

Skill Development Activity: IMPROVING SPATIAL STRUCTURING Classifier Use - ASL Texts

Classifiers fall into a variety of classes. According to the Signing Naturally (2014) curriculum, published by Dawn Sign Press, there are eight.

1. Semantic Classifier

Semantic classifiers are proforms that function as "pronoun" that replaces a noun (or as noun and verb combined). Some examples of semantic classifiers are: cl-1 (e.g. a person), cl-2 (e.g. two persons), cl-2-upsidedown (a standing person), cl-2bent (e.g. an animal), etc.

2. Descriptive Classifier

Descriptive classifiers are used to describe shape, size, texture, or a pattern of a noun. Examples include stripes on a shirt, width or narrowness of a corridor, shape, length and thickness of a mustache, surface of a road that is under repair, etc.

3. Instrument Classifier

The handshapes of instrument classifiers describe how an object is handled. Examples include using a tool, holding a book, cutting with a knife, pushing a button, buttoning a shirt, lifting a jar lid, pulling a nail, removing a book from a shelf, etc.

4. Element Classifiers

These classifiers use both the handshapes and movements to describe the property and movement of the elements of fire, water, and air. Examples could include showing a fire raging across a vast amount of land or engulfing an entire house.

5. Locative Classifier

Two types of locative classifiers are 1) location and 2) pathline.

Locative classifier is used to indicate a location of something, or the position relative to another. It is also used as a pathline of the object and its movement and/or distance. For example, the relationship of a house to the garage would show location, and the path from the opening of the garage door to the backdoor of the house would show the pathline. Or, if a particular book is located on the third shelf down, fifth book over from the left, of a five-shelf bookcase, the path from the bookcase top shelf down to the third shelf, and over from the left to the right by five books to show the specific location of the book would be the pathway.

6. Body Classifier

Body classifier uses a direct contact with most of the upper frontal part of the body to refer to a part of the body. For example, hands "holding a person", tapping on a person's back or shoulder, or, a person nodding their head to show someone nodding their head.

7. Body Part Classifier

Body part classifier is a symbol that refers to a part of the body beyond the frame of the signing area -- e.g. legs, back, feet, etc. For example, you utter the ASL word #foot and then use its classifier (e.g. the passive hand) to represent the foot. Or, you would use an CL-S handshape to represent a head shaking no. Or, you would use the CL-index finger of both hands, crossed, to represent legs crossed.

8. Plural Classifier

Plural classifier is a plural symbol of a noun or subject. Some examples are a) CL-open-hand, horizontal, palm down for "many birds flying in the sky" or b) CL-horizontal 3-handshape representing a car parked in a lot, held, while the non-dominant hand replicates and moves that handshape across the lot, would show multiple cars parked in the lot.

In this guide, you will analyze a series of short ASL texts to determine how ASL speakers use classifier constructs to convey meaning and as part of the grammatical feature of spatial structuring. You will also practice translating the ASL classifier constructs into equivalent spoken English words/phrases, and then integrate that information into an interpretation of the ASL message into spoken English. In another guide, you will focus on translating English words and phrases into ASL classifier constructs.

Exercise A: Let's practice the process you are being asked to apply in this guide. Consider the following ASL text entitled A Cross Country Mishap. This ASL vlog is 1:03 minutes in length and the ASL narrator is discussing what happens to one individual during a cross country skiing competition. View the text first for comprehension, and then next to isolate and identify where classifiers and classifier constructs were utilized.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Np_AZLR29iw

Where did the narrator use classifiers in this text? What classification do the classifiers you identified fit into? How did the classifiers contribute to the spatial structuring of the message? How did the ASL narrator establish the topic, the individuals involved, and the specifics of what transpired in the story? What strategies did the narrator use to create a real-world orientation? Were there instances of close-up and long-shot perspective utilized? Record your findings.

How do your findings compare with the following list?

