

One root to build them all: Roots in sign language classifiers

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BACKGROUND: Classifier (CL) constructions :

- convey information about the shape, size, handling of an entity involved in an event and/or present in a location,
- are realized in different forms depending on the syntactic properties of the referents in the structure

- Nonarbitrary relation between their form and meaning
- Is it possible to provide a compositional analysis of CL?

PREVIOUS STUDIES:

CLs as functional heads

(Benedicto & Brentari, 2004)

- One-place root
- Roots with the argument number info, no info on their syntactic properties
- Structure determined by CL head

CLs as agreement markers

(Zwitserslood, 2003 - NGT)

- One-place root
- Roots with no material
- CL type determined by structure (voice node)

Ext arg

Body Part CL

(BPCL)

Int arg

Whole Entity CL

(WECL)

Ext + int arg

Handling CL








(HCL)

PROBLEMS:

Important contribution of these works; however:

- Phenomenon-specific syntactic elements (B&B, 2004)
- No treatment of BPCL (Z, 2003)
- Counterexamples attested in Turkish Sign Language (TİD)

DATA

- H1: **APPLE** TREE^TREE FALL.CL:WECL()
H2: TREE^TREE TREE.CL:WECL()
'The apple falls from the tree.'
- H1: **WOMAN** TREE^TREE FALL.CL:WECL()
H2: TREE^TREE TREE.CL:WECL()
'The woman falls from the tree.'
- H1: **WOMAN** TREE^TREE JUMP.CL:BPCL()
H2: TREE^TREE TREE.CL:WECL()
'The woman jumps off from the tree.'
- H1: WATER^BOTTLE THROW.CL:HCL()
(S/he) throws the bottle.'

PROPOSAL: A compositional analysis

- to reflect the classifier types (WECL, BPCL, HCL)
- to utilize non-phenomenon specific linguistic tools

Lexical vs. CL predicates: No structural difference

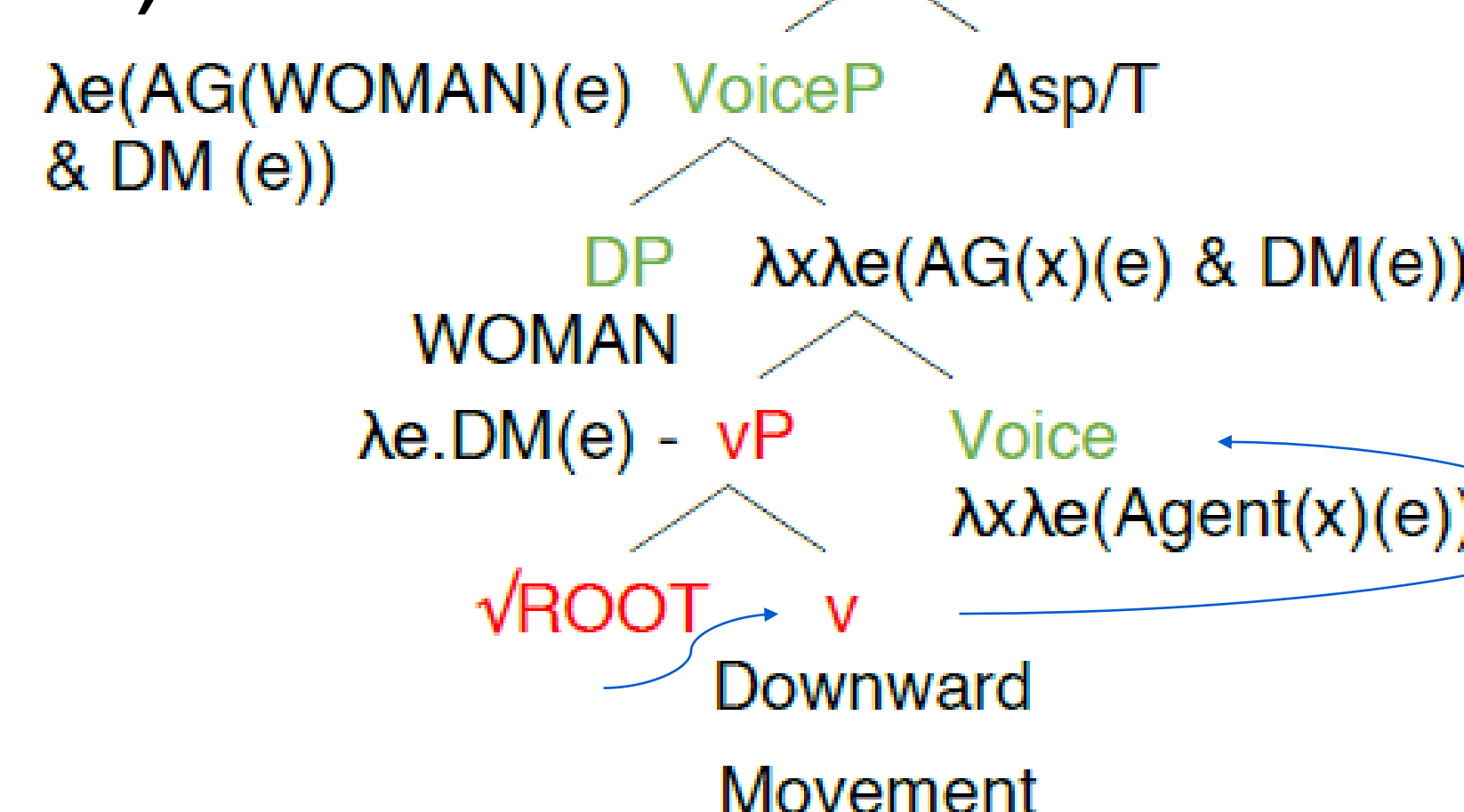
Root determines the presence of a classifier (Z, 2003)

