The Expression of Oxymoron in Taiwan Sign Language

Chien-hung Lin

Tunghai University, Taiwan

2021

The 16th International Conference on Role and Reference Grammar

Taiwan Sign Language

- Taiwan Sign Language (TSL) is a visual language that is widely used by approximately 110,000 deaf and hearing-impaired citizens of Taiwan.

- TSL belongs to the Japanese Sign Language family.

Taiwan Sign Language

- spoken languages: the auditory-vocal channel
- signed languages: the visual-gestural channel

- The features distinctive to signed languages, such as:
  - simultaneous morphosyntax
  - flexible word order
  - agreement pattern encoding on verbs
  - grammatical functions of non-manual signals

Purpose of this study

- This paper discusses the expression of oxymoron in TSL within the framework of RRG, with the aim of finding out how the concept of oxymoron is linguistically encoded through the visual-gestural channel, at the same time exploring the syntax-semantics interface in TSL.

Research issues

- How do two contradictory concepts, which are incorporated to describe the same referent, being linguistically encoded in TSL grammar?

- How do TSL signers structure syntactic representation to represent difference semantic interpretations of oxymoron?

- How does RRG provide a systematic framework for the expression of oxymoron in TSL?

Oxymoron

- Conceptually, oxymoron is understood as the ability of the human mind to combine contradictory and divergent concepts to explain events and experience (Gibbs, 1994).

The expression of oxymoron

- Condensed form

e.g., Tears are the silent scream of broken trust.

- Uncondensed form

e.g., Emptiness is like a weight, heavy on the heart.

The meaning of oxymoron

- Two contradictory attributes modifies the same referent.

- Two contradictory attributes are encoded in the same event.

The expression of oxymoron in English: modifying the same referent

- He had bitter sweet memories.
- What he said is falsely true.
- There is a love-hate relationship between them.
- Would you have the cruel kindness to give a quicker death?
- In the night, no one dared to disturb the sound of silence.

The expression of oxymoron in English: modifying the same event

- He hastened slowly to her assistance.
- He wished that he was ill, then he could stay away from school began groaning loudly.
- A Christian perspective starts with a changeless changing God.
- The dark night silently screamed.

The sematic structure of oxymoron

- Oxymoron in antonymic relation

- Oxymoron in contradictory relation

Oxymoron in antonymic relation

- It means that two direct antonymous features of the same conceptual domain are brought together to form an oxymoron, such as *bitter sweet* and *living dead* in English.

- Oxymoron in antonymic relation is also named as "direct oxymoron."

Oxymoron in contradictory relation

- It means that two contradictory features from different conceptual domain are brought together to form an oxymoron, such as *sweet sorrow* and *original copy* in English.

- Oxymoron in contradictory relation is also named as "indirect oxymoron."

The scope of this study

- This study focused on the oxymoron in which two contradictory attributes are used to describe the same referent, such as a *married bachelor*, *sweet sorrow*, etc.

Four constructions for the expression of oxymoron in TSL

Four constructions of TSL oxymoron

- Bi-clausal construction

- Equal comparative construction
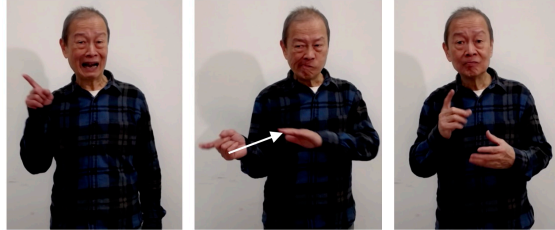
- Serial verb construction

- Simultaneous construction

bi-clausal construction

- $PSA_i + RP_i + V_1$, $RP_i + V_2$

- The contradictory attributes of the referent are denoted by V_1 and V_2 respectively.

- The two contradictor attributes designate different components of the referent. In other words, the RP in PSA and the other RPs (i.e., RP of V_1 and RP of V_2) are in part-whole relation.

HE$_i$ STEAL WHAT GIVE$_{i \to j}$ POOR PEOPLE$_j$. HE$_i$ PERSON   BAD   HEART   GOOD.

"He robbed the rich to help the poor. He is a villain with a good heart."

a. HE$_i$ b. STEAL$_{\to i}$ c. WHAT

d. GIVE$_{i \to j}$ e. POOR PEOPLE

f. HE$_i$ g. PERSON   h. BAD

i. HEART   j. GOOD

equal comparative construction

- $PSA_i + SAME + V_1/RP_j + EQUATE + V_2/RP_k$
- The contradictory attributes of the referent are denoted either by V_1 and V_2 or by RP_j and RP_K.
- Due to WHOLE FOR PART metonymic mechanism, the attributes are metonymically triggered by RPs.
- The word SAME is used incorporate the contradictory meanings.
- The word EQUATE denotes that two contradictory attributes are in equal status of the oxymoron.

HE$_i$ SISTER$_j$ TAKE CARE$_{i \to j}$ ABLE. HE SAME KID EQUATE ADULT.

"He taken care of his younger sister. He looks like a little adult."

a. HE$_i$ b. SISTER$_i$ c. TAKE CARE$_{i \to j}$ d. ABLE

e. HE   f. SAME   g. KID   h. EQUATE

i. ADULT

serial verb construction

- PSA+*SAME*+V_1+V_2

- The contradictory attributes of the referent are denoted by V_1 and V_2 respectively.

- To incorporate the contradictory meanings, the word SAME is employed.

- In general, V_1 is related to the topic information, while V_2 is related to the focus information.

