Control clause in Russian Sign Language and Sign Language of the Netherlands: a comparative analysis

(work in progress)

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Outline

- Background
  - Control clauses in spoken languages
  - Control clauses in sign languages (SLs)
- Study 1. Control clauses in RSL: WANT/ХОТЕТЬ
- Study 2. Control clauses in NGT (in progress): WANT/WILLEN
- WANT-clause in NGT and RSL: comparison
- Next steps:
  - corpus study: more predicates
  - grammaticality judgment test

Control complement clauses

Complement clause (CC) – subordinate clause functioning as an object of the main clause predicate.

I **know** [this story] nominal object

I **know** [that John likes this book] clausal object

Control CCs – the embedded subject is null and its reference is controlled by the matrix subject.

The boy$_i$ wants [__$_i$ to help a friend]

Compare with subject-to-object raising – embedded subject is overt and is NOT the same as the matrix subject:

The boy wants [**me** to help **a** friend]

Control clauses in SLs

Control clauses introduced by typical control predicates (e.g. want) are described for some SLs (e.g., Italian SL, Turkish SL and some others)

In contrast with other types of CCs, these allow for the center-embedding, i.e. SOV word order.

(1) GIANNI [COW MILK] **TRY**
"Gianni tried to milk the cow."

(2) a. GIANNI **TELL** [PIERO BIKE FALL]

b. *GIANNI [PIERO BIKE FALL] **TELL**
"Gianni said that Piero fell off the bike."

(Italian SL, Geraci & Aristodemo 2016: 117–119)