What is new → Roots in CL are slots (Borer 2014)

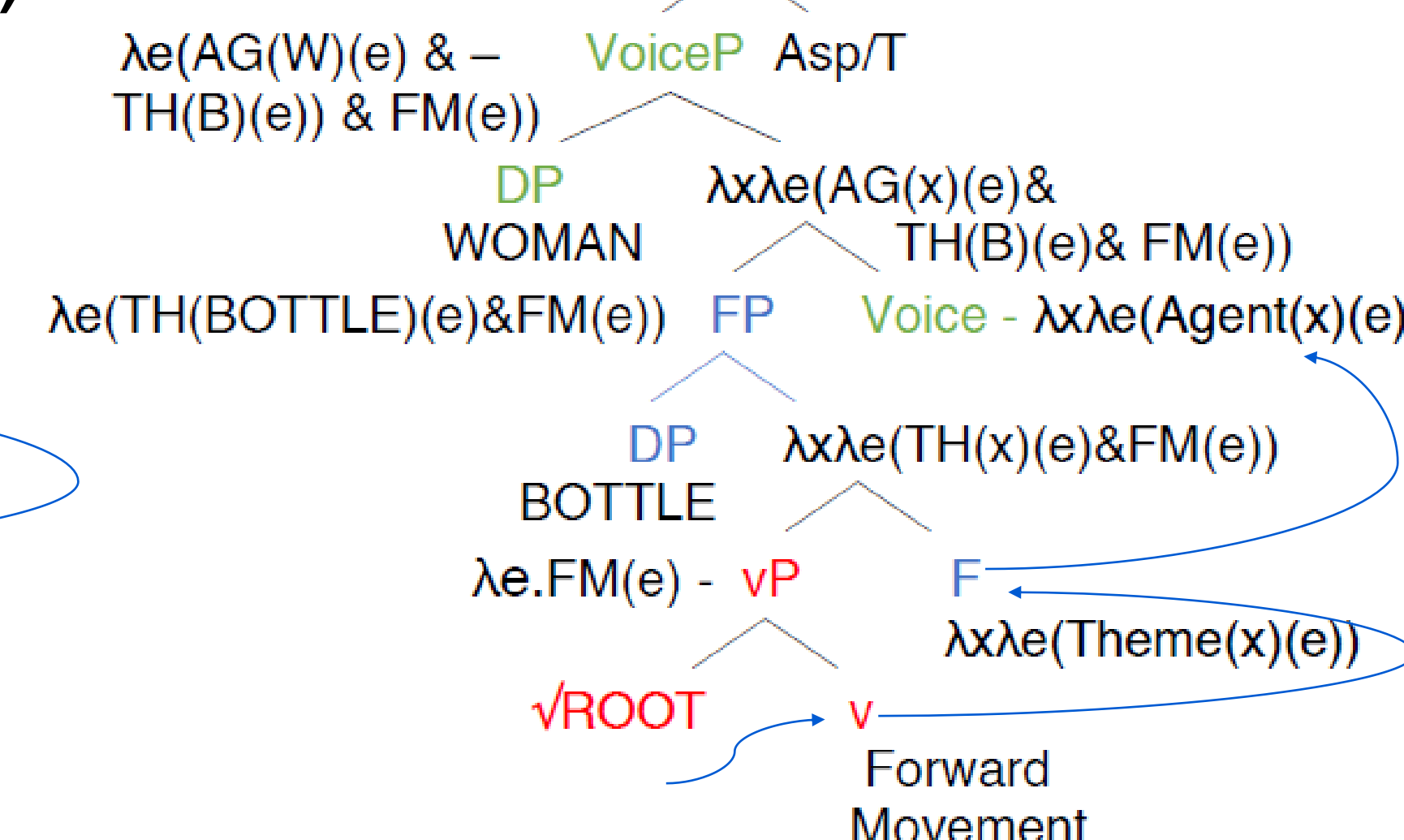
Roots severed from both arguments (Borer 2005, i.a)

Argument introduction - F (internal) and Voice (external)