WIFE   HUSBAND   GO SEPARATE.   HE   SAME   MARRY   FINISH   SINGLE

"He and his wife had separate lives. He looks like a married bachelor."

a. WIFE   b. HUSBAND   c. GO SEPARATE

d. HE   e. SAME   f. MARRY   g. FINISH

h. SINGLE

simultaneous construction

- $PSA+V_1$(with facial expression of V2) $+(V_2($with facial expression of V1$))$

- This construction is derived from serial verb construction mentioned above.

- The V_1 accompanies the facial expression conveying the meaning that is opposite to V1. Thus, the occurrence of V_2 is optional.

- When contradictory attributes are blended by means of non-manual features, the word SAME can be omitted.
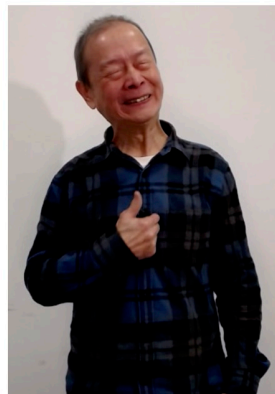
TUITION EXPENSIVE I BURDEN.

"The high tuition fees are my labor of love."

a. TUITION

b. EXPENSIVE

c. I

d. BURDEN(with facial expression of smiling)

TAIWAN SIGN LANGAUGE   FINAL THEY$_i$ WATCH$_{i\rightarrow}$ ATTACH IMPORTANCE.

<u>with head shaking</u>   <u>with head nodding</u>

I   HAPPY   CRY

"Taiwan Sign Language has finally attracted everyone's attention. What a bitter pleasure."
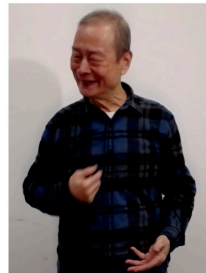

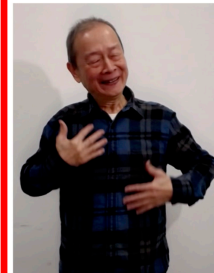a. TAIWAN SIGN LANGAUGE   b. FINAL   c. THEY$_i$

d. WATCH$_{i\rightarrow}$ e. ATTACH IMPORTANCE

f. I   g. HAPPY(with head shaking)   h. CRY(with head nodding)

- In addition to blend the V with certain antonymic facial expression, TSL signer could associate the two contradictory meanings with "in presupposition" and "out of presupposition" by means of facial expression.

HE   RECENTLY BUY CAR. THIS CAR LOOK OLD^{with disgusting facial expression}   NEW^{with surprising facial expression}
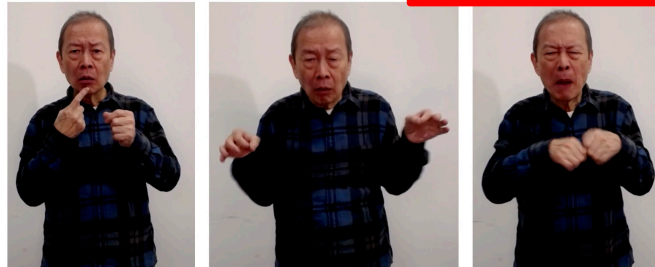
FEW YEARS SUDDENTLY BROKE.

He just bought a car. This car is a used new car, but many components have been broken in the past few years.

a. HE   b. RECENTLY   c. BUY   d. CAR

e. THIS CAR   f. LOOK   g.OLD^(with disgusting facial expression)   h.NEW^(with surprising facial expression)

i. FEW YEARS   j. SUDDENTLY   k. BROKE

The linking principles for TSL oxymoron constructions:

- Principle A: The Actor of V1, namely Actor1, is linked to the PSA position.

- Principle B: The Undergoer1 and the Undergoer2 are linked to appropriate positions in the clause.
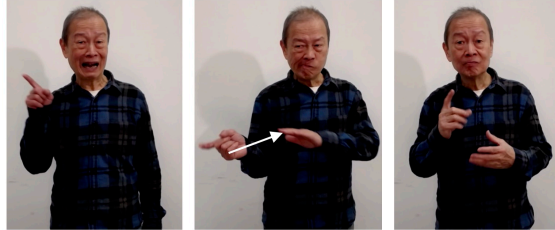
Linking of bi-clausal construction

HE$_i$ STEAL WHAT GIVE$_{i\to}$j POOR PEOPLE$_j$. HE$_i$ PERSON   BAD   HEART   GOOD.

"He robbed the rich to help the poor. He is a villain with a good heart."

a. HE$_i$ b. STEAL$_{\to i}$ c. WHAT

d. GIVE$_{i\to j}$ e. POOR PEOPLE

f. HE$_i$ g. PERSON   h. BAD

i. HEART   j. GOOD

$$\mathbf{be'}(\text{he, }[\mathbf{bad'}\text{ (person)}]) \wedge \mathbf{be'}(\text{he, }[\mathbf{good'}\text{(heart)}])$$

