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A New Type of List Buoy in Japanese Sign Language: Emergence from Gesture

Yuko Asada
(Showa Women's University, Japan)

ABSTRACT

This presentation reports a previously unnoticed type of List Buoy (**LB**) (Liddell 2003) in Japanese Sign Language (JSL) and discuss its theoretical implication.

It has been known that LBs are used in several sign languages and that they share similar properties as those described by Liddell for LBs in American Sign Language (cf. Hendriks 2007; Liddell *et al*. 2007). JSL has such LBs (see Figs. 1-2), but in addition to this "standard" type of LBs (henceforth, **S-LB**), JSL signers also use a LB as illustrated in Figs. 3-4, in which the fingers of the weak hand are oriented inward and folded one by one and thus not extended horizontally as in the case of a S-LB. I refer to this type of LB as **inward LB**s (**I-LB**).
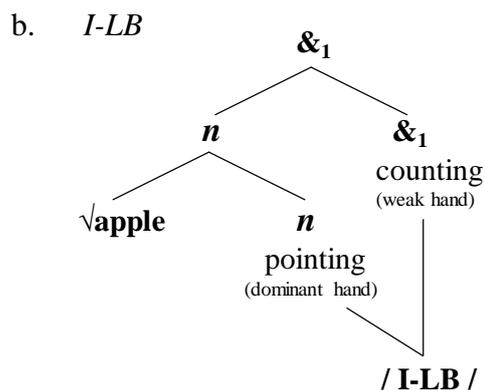
I-LBs differ from S-LBs in several respects:

   (i) I-LBs are typically used to keep track of counted items. Unlike S-LBs, they are not allowed when the associated entities are ordered;

   (ii) I-LBs do not occur in an explicative type of discourse;

   (iii) I-LBs require a lexical item denoting 'and so on', 'etc.', or the numeral sign that shows the number of listed entities to mark the end of the listing.

One possible explanation of this restricted distribution of I-LBs is that an I-LB is a gesture that co-occurs with signing and is thus not yet a "full-fledged" linguistic item. This seems to be a plausible analysis, considering that speakers of spoken Japanese and JSL use a counting gesture that involves folding the fingers similarly to an I-LB. However, I show that an I-LB is not a gesture but a grammaticalized element, based on the experiments conducted with native informants of Japanese and JSL. The results of the experiments reveal crucial differences between I-LBs in JSL and co-speech gestures used by Japanese speakers:

   (i) JSL signers systematically insert pointing with their dominant hand to contact the tip of their weak hand after describing the associated entity;

   (ii) While some Japanese speakers use co-speech gestures only partially in their listing, such incomplete usage is never observed with JSL signers.

In light of this discussion, I propose that the I-LB in JSL is a linguistic element that has undergone grammaticalization from a counting gesture. Specifically, I claim that I-LBs emerged in JSL from the process below:

(1)   a. *Counting gesture (CG)*   b.   *I-LB*

√apple - CG_1 … √orange - CG_2 …

$$\&_1$$

$$n \qquad \&_1$$

$$\text{√apple} \qquad n \qquad \text{counting (weak hand)}$$

$$\text{pointing (dominant hand)}$$

$$/\ \textbf{I-LB}\ /$$

In this process, pointing with the dominant hand plays a crucial role to "tag" a nominal object with its associated CG. Once the pointing sign is introduced, it nominalizes the root, turning the simple association between the item and the number word in (1a) into a headed, hierarchical structure as in (1b).

This proposal captures the observed facts concerning I-LBs: consistent pointing with the dominant hand and its functional property as being typically used to keep track of counted objects. Interestingly, this proposal is also compatible with facts concerning pointing observed in early child language acquisition as discussed in Takei & Torigoe (2001), Goldin-Meadow & Butcher (2003), and others.

Two types of LBs in JSL

Figure 1   **Figure 2**   **Figure 3**   **Figure 4**