3')



4')



Next step: Head-movement of √ROOT



Root cannot be pronounced since it lacks info (Z, 2003)

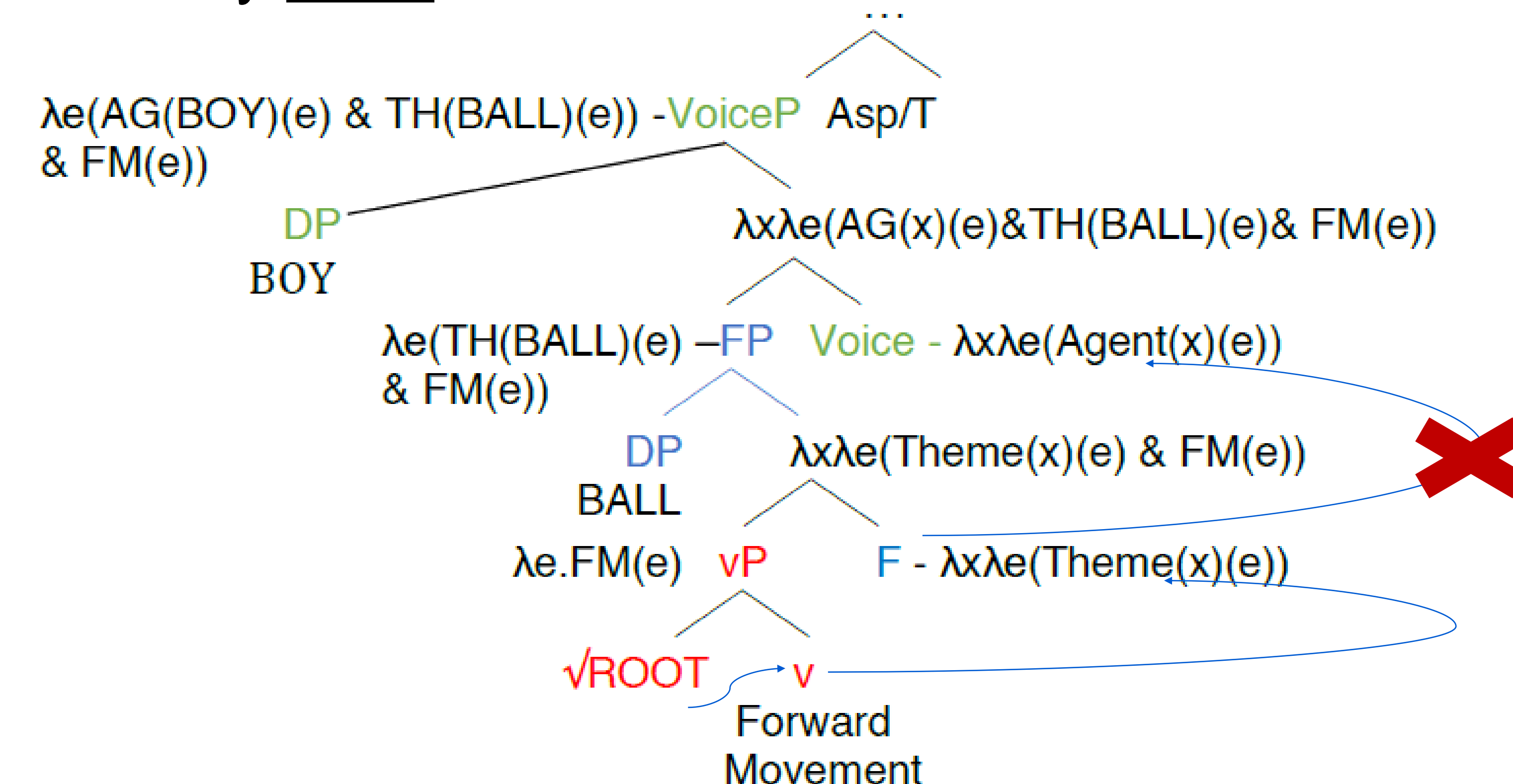
CL handshapes as pronominal affixes

DISCUSSION: The classifier types are

determined by the structure.

Counterexamples TİD data?

- H1: BOY BALL ROOT.forward.CL:BPCL()
H2: BALL BALL.CL:WECL()
'The boy kicks the ball.'



Presence of an argument on the non-dominant hand = disrupted head-movement = no portmanteau HCL

CONCLUSION:

- Roots in CLs as empty slots
- Both arguments introduced via functional heads
- Classifier handshapes as pronominal affixes
- Structure as the determinant of CL type
- Presence of non-dominant hand as a game changer

SELECTED REFERENCES:

Benedicto, Elena & Diane Brentari. 2004. Where did all the arguments go?: Argument changing properties of classifiers in ASL. Borer, Hagit. 2005. Structuring Sense II. Zwitserslood, Inge. 2003. Classifying hand configurations in Nederlandse Gebarentaal.

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