TIMECODE	CLASSIFIER TYPE AND MEANING
0:07 - 0:08	<u>Semantic Classifier</u> - CL:5 [both hands] showing people converging on the landscape for cross country race, start of the race and skiers moving across the terrain
0:09 - 0:12	<u>Descriptive Classifier</u> - CL:5 showing rolling hills and multiple trees across the landscape the skiers will follow for the race

0:14	<u>Body-Part Classifier</u> - CL:V to show legs walking in the snow
0:28	<u>Semantic Classifiers</u> - CL:1 for one person lagging slightly to the rear of the CL:5 group of skiers as they move across the terrain
0:38 - 0:42	<u>Descriptive/Locative Classifier</u> - CL:5 claw representing large rock located on the terrain in front of the skier <u>Semantic Classifier</u> - CL:1 for individual skier hitting rock and falling over it Narrator shifts to close-up orientation where narrator assumes character of the skier using <u>Body Classifiers</u> - CL:hands-up-in-the-air as upper torso moves forward depicting a fall constructing the action of losing his balance and falling over the rock
0:43 - 0:44	<u>Descriptive/Locative Classifiers</u> - CL:bent L on both hands for pond on other side of rock, CL:bent L on both hands for mud in pond
0:46	<u>Body Classifiers</u> - Close-up orientation of skier falling into the pond alternating with a <u>Semantic Classifier</u> - CL:1 representing the skier bent and moving forward in twisted fall over rock and into the mud
0:50	<u>Descriptive Classifier</u> - CL:5 representing mud, Close-up orientation for mud splashing up across skiers face
0:54	<u>Descriptive Classifier</u> - CL:5 representing mud, Close-up orientation for mud spreading across and down skiers face and onto clothing
0:56	<u>Body-Part Classifier</u> - CL:V for legs of skier as he slowly stands up from fall
1:02	<u>Semantic Classifier</u> - CL:1 for skier going off across the terrain in direction of the other skiers

Part of the application of these classifiers is the use of *constructed action* to depict one of the skiers falling behind, falling over a rock into a mud pond, getting up and leaving the incident moving in the direction of the other skiers. This alternating between close-up and long-shot orientation is a part of depiction in ASL. Depiction is another important aspect of incorporating a real-life, visual-spatial orientation to information and provides for a natural application of classifiers as part of the process.

With these examples in mind, along with any additional examples you identified, develop an English translation for each of the classifiers / classifier constructions. How would you articulate the information presented visually-spatially in ASL into an equally vivid and descriptive spoken English equivalent?

Once you have completed developing the translations of the individual pieces, practice incorporating them into an interpretation of the entire text from ASL to English. When you are comfortable with your interpretation, record it, share it with a mentor and/or peers for feedback, and re-do as the feedback

warrants, until you have an ASL to English interpretation that you feel is a good illustration of the meaning of the text and incorporates the English wording that conveys the information in a dynamic and descriptive manner.

You can take the process one step further by having someone who is unfamiliar with the original text to back-translate the English interpretation into ASL and then compare that translation to the original text. This will help you to gauge how effective you were in preserving the semantic intent of the original ASL text.

Exercise B: You will repeat the analysis process with additional ASL texts that you will translate into English. Here are the steps you will apply, followed by a series of short, but robust ASL texts for you to work with.

Step 1. Analyze the ASL text to determine how classifiers were used as part of creating a real-world visual-spatial orientation.

Step 2. Isolate and identify the classifiers and classifier constructs that exist within the text. What does each mean within the text? Identify the class of classifiers that were used - it is common to use multiple classes within a text.

Step 3. How would the same information be communicated in spoken English? Complete a translation of each of the classifiers and classifier constructs from the text.

Step 4. Now, generate an ASL to spoken English interpretation of the text in its entirety, giving particular attention to how you convey the ASL classifiers to create a dynamic equivalency in spoken English.

Step 5. When you feel you have a fairly solid interpretation, record yourself generating it.

Step 6. Conduct a self-assessment. Were you successful in applying the translations you intended? What would you do differently to make it more effective? Share the recording with a mentor and/or peers for further feedback.

Step 7. Incorporating your own self-assessment and feedback from your mentor and/or peers, re-do your translation and filming of it.

Step 8. If time permits, give the final English interpretation [audio only] to a peer unfamiliar with the text and your translation and have them back-translate it into ASL. How representative is the back-translation of the original ASL text? How might you improve your interpretation further to make it more equivalent?

Repeat this process with any of the following texts. With regular practice, review, and revision, this strategy will strengthen your ability to recognize and identify ASL classifier constructs in application and determine their English equivalence.