SENTENCE

CLAUSE   CLAUSE

CORE   CORE

RP   RP   NUC   RP   NUC

PRED   PRED

HE   PERSON   BAD   HEART   GOOD

Ø

Actor1   Undergoer1   Actor2   Undergoer2
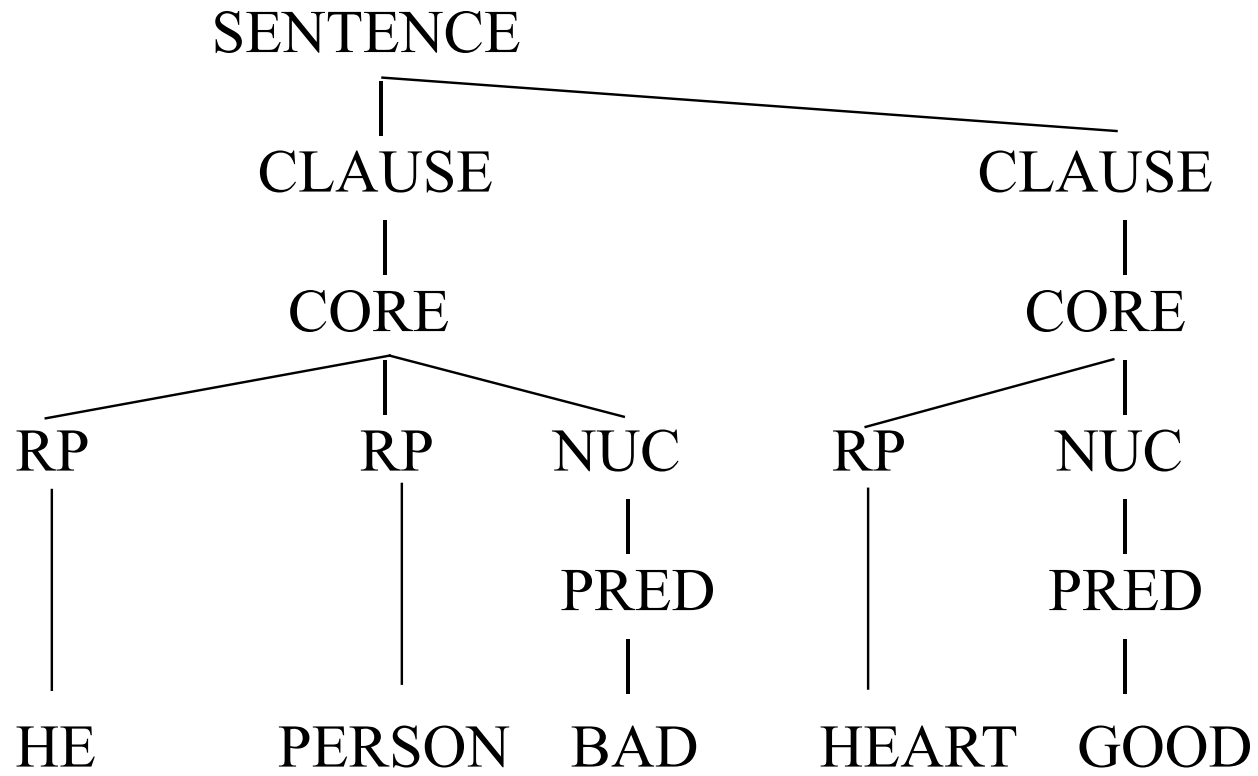
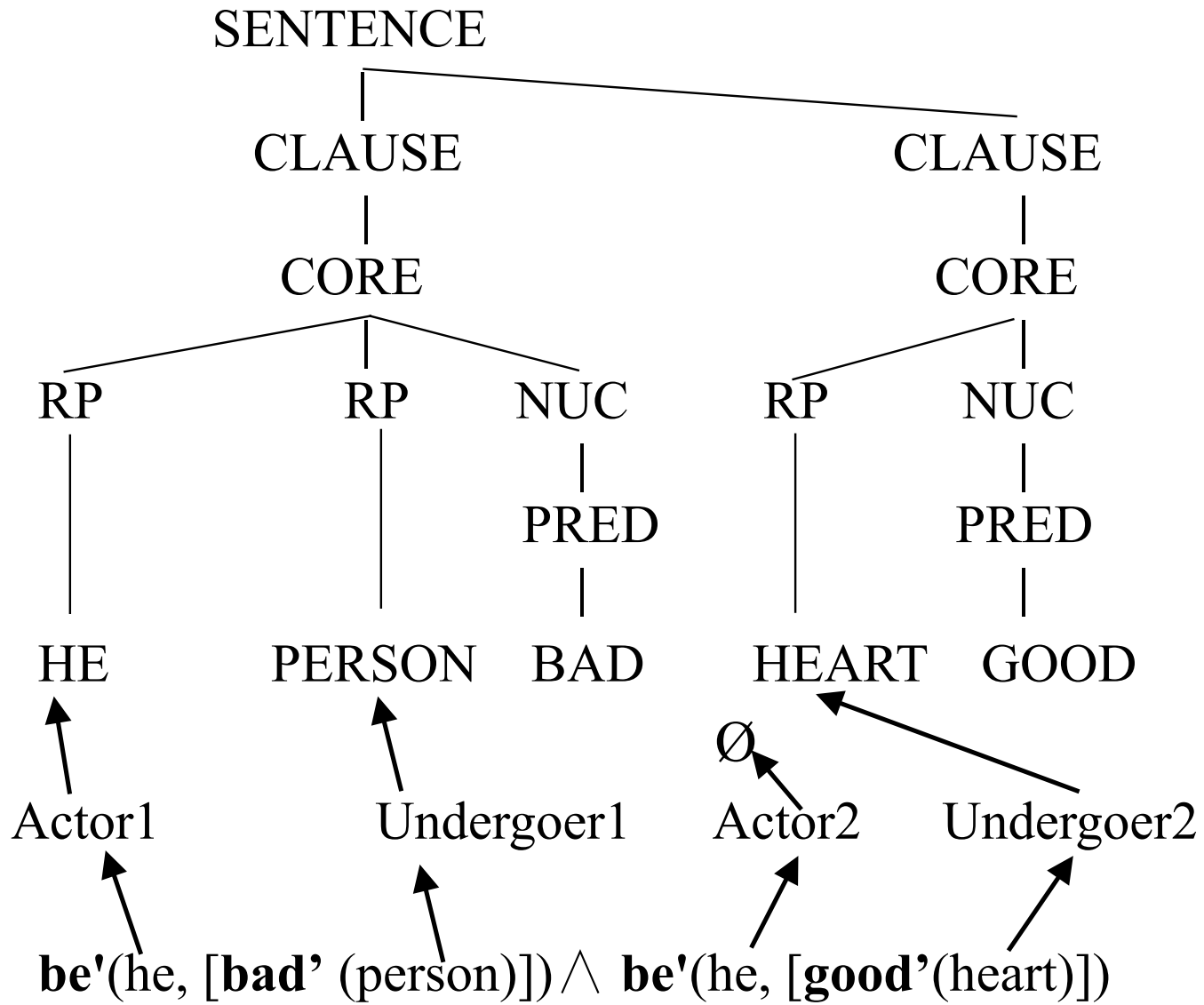**be'**(he, [**bad'** (person)]) $\wedge$ **be'**(he, [**good'**(heart)])