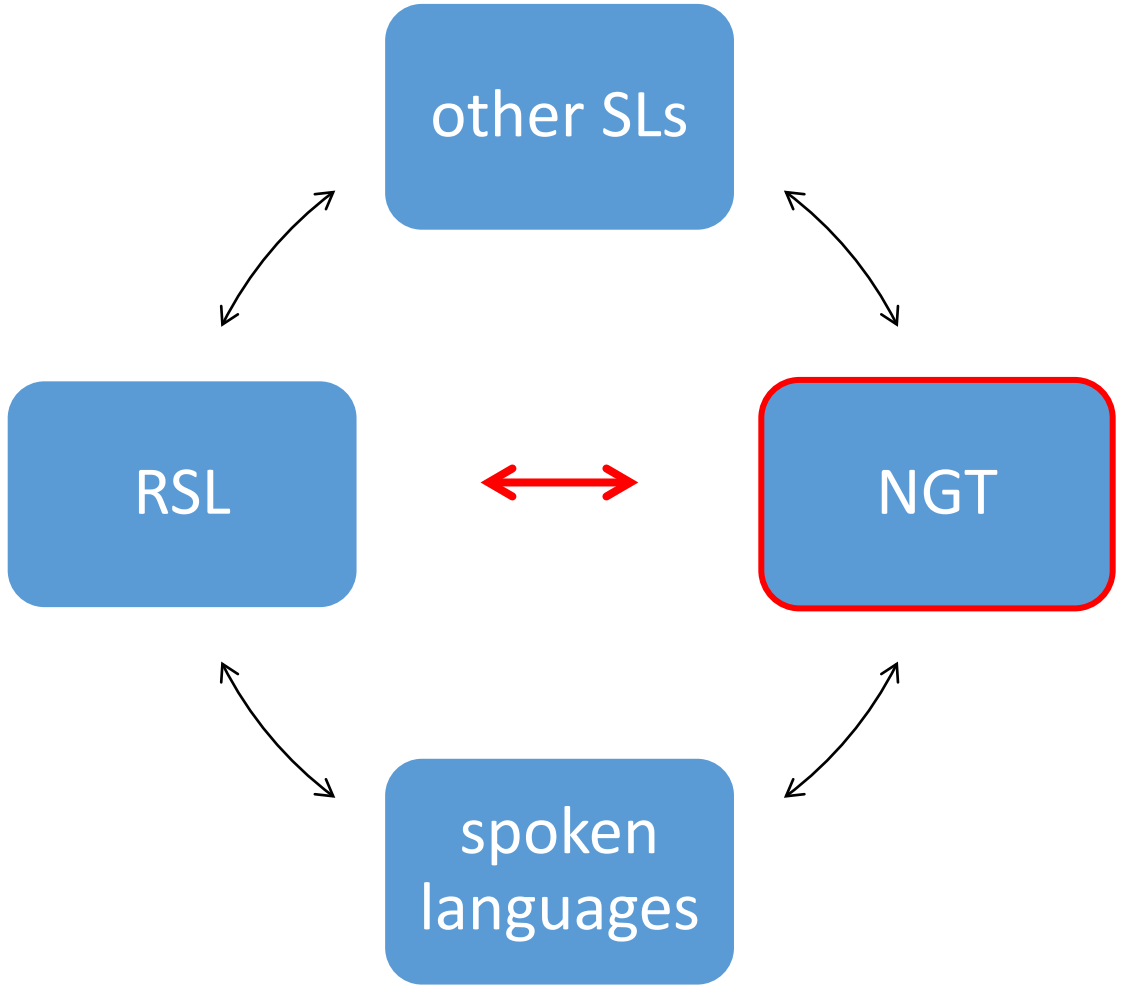
Overarching goals of this study

Study 1. Control clauses in Russian Sign Language (RSL) (Khristoforova 2020; Khristoforova (submitted))

Study 2. Control clauses in Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT)

To compare different control predicates (i) within one language; **(ii) between RSL and NGT;** (iv) across SLs; (v) across signed and spoken languages

Today's focus: WANT-clauses in NGT (and RSL) (based on corpus!)



Control clauses in RSL: WANT/ХОТЕТЬ

Control clauses: **61** entries in corpus
+ grammaticality judgment tests (GJT) (8 RSL participants).

(3) CAT_i **WANT** [$\_\_\_i$ EAT CANARY]

"The cat wants to eat the canary"

Control clauses in RSL: WANT/ХОТЕТЬ

Embedded subject ≠ matrix subject?

Corpus: embedded subject is always controlled by the matrix one!

GJT: embedded subject ≠ matrix subject is grammatical (score: 3.6/4) (4 participants).

(4) **CAT** WANT [**OWNER** FEED] 3.6/4

"Cat wants {his} owner to feed him"

Control clauses in RSL: WANT/ХОТЕТЬ

Extraction patterns: topicalization; scrambling

Corpus: sparse

GJT: topicalization was judged as grammatical (3.75/4), while scrambling is ambiguous (3/4).

(5) **BALL** **IX-3** CAT WANT [FIND __] 3.75/4
"That's the ball, the cat wants to find."

(6) CAT **BALL** WANT [FIND __] 3/4
Lit. 'Cat the ball want find'
"That's the ball, cat wants to find."

Control clauses in RSL: WANT/ХОТЕТЬ

Center-embedding

Corpus: 50% of corpus entries

(7) CAT [CANARY EAT] WANT
"Cat wants to eat a canary."

Control clauses in RSL: WANT/ХОТЕТЬ

Subject agreement in the embedded clause

Corpus: too few embedded agreement predicates

GJT: embedded subject agreement can be default. NB!: deficient subject agreement is not possible in the analogous matrix clauses or full finite CCs.

(8) a. BOY$_{[3]}$ **WANT** $_{3}$HELP FRIEND 3.6/4

b. BOY$_{[3]}$ **WANT** DEF/1HELP FRIEND 3.8/4

"The boy wants to help a friend"

c. *BOY$_{[3]}$ DEF/1HELP FRIEND 1.4/4

"The boy helps a friend."

Control clauses with WANT/ХОТЕТЬ in RSL: summary

	corpus	GJT (0-4 scale)
center-embedding	+	Ø
scrambling	-	3
embedded subject != matrix subject	-	3.6
default subject agreement	Ø	3.8

WANT-clauses in RSL are control clauses like those in Italian and Turkish SLs

Control clauses in NGT: WANT/WILLEN

Corpus: **80** entries

- CCs with WILLEN almost exclusively follow SVO

(9) IX-1_i **WILLEN** [$\_\_\_i$ GAAN]

1SG want go

"I want to go."

