The MEAN constructions in Japanese Sign Language:
from causality to inferred evidentiality

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In this paper, we examine the Japanese Sign Language (JSL) sign MEAN, which appears in asking and answering the reason and marks inferred information. We discuss this within a proposed view of JSL as an evidential-prominent language (Takashima et al. 2018; Aikhenvald 2004; van der Auwera and Ammann 2005). We will claim that MEAN shows a change from more objective construal to more mental or subjective construal (Langacker 2008), that is, it is grammaticizing from a causal to a marker of inferential evidentiality. Although MEAN is conventionally used in the deaf signing community and has been analyzed as an epistemic modality marker in JSL (cf. Matsuoka et al. 2016), we find that MEAN usually marks causal clauses in interactive situations in which the signer seeks the reason for some observed scene, to fictive-interactional questions reported only by the signer, to purely mental questions in which the signer "asks" herself for the reason.

$MEAN_1$ functions as a question marker in both objectively construed, actual interactional questions, and in rhetorical or fictive-interactional question (Jarque & Pascual 2018) clauses; $MEAN_1$ is accompanied with mouthing *riyuu* 'reason'. In example (1) SUDDEN DISAPPEAR $MEAN_1$ expresses a fictive-interactional question: "Why did the puppy disappear? Oh, it's because …".

The sentence-final $MEAN_2$ in (1), GUIDE-DOG TEACH PURPOSE GIVE $MEAN_2$ provides the answer, much like a *because* clause in English. This mental or subjective construal of $MEAN_2$ is also shown in (2). Here, $MEAN_2$ marks an inference. The signer reports that she had observed a wet umbrella in her friend's hand, and the question "why does she have an umbrella" arose in the signer's mind but was not signed. She inferred that it is because it is raining outside. Her evidential inference is expressed with $MEAN_2$ and pointing at the (now fictive) umbrella. We claim that $MEAN_2$ functions not as an epistemic modal, a prediction with some degree of certainty, but as an inferential evidential marker (Shaffer & Janzen 2016). We conclude that MEAN is grammaticizing from a causal into an inferential evidential.

Examples

(1) NEXT-DOOR PUPPY EXIST KNOW / SUDDEN DISAPPEAR
$MEAN_1^{\text{mouthing}(riyuu\text{'reason')/chin-up/head-shaking/eye-squint/brow-furrow}}$ [ ]$^{\text{mouth-opening(aa)}}$ [ ]$^{\text{nod}}$ PT3
GUIDE-DOG TEACH PURPOSE $_1$GIVE$_a$ $MEAN_2^{\text{mouthing}(imi\text{ 'mean')}}$
I knew there was a puppy next door but it suddenly disappeared. Why? Oh, the reason is that the puppy was a guide dog and they gave it back (to the guide dog training center).

(2) [A friend of the signer came to an indoor café with a wet umbrella in her hand. The signer pointing at the umbrella and says:]
PT3$_{\text{(umbrella)}}$ RAIN $MEAN_2^{\text{mouthing(imi 'mean') brow-raise}}$/PT3$_{\text{(umbrella)}}$
Is it raining outside (which I inferred from your umbrella)?

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