon Genitive
- pro



Classifiers



Figure 5.1 Size and shape specifiers (ASL) (reprinted with permission from Supalla 1982)

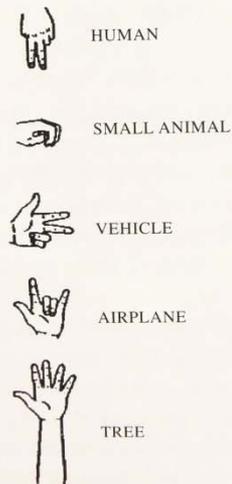


Figure 5.2 Entity classifiers (ASL) (reprinted with permission from Supalla 1982)

- Specific handshapes
- Shows:
 - Thematic relationships
 - Location
- VP or DP?

CP

(TopP) > CP > TP > (NegP) > (AspP) > (Agr_sP) > (Agr_oP) > VP

THE HIERARCHY

- TopP = Topicalization
- AspP = Aspect
- Agr_sP = Subject Agreement
- Agr_oP = Object Agreement

PROOF OF CP

- Topicalization
- Rhetorical Questions

PRO and Topicalization

SUBJECT CONTROL

- I WANT DANCE.

OBJECT CONTROL

- ITOLD JERRY EAT.

ECM

- I WANT JERRY DANCE.

TOPICALIZATION

- Non-manual markers
- TopP
- Word order
- Mini-Topicalization

Constituents and Relative Clauses

CONSTITUENTS

- Topicalization
- Non-manual signs

RELATIVE CLAUSES

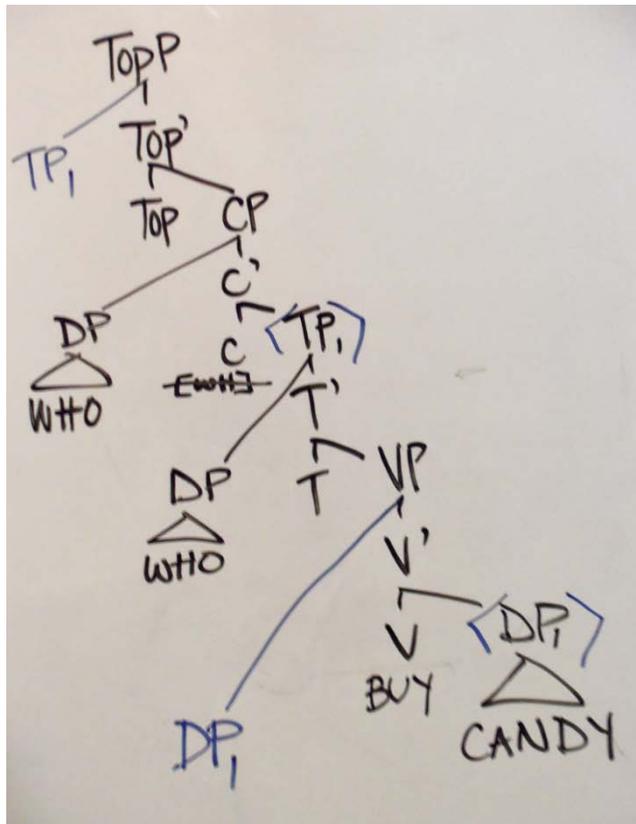
- Non-manual signs
- Part of TopP
 - C-command

Questions

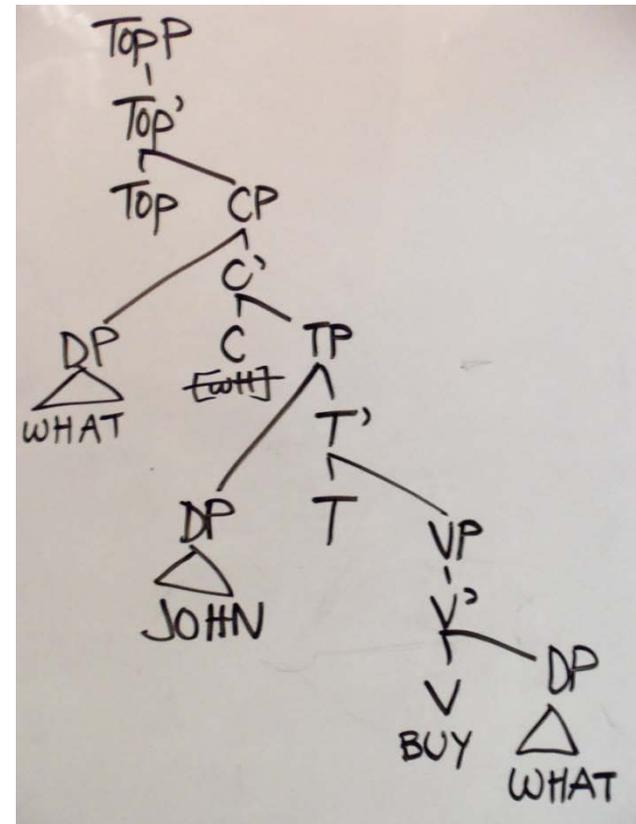
- WH
 - *in situ*
 - Second WH for emphasis
- Yes/No
 - Hold final sign
- Rhetorical
 - Question and answer
- WHAT / Question Wiggle
 - End of sentence
 - Used for emphasis

WH Questions

SUBJECT



OBJECT



Transitivity and Theta Roles

- Transitivity
 - Intransitive
 - Transitive
 - Ditransitive
- Theta Roles
 - Direction
 - Classifiers