Linking of equal comparative construction

HE_i   SISTER_j   TAKE CARE $_{i \to j}$ ABLE.   HE   SAME   KID   EQUATE   ADULT.

"He taken care of his younger sister. He looks like a little adult."

a. HE$_i$ b. SISTER$_j$ c. TAKE CARE $_{i \to j}$ d. ABLE
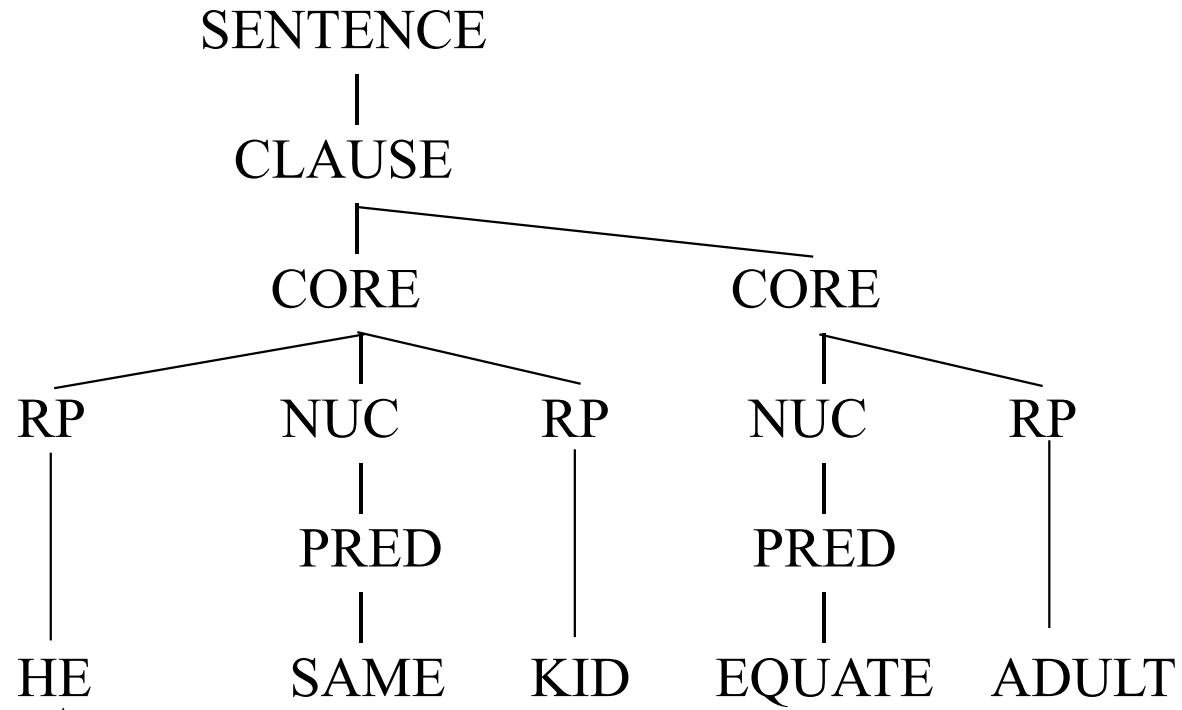

e. HE   f. SAME   g. KID   h. EQUATE

i. ADULT

                              SENTENCE
                                 |
                              CLAUSE
                          /   \
                      CORE   CORE
                 / | \   /   \
               RP   NUC   RP   NUC   RP
                | | | | |
                | PRED | PRED |
                | | | | |
               HE   SAME   KID   EQUATE   ADULT

be'(he, (kid)) ∧ **EQUATE' (be'** (he (adult)))

