
6 Reporting and role shift

Summary 6.1 Attitude role shift and (in)direct speech. – 6.2 Action role shift.

In LIS, role shift [SYNTAX 3.3.3] is characterised by particular semantic and morphosyntactic properties.

Semantically, the expressions that are signed under role shift are somehow interpreted ‘from another person’s perspective’ than the actual signer, or ‘with respect to another context’ than the context of the actual speech act.


Morpho-syntactically, role shift is typically marked overtly by some non-manual articulation, which may involve: i) body shift or change in body posture, ii) head movement, iii) change in the direction of eye gaze, and/or iv) altered facial expressions in order to mark that the signer is adopting somebody else’s perspective.

Note that role shift in LIS can be used to report utterances or thoughts of another person (so called *attitude role shift*) [PRAGMATICS 6.1] or to report the actions another person performed (so called *action role shift*) [PRAGMATICS 6.2].

6.1 Attitude role shift and (in)direct speech

Attitude role shift is typically used to report utterances, thoughts, or attitudes of other persons. The following sentence illustrates the oc-

currence of attitude role shift. Several features should be stressed. First, after the main verb the signer shifts his body towards the locus associated to the main subject (GIANNI) to indicate that the rest of the utterance should be interpreted from this person's perspective. Second, and related to this, the first person pronoun IX_1 in the embedded subject position does not refer to the actual speaker, as is normally the case with indexical pronouns, but, rather, to the person whose perspective is adopted (namely GIANNI). Finally, TOMORROW is evaluated with respect to the moment of Gianni's utterance, whence the translation.

rs: Gianni 


YESTERDAY GIANNI_a IX_a 3_a TELL₁ IX₁ TOMORROW LEAVE

'Yesterday Gianni told me that he would leave today.'

Attitude role shift is functionally similar to direct speech in spoken languages. By using direct speech, one reports an utterance from the perspective of the person to whom that utterance is attributed. If yesterday Gianni said the sentence 'I'll leave tomorrow' and I want to report this to someone else by using direct speech, I can utter the sentence 'Gianni said: 'I'll leave tomorrow''.

6.2 Action role shift

In action role shift, the signer *enacts* or takes the role of another person. In the following sentence, the use of role shift allows the signer to show, instead of describing it, the gracious act of Gianni. Action role shift allows to express how the action is performed by including the body language of the protagonist of the action.

rs: Gianni 

GIANNI HOUSE ARRIVE MARIA_a IX₁ FLOWER₁ CL(closed 5):
'give_flower'_{3a}

'Gianni arrived home. He donated flowers to Maria.'

Information on Data and Consultants

The video clips exemplifying the linguistic data have been produced by a LIS native signer coming from the northern part of Italy and involved in the SIGN-HUB Project.

Authorship Information

Carlo Cecchetto