- Coerts (1994a; 1994b): basic word order in NGT is SOV; Van Gijn & Zwitserlood (2006); Oomen and Pfau (2017); Klomp (2021): SOV or SVO.

Control clauses in NGT: willen

Embedded subject ≠ matrix subject?

Corpus: WILLEN can introduce clause, with their own distinctive subjects (8 entries).

(10) IX-1 **WILLEN-NIET** IX-3 DENKEN ZO {...}
1sg want.not 3sg/pl think so
"I don't want them to think {that} ..."

Subject-to-object raising (as in English traslation)? Or full CPs with a null complementizer? Full analysis of other types of CCs is needed to distinguish the two.

Control clauses in NGT: WANT/WILLEN

Embedded material other than embedded predicate (e.g. object, adverbials, other subordinate predicates) can be moved to the middle-field of the main clause (i.e., scrambling): 7 entries

(10)	HOREND	PRATEN	**WILLEN**	[TOETSEN ___]
	hearing	speak	want	test
	“Hearing people want to test speaking”			

(11)	{IX-1}	IX-3	**WILLEN**	[ZIEN ___]	IX-1
	{1SG}	DEM	want	see	1SG
	“I want to see that”				

Control clauses in NGT: WANT/WILLEN

In CC, WILLEN can be highly reduced and assimilate with the following sign in location.

Corpus: 14 entries

(13) IX-3 **WILLEN** BELLEN

"{Mother} wants to call him."

Reduction in length

Assimilation in shape, location?, movement

Control clauses in NGT: WANT/WILLEN

Reduction is not observed with
nominal objects.

(14) {HOND} **WILLEN** IX-3B {VLEES}

“{The dog} want {the meat}.”

Control clauses in NGT and RSL: willen/хотеть

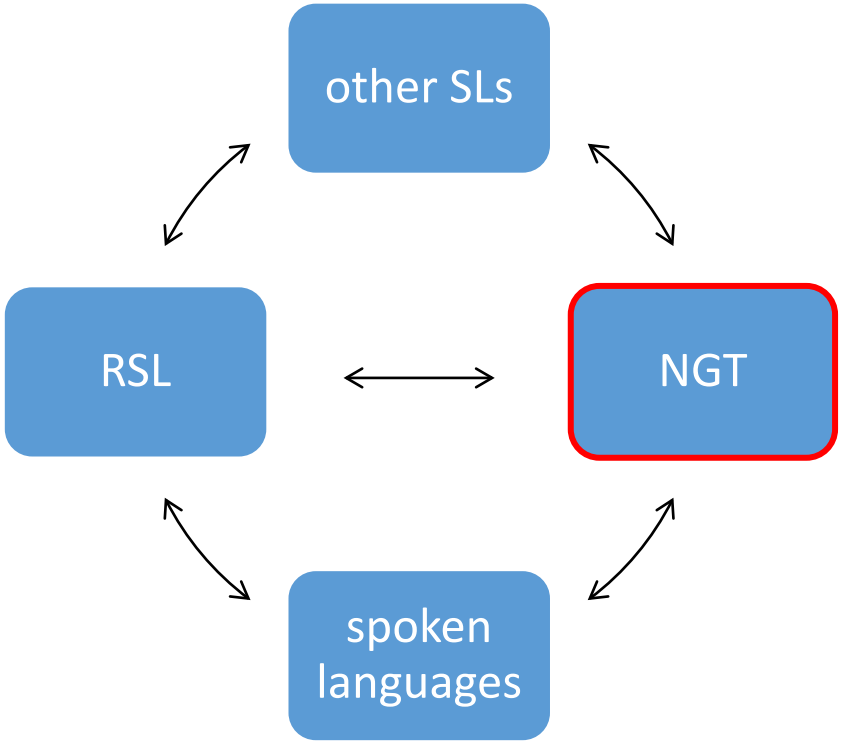
	NGT (corpus: 80)	RSL (corpus: 61 + GJT)
center-embedding	-	corpus: +
scrambling	+	corpus: - ; GJT: +
phonological reduction	+	corpus: -
embedded subject != matrix subject	+	corpus: -; GJT: +
deficient subject agreement	?	GJT: +

Next Step 1

- other “control” complement-taking predicates in NGT corpus + WANT/WILLEN
  - BEGIN/BEGINNEN
  - TRY/PROBEREN
  - LOVE/HOUDEN.VAN

  + modals (CAN/KUNNEN)

Research Question 1: do control predicates in NGT form a coherent class (as RSL control predicates do)?