SENTENCE

CLAUSE

CORE   CORE

RP   NUC   RP   NUC   RP

PRED   PRED

HE   SAME   KID   EQUATE   ADULT
Ø

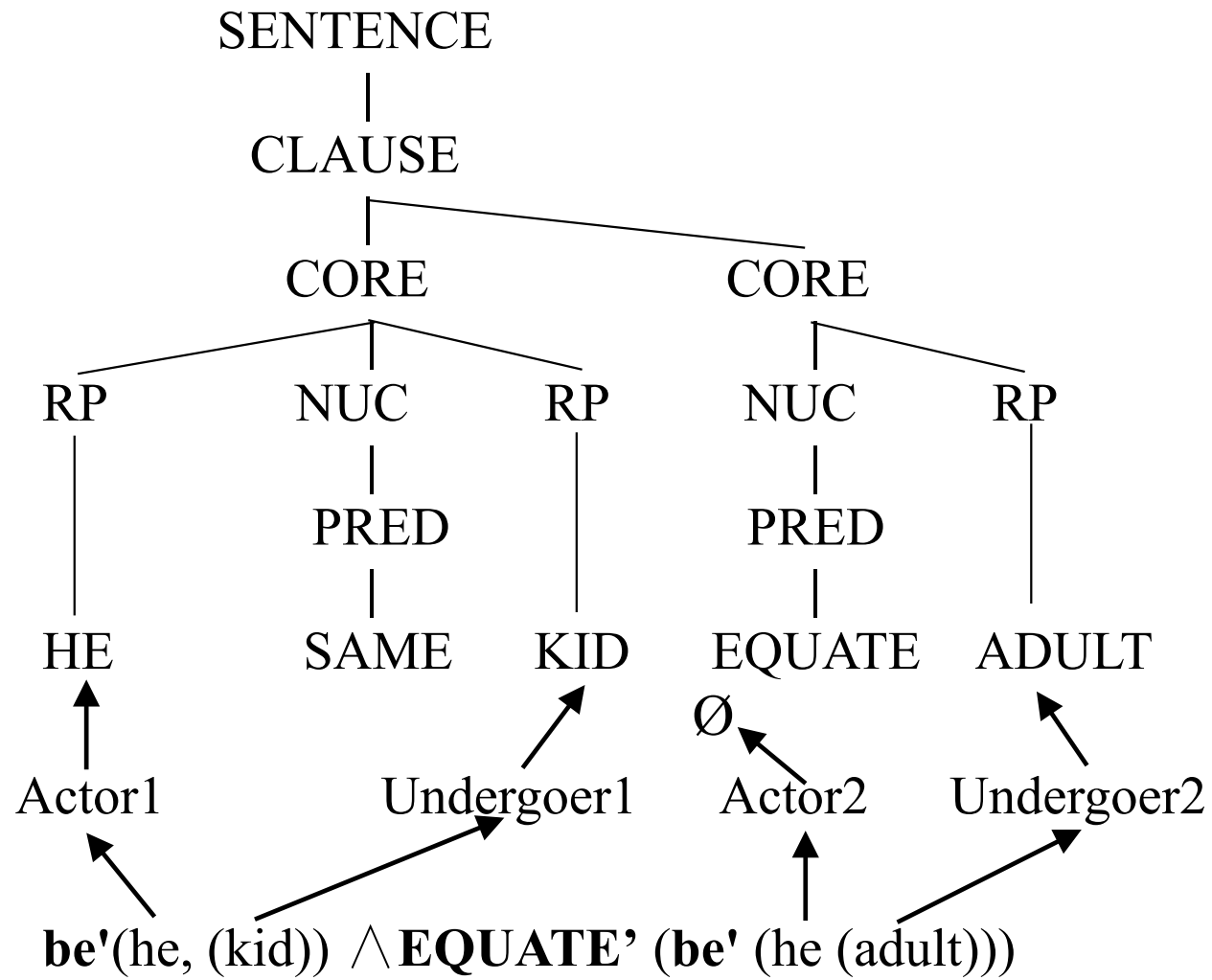Actor1   Undergoer1   Actor2   Undergoer2

be'(he, (kid)) $\wedge$ **EQUATE' (be'** (he (adult)))

Linking of serial verb construction

WIFE   HUSBAND   GO SEPARATE.   HE   SAME   MARRY   FINISH   SINGLE

"He and his wife had separate lives. He looks like a married bachelor."

