

## Verbal Temporal Categories in Georgian Sign Language (GESL)

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**ABSTRACT.** The Georgian sign language (GESL) is a native language for about 2 500 Deaf and Hard of Hearing people (DHH) of Georgia - the linguistic minority of the country.

GESL verbal morphology has its temporal system. Sign languages (SL) reveal their specific attitude toward spatial and temporal categories. The most shared temporal line in SL is as follows:

←-- distant past --/-- recent past ---/-- present /body--/-- near future --/-- distant future -→.

The body is the present, the future is ahead, and back-behind the body is the past. Near close is the near future, close to the back is the close past, and far away forward is a distant future and far away back is a distant past. Such an approach is shared by almost all SL with a very few exception. Obviously, GESL has its temporal vocabulary as well. Time-related words often indicate circularity and cycling. Crucially, GESL also has the morphological verbal markers of tense (future and past), aspect and durative. The present paper reveals these verbal temporal markers.

This paper brings its input to SL studies worldwide, and the investigated GESL temporal system is a specific part of a wide typological specter of temporal system in SL © 2018 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

**Key words:** tense, aspect, sign languages, GESL (Georgian Sign Language), sign languages

The Georgian sign language (GESL) is a native language for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people (DHH) of Georgia. These people are the linguistic minority of the country, and their number is about 2500.

Crucially, in spite of a significant influence of the Russian Sign Language, GESL has its individual grammar system. The present paper is one of the first investigations of the verbal temporal categories in this language. Usually sign languages (SL) demonstrate specific temporal systems with considerable variations. In SL linguistic,

information is encoded by non-verbal means. Thus, body position, mimic and manual signs display the linguistic content for any grammar category.

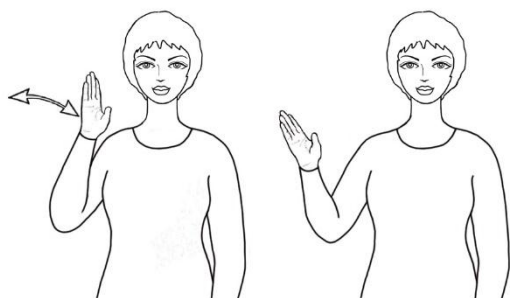
Many researchers dedicated their works to the issues of temporal units in SL grammar [1-7]. Freedman [8] and Cogen [9] noted that sign language verbs generally do not inflect for tense, like some spoken languages. In such cases, the temporal content is expressed only by means of adverbs. Although the other authors [10] argue that some signs in SL can be considered as morphological markers of tense.

The present paper is the first attempt to reveal the temporal system in GESL and the morphological markers of this system. For this research, I used free narrative texts of GESL - signing videos, where the language forms can be observed, and the method of elicitation was also used. The sources for GESL elicited materials were the third generation Deaf persons, who grow in Deaf families with Deaf parents and grandparents. For SL researches, such sources are usually considered as “good signers”.

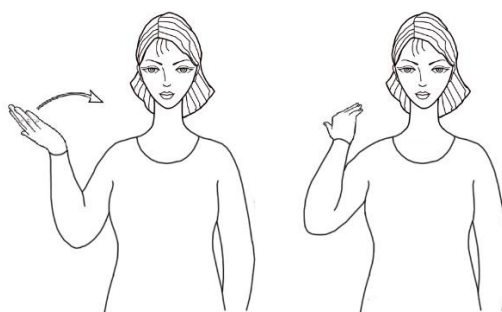
Interestingly, GESL has its own temporal system different from spoken Georgian. GESL widely uses the adverbs of time such as ‘now’, ‘before’, ‘already’, ‘tomorrow’, ‘today’, ‘yesterday’, ‘before’, ‘after’ etc. Still, there are some signs in this language, which act as verbal morphemes with temporal content [11].

In many SL the body acts as PRESENT and everything in front of the body is FUTURE and everything behind it is PAST. The most shared temporal line in SL is as follows:

**←-- distant past --/-- recent past ---/-- present /body--/-- near future --/-- distant future ->.** Near close is the near future, close to the back (behind the body) is the close past, far away forward is a distant future and far away back is a distant past. Such an approach is shared by almost all SL with a very small exception. As one can see on figs. 1 and 2, show that the one-handed manual markers appear for meaning the future (with forwarding hand-movement) and the past (with hand-movement behind the body/shoulder).



**Fig. 1.** The marker of the future tense.



**Fig. 2.** The marker of the past tense.

Two-handed sign ‘now’:



**Fig. 3.** The lexical sign for ‘now’.

The time line, showing the points in reference to past, present, and future is connected with a signer’s body [10]. Such a time-line is widely accepted in SL, although there are some SLs which do not follow this time-line, for example, Kata Kolok, a sign language used in the village of Bali [10].