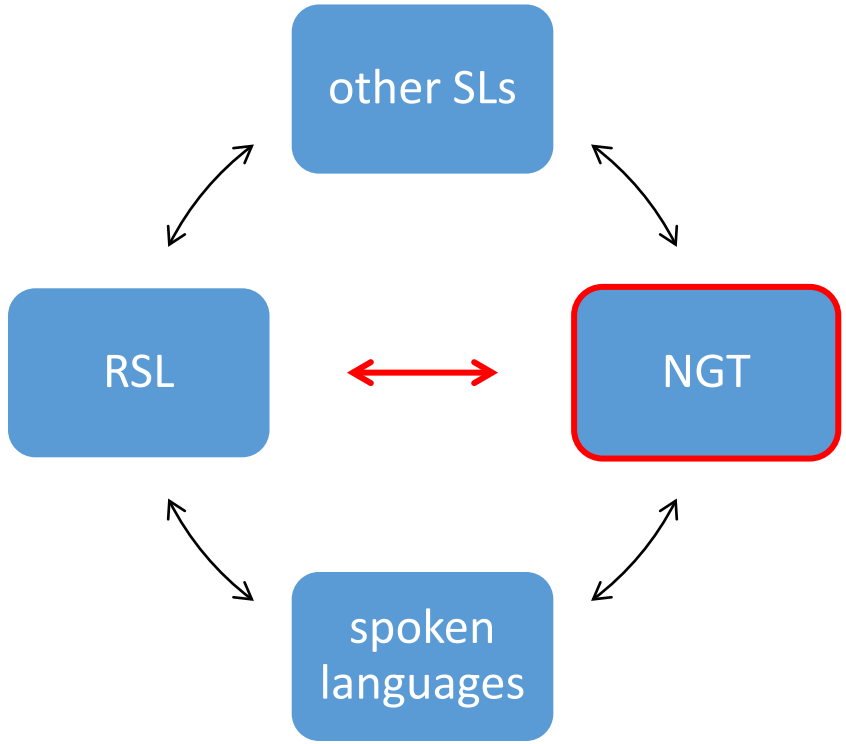


Next Step 2

- GJT for “control” clauses in NGT
- scrambling
  - what can be scrambled (O, Adv, V ..)?
  - scrambling vs. no extraction
- center-embedding - *worth testing?*
- subject-to-object raising - *worth testing?*
- embedded subject agreement

Research Question 2: NGT WANT/WILLEN vs. RSL WANT/ХОТЕТЬ

Research Question 3: The grammatical status of NGT willen (restructuring, modal, control …)



Bonus slides

On SL agreement and complementation hierarchies

Agreement across modalities

Steele (1978: 610):

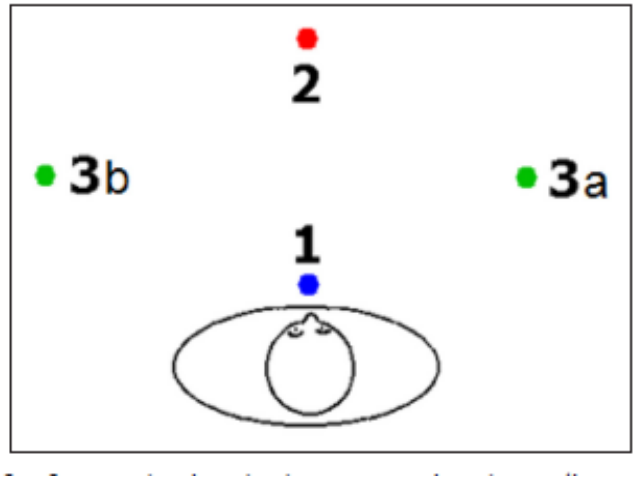
"The term agreement commonly refers to some systematic covariance between a semantic or formal property of one element and a formal property of another."

controller	*target*		
Boy	help**s**	his	friend
[3SG]	help[___]		

Agreement in Sign Languages

Agreement in SL is realized via the direction of the motion in verbal signs; start and end points of the movement encode person features of the arguments:

- the body of the signer – 1st person;
- the front – 2d person;
- the sides– 3d person.