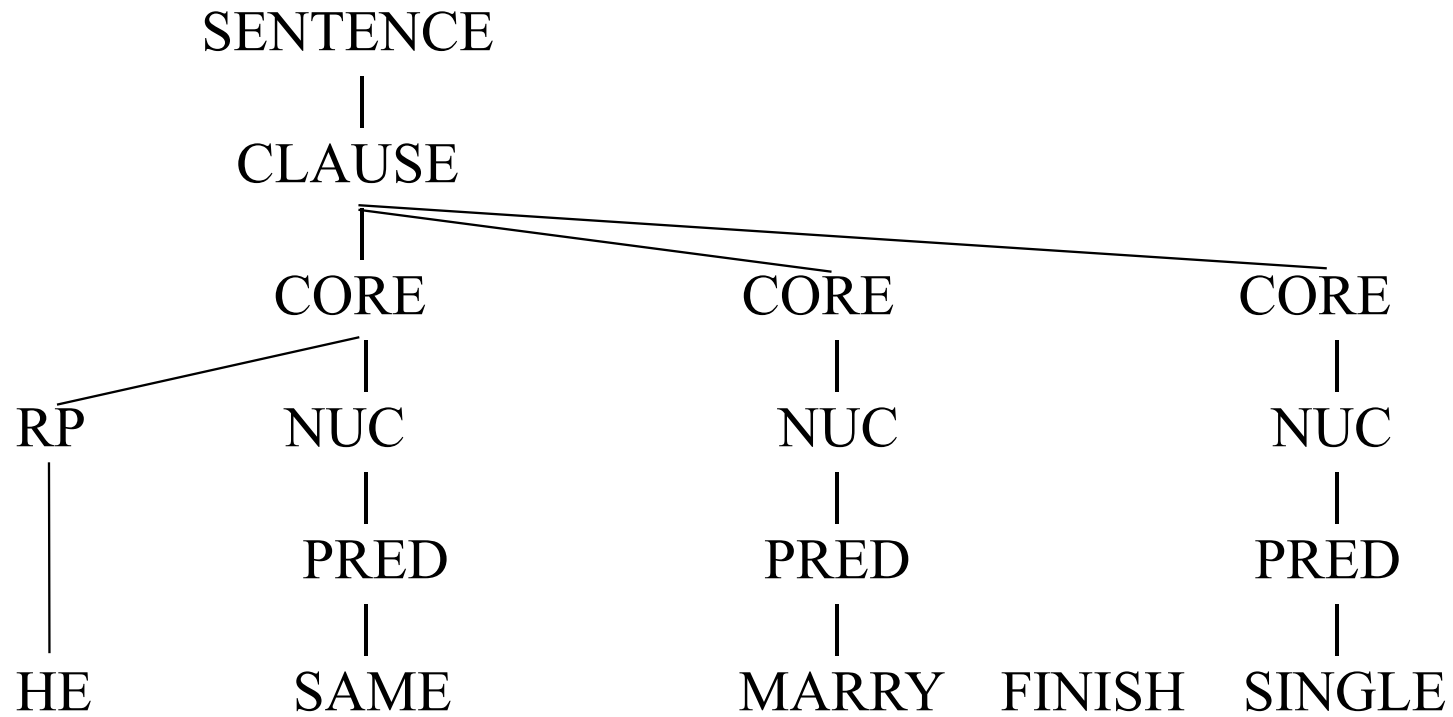a. WIFE   b. HUSBAND   c. GO SEPARATE

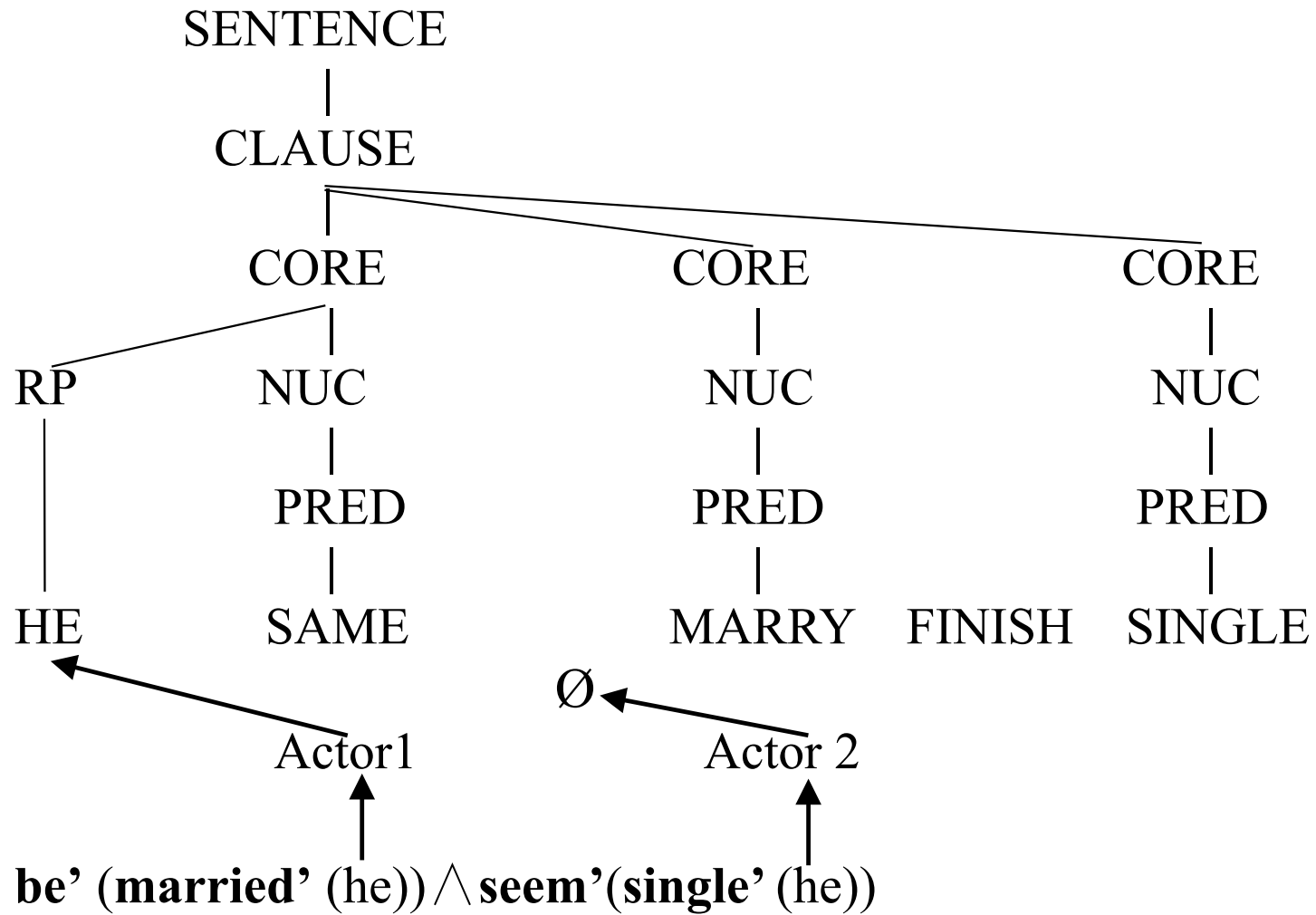

d. HE   e. SAME   f. MARRY   g. FINISH

h. SINGLE

```
                    SENTENCE
                        |
                    CLAUSE
                      /  |  \
               CORE      CORE       CORE
               /  |        |          |
            RP   NUC      NUC        NUC
            |     |        |          |
            |   PRED     PRED       PRED
            |     |        |          |
           HE   SAME    MARRY  FINISH  SINGLE
```

be' (married' (he)) $\wedge$ **seem'(single'** (he))

SENTENCE

CLAUSE

CORE — CORE — CORE