The following texts can be used to practice further application of the steps in analyzing ASL messages for the use of ASL classifiers and how to translate those into spoken English equivalents. These texts were selected because they are short and rich in use of ASL classifiers.

1. Egg Toss - 1:24 minutes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dppFp-LBEM>
2. Water Balloon - 0:56 seconds
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLi3cAoHiMc>
3. The Red Car Accident - 3:57 minutes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MArpnBdDdc>
4. The Dummy - 5:04 minutes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpSLx9LLQFU>
5. Pneumonia - 1:05 minutes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0x9b6gt7TEw&list=PL9C632E2215197724&index=2>
7. Lung Cancer - 2:22 minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmg_SqUDKFA&index=3&list=PL9C632E2215197724

Applying the same steps to texts that are longer in length and more complex in subject matter is also important. To that end, here are more complex texts with classifiers.

8. How the Lungs Work - 5:13 minutes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6msPKqw1QQ&list=PL9C632E2215197724>
9. The Digestive System - 6:15 minutes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35RrgzoiH4M>
10. The Heart - 6:08 minutes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ivNvP9i1nE&t=115s>

Exercise C: Receptive Recognition of Classifiers

- Select ASL texts that incorporate a high use of classifiers.
- Watch the text and every time a classifier is used, stop the tape and reproduce/ shadow the production of the classifiers.
- Then, make a list of English words that indicate what the classifier represents. Practice stating the classifier information in a concise and descriptive manner in English.
- Once you have identified and practiced all the classifiers in isolation, repeat the viewing of the text and state an English equivalent for the classifier information as each classifier arises in the text. State English words ONLY for the classifier information.
- The third time through the text, integrate your interpretation of the classifier information with the rest of the text.

Repeat this step as often as necessary until you are comfortable integrating the classifier information in concise and descriptive English.

- If possible, record yourself interpreting the text, and ask someone to listen to the quality of your descriptions and provide you with feedback.
- Re-do based on the feedback.

Exercise D: Journal

Maintain a journal of ASL classifiers that you observe occurring in ASL narratives and conversations, as part of your interactions with the Deaf Community. Practice choosing English representations for the entries and discussing them with a colleague to expand the possible options you could use.

Resources

Free Online Materials

ASL Storytime from the Department of Sign Language and Interpretation at Gallaudet University

- This series includes three volumes, each containing stories with a broad variety of ASL features.
- Available on YouTube.
 - Volume 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLxddLdxbOw>
 - Volume 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAGx5CXgmTU>
 - Volume 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xqx4wCZoCMU>

NOTE: These stories are good for practice of many ASL features so use them with other instructional sheets in addition to this one!

TerpTalks from the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC)

- This series includes diverse ASL and English texts available for practice interpreting.
- There is no charge for accessing these materials, although you may be required to register to access.
- Available on NCIEC's website: <http://www.interpretereducation.org/tim/terptalks/browse/>

Purchasable Materials

The following resources may be available for use from your local interpreter education program or through your public library. If the library does not have them, request that they purchase them for community use.

ABC Stories from Sign Media (www.signmedia.com)

- Creative use of the ABC's to create stories. Incorporates a lot of classifier information.

Edgar Allan Poe Chilling Tales from Sign Media (www.signmedia.com)

- Three short stories conveyed in vivid detail including classifier information. Each DVD is one hour in length.

Interpreter Practice Materials from Sign Media (www.signmedia.com)

- Set of 33 DVDs includes 12 simultaneous texts, 12 consecutive texts, 7 one-to-one situations, 2 small groups, 6 ASL texts and 6 English texts.
- Excellent for individual, study group, or classroom skill development exercises.

Pursuit of ASL: Interesting Facts Using Classifiers from Interpreting Consolidated (www.aslinterpreting.com)

- DVD containing thirty-five (35) short texts about a broad base of topics - ranging from contact lenses, wrinkles, buying fresh fish, octopus, nylon stockings, and Velcro - all being discussed in ASL with the use of classifiers.

Sherlock Holmes Mysteries from Sign Media (www.signmedia.com)

- Three short stories conveyed in vivid detail including classifier information. Each DVD is one hour in length.

Sport Sign Series from Sign Media (www.signmedia.com)

- Each section is 30 minutes in length and provides a brief history of the game, an overview of the rules, and commonly used vocabulary for that sport. Lots of classifiers used.