(Pfau et al. 2018 : 3)

Agreement in SLs: RSL example

1-HELP-2

“I help you”

2-HELP-1

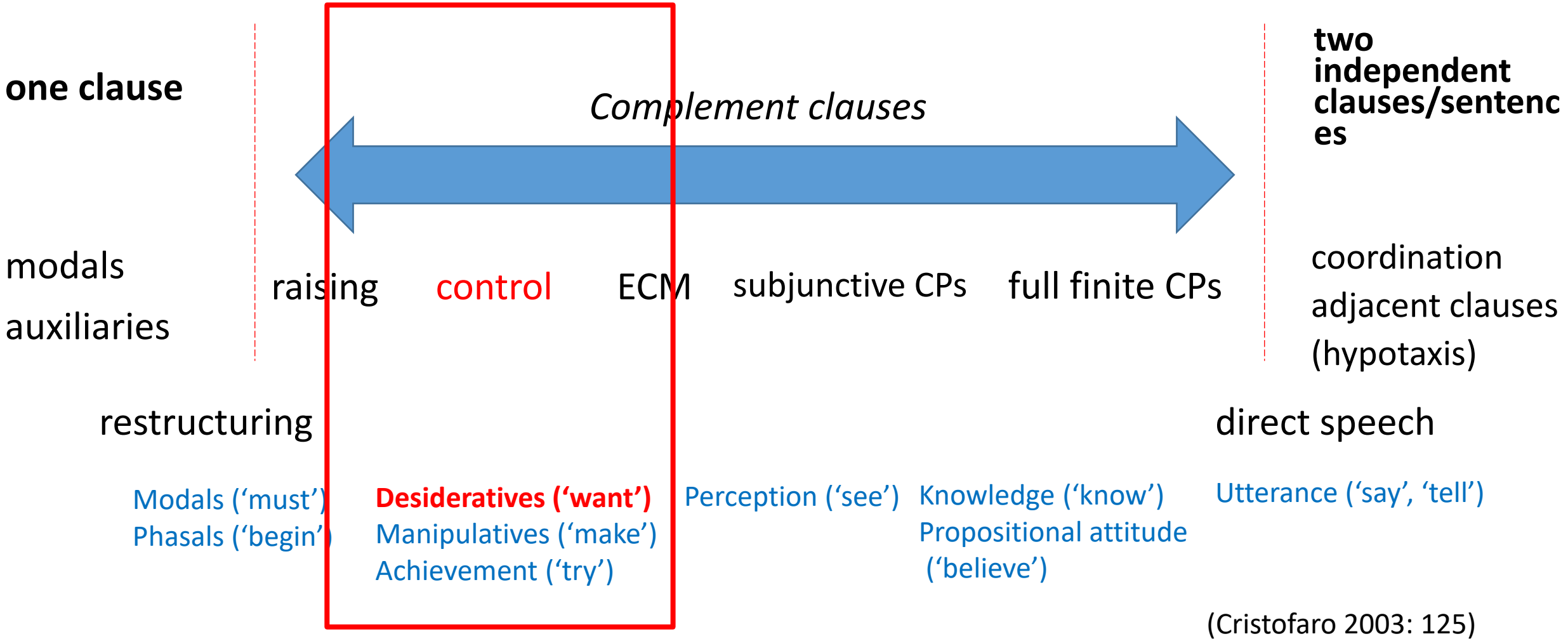
“You help me”

3A-HELP-3B

“He/she help him/her”

Embedded deficient subject agreement example

Syntactic integration and complementation hierarchy



(Cristofaro 2003: 125)