RP — NUC — NUC — NUC

PRED — PRED — PRED

HE — SAME — MARRY — FINISH — SINGLE

Ø

Actor1 — Actor 2

be' (married' (he)) ∧ **seem'(single'** (he))

Linking of simultaneous construction

TAIWAN SIGN LANGAUGE   FINAL THEY$_i$ WATCH$_{i\rightarrow}$ ATTACH IMPORTANCE.

<u>with head shaking</u>   <u>with head nodding</u>

I   HAPPY   CRY

"Taiwan Sign Language has finally attracted everyone's attention. What a bitter pleasure."
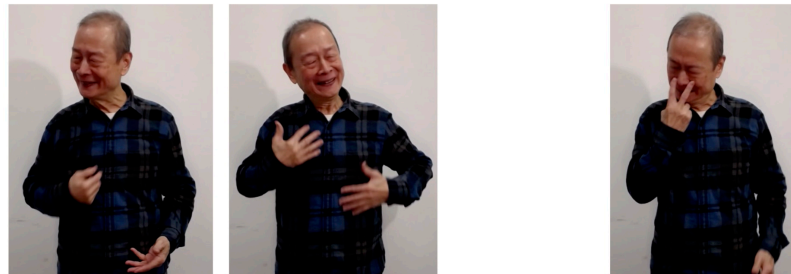

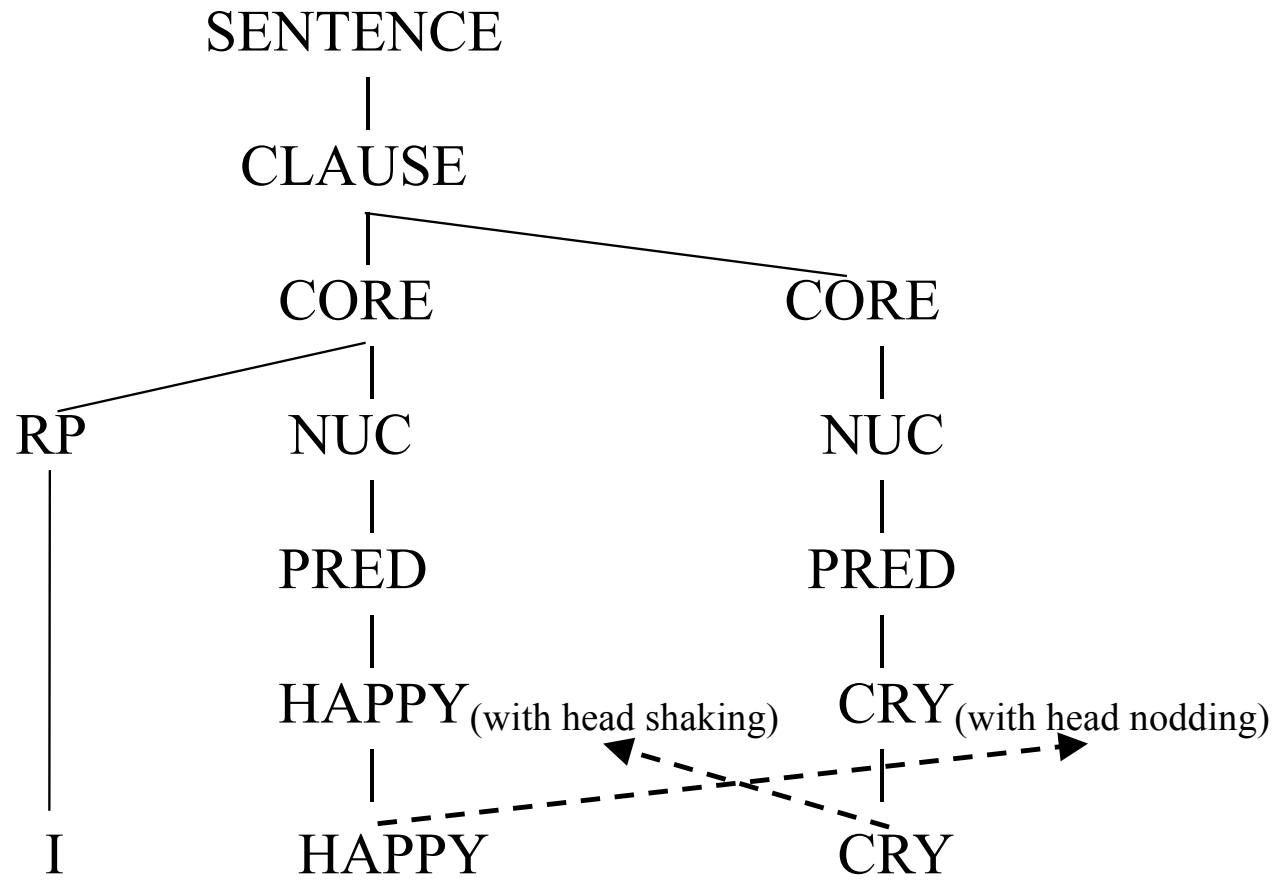a. TAIWAN SIGN LANGAUGE   b. FINAL   c. THEY$_i$

d. WATCH$_{i\rightarrow}$ e. ATTACH IMPORTANCE

f. I   g. HAPPY(with head shaking)   h. CRY(with head nodding)