The examples below clearly show the tense-changing strategy in GESL.

- (1) PAINT  
He/she paints.
- (2) PAINT FUTURE  
He/she will paint.

Interestingly, in SL the body acts as a subject and the subject is often missing in the sentences, especially when it had already been mentioned above.

The lexical sign ‘already’ is a two-handed symmetric dynamic sign accompanied with mimics

(see Fig. 4). The reduced one-handed version of this sign is used for the perfect tense. It is a typical process of grammaticalization with sign erosion case. Thus, GESL has a marker of aspect for the perfect tense.

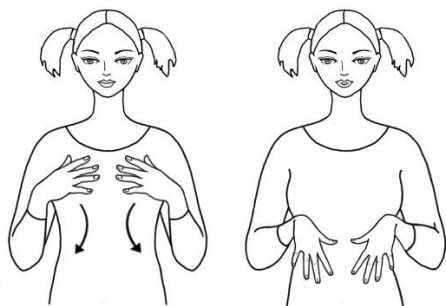


Fig. 4. The sign 'already'.

(3) PAINT ALREADY(Singlehanded)

He/she painted/ has painted.

In such verbal forms, where the marker of aspect occurs, no additional markers are required to convey the content of the past tense.

GESL also has a morphological marker for durative forms:

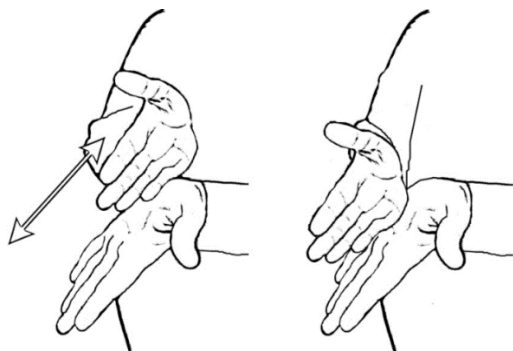


Fig. 5. The marker of duration.

(4) WRITE PAST DURATION

(He/she) was writing (for a long time).

The example 4 above conveys the meaning of past durative verb with the three signs – it means

that (he/she) was writing (in past) during a long time. The same meaning can also be exposed by the repeated verbal signs, see the examples 5 and 6 below.

(5) WRITE WRITE PAST

(He/she) was writing (for a long time)

(6) DO DO DO

(He/she) is doing (it).

Interestingly, the verbal temporal markers may change the places. They can appear before or after verbs. Although there is no standardization in GESL, the advantage is given to the cases where these temporal morphemes follow (and not precede) the verbal signs.

Non-manual temporal markers in GESL do not dominate over the manual marking of this system, although in GESL there are some specific mimic markers for (non-indicative) mood.

### Conclusions

This paper is a first attempt to study the temporal system in GESL. It reveals the following markers of this system:

- Marker of the future tense,
- Marker of the past tense,
- Marker of the present durative,
- Marker of duration,
- Marker of perfect.

The paper describes only manual markers of the temporal system in GESL.

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## ენათმეცნიერება

## ზმნის დროითი კატეგორიები ქართულ ჟესტურ ენაში

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ქართულ ჟესტურ ენას აქვს თავისი დროის სისტემა. საერთოდ, ჟესტური ენები სივრცითი და დროითი ერთეულების მიმართ სპეციფიკურ დამოკიდებულებებს ამჟღავნებენ. მოქმედების დროის უნივერსალური ხაზი ჟესტურ ენებში ასეთია: სხეული არის აწმყო, წინ არის მომავალი, უკან – წარსული. ახლოს წინ არის ახლო მომავალი, ახლოს უკან – ახლო წარსული, ხოლო წინ შორს არის შორეული მომავალი და უკან შორს – შორეული წარსული. მცირე გამონაკლისის გარდა, ასეთი მიდგომა გაზიარებულია თითქმის ყველა ჟესტური ენის მიერ. ცხადია, ქართულ ჟესტურ ენაში არის შესაბამისი დროის ლექსიკაც. დროის აღმნიშვნელი სიტყვები ძალიან ხშირად მიუთითებენ წრიულობასა და ციკლურობაზე. ამასთან მნიშვნელოვანია, რომ ქართულ ჟესტურ ენას გააჩნია დროითი კატეგორიის მორფოლოგიური ზმნური მარკერები. კერძოდ, წარმოდგენილ ნაშრომში გამოვლენილია წარსული და მომავალი დროის მარკერები, ასევე სრული ასპექტისა და დურატივის რეფერენტები. სტატიაში განხილულია დროის სისტემის მხოლოდ მანუალური მარკერების შემთხვევები.

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