SENTENCE
CLAUSE
CORE   CORE
RP   NUC   NUC
PRED   PRED
HAPPY (with head shaking)   CRY (with head nodding)
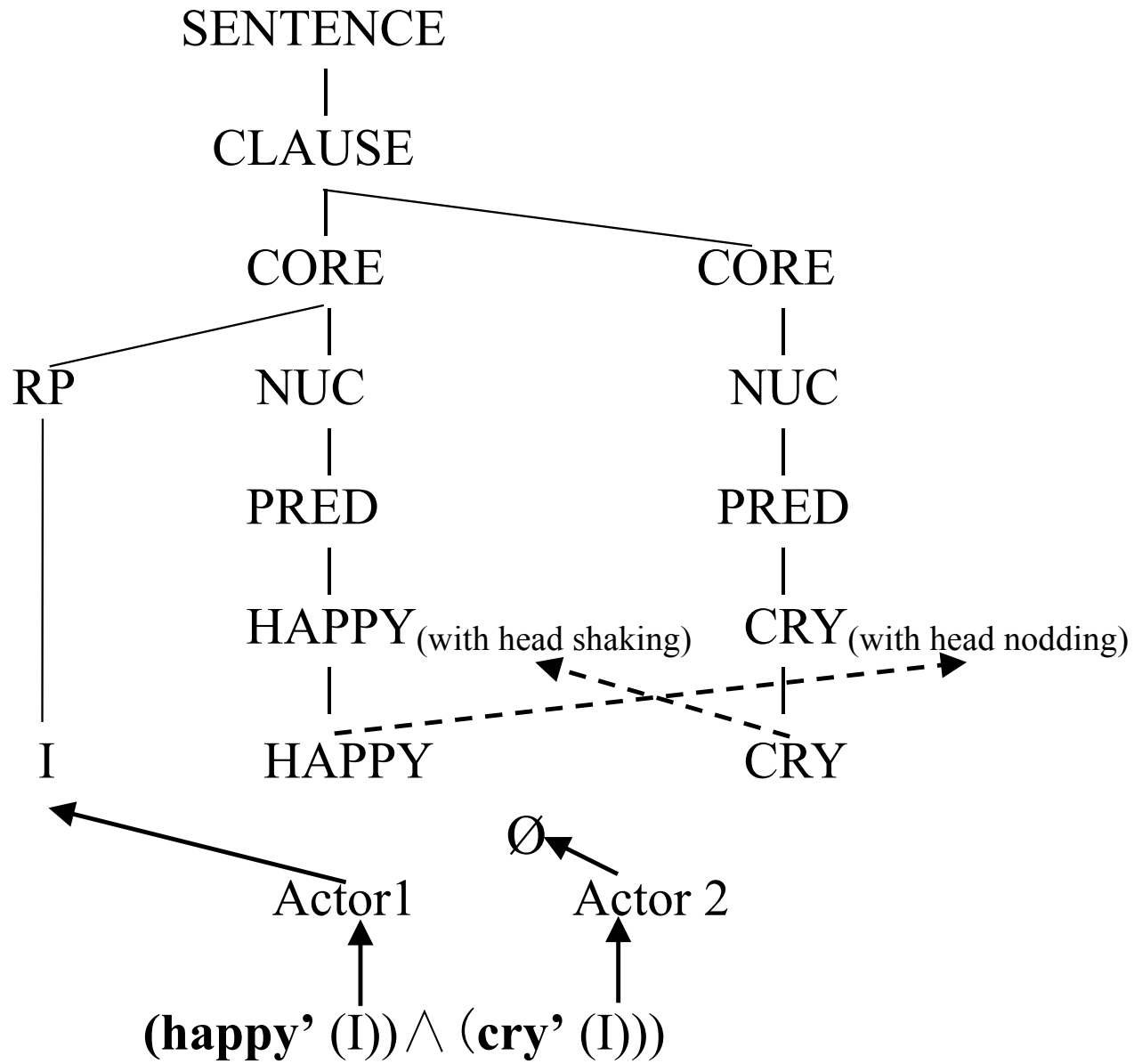I   HAPPY   CRY

(**happy'** (I))∧(**cry'** (I)))

Conclusion

- TSL signers could encode the concept that two contradict attributes describe the same referent by means of visual-gestural channel.

- Due to semantic interaction of contradictor attributes, oxymoron may have different interpretations in different contexts. Thus, the four different constructions are used, namely bi-clausal construction, equal comparative construction, serial verb construction, and simultaneous construction.

Conclusion

- To accommodate two conflict attributes, TSL signers make use of non-manual features, either conveying antonymic meaning or revealing the information of signer's presupposition, and incorporate them on the form of verbs.

Thank you for your time and attention.