PART FIVE

SEMANTICS

UNIT 21

The Meaning of Individual Signs

Semantics is the study of the meaning of words and sentences. So far, we have looked at the basic units used to construct signs—movements and holds, handshapes, location, orientation, and nonmanual signals—that is, the phonological structure of ASL. We have seen how these parts can be used to construct new units, that is, the morphological component of the language, and we have seen how units are put together to form sentences. But for people who use language to communicate with each other, they not only need to share the phonology, morphology, and syntax of a language, but they also must share a system of meaning. The symbols and combinations of symbols must have shared value for the users of a language. Semantics is the study of the rule-governed ways in which languages structure meaning.

Determining Meaning

How do we know what a sign means? When we see another signer use the sign CAT or HOUSE or THINK, how is it that we get the meaning intended by the signer from the combination of movements and holds, handshape, location, orientation, and nonmanual signals? Finding answers to these questions takes us back to the very first issue that we discussed, that is, the features that communication systems and languages have in common. You will recall that one feature that languages and other communications systems have in common is that they are shared by members of a community. The users of a language or variety of language determine what the meaning of a given combination of movements, holds, handshape, location, orientation, and nonmanual signals (that is, a specific sign) will mean.

Since meaning is determined by a specific community of users, the same combination of features, or the same sign, may have different meanings to different communities. For example, the combination of features that means NAME in ASL means ROME (the name of the capital city) in Italian Sign Language (LIS) (see Figure 85). The same combination of sounds that in spoken Italian functions as a feminine plural definite article—*le*—in spoken Irish means "with."

Users of languages all over the world commonly look to written dictionaries as the definitive source for the meaning of words and signs, but it is important to remember that the people who write dictionaries derive their definitions of words

NAME (ASL) / ROME (LIS)

Figure 85. The same sign can have different meanings in different signing communities.

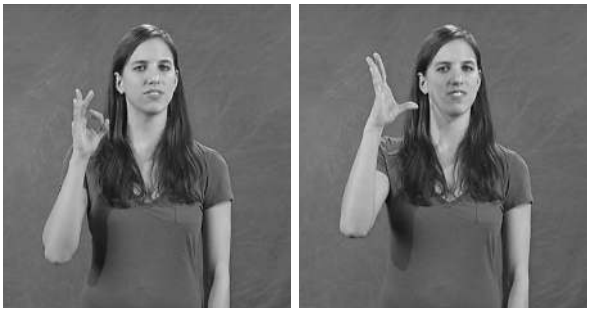
or signs by carefully observing the way words and signs are used by real people. Dictionaries for sign languages are unique in that, while they may be organized to reflect the linguistic structure of the sign language, they seem to be almost necessarily bilingual. That is, in addition to providing an inventory of the signs in a sign language, sign language dictionaries almost always also provide written glosses for the signs in the majority language of the community in which the sign language is used. Stokoe's *Dictionary of American Sign Language* was an exception because it did not present the signs by an alphabetical list of their English glosses, but rather by the parameters of location, handshape, and movement. The potential problem with bilingual dictionaries is that the same sign may have different English glosses assigned to it or different signs may be assigned the same English gloss. Therefore, the meaning of the sign may not always be clear from the gloss assigned to it.

Types of Meaning

Researchers have identified three different kinds of meaning: *referential* meaning, *social* meaning, and *affective* meaning.

Referential Meaning. Referential meaning is the idea, thing, or state of affairs described by the sign or sentence. For example, the sign CAT refers to a four-legged mammal with a tail, whiskers, and so forth. The meaning of the sign CALIFORNIA is the western state that has the Pacific Ocean to the west, Mexico to the south, Oregon to the north, and so forth. That state is the referent of the sign.

Social Meaning. Signs and sentences also provide information about the social identity of the language user. For example, certain choices of signs may reveal where the person is from, whether the person is male or female, or whether the person is African American or Caucasian. To illustrate this, imagine someone signing AWFUL with the strong hand pointing upward (Figure 86). Can you visualize a male signer using this sign? Most likely the answer is no. The reason for this is that most ASL users deem this production of the sign to be feminine. This is how social meaning is conveyed by this sign.



AWFUL

Figure 86. Social meaning conveyed by the signer.

Affective Meaning. Affective meaning provides information about the signer's feelings, attitudes, or opinions concerning a piece of information. Affective meaning can be conveyed by individual sign choice and by sentence structure. For example, a signer may be reporting a conversation that she had with another person in which the person talked about her work. One way to report the conversation would be to say "Alice explained to me about her fascinating research," while another way would be to say "Alice boasted to me about her boring old project again." Both sentences report the same basic information, that Alice talked about her work, but the signer's attitude toward what Alice said is completely different in each sentence. In the first sentence, the words *explained* and *fascinating* convey the meaning that the signer was really interested in what Alice had to say; in that second sentence, the words *boasted*, *boring old project*, and *again* clearly convey the message that the signer was not interested in what Alice had to say and had a negative opinion of her work. The difference in meaning between the two sentences is a difference in affective meaning.

Denotation and Connotation

The referential meaning of a sign or a sentence is often called its *denotation*, while the social and affective meaning is often called *connotation*. The difference between denotation and connotation can be illustrated with two signs in ASL that can be glossed as DEAF. The sign DEAF that is made with a 1 handshape that moves straight down from the ear to the chin denotes someone's audiological status and has a fairly neutral connotation. However, the form of the sign that is produced with a slow arc movement and with a puffed cheek, while still denoting someone's audiological status, also conveys the message that the person is a full-fledged member of the Deaf community (see Figure 87). This is a social connotation.

Relationships between Lexical Items

Users of a language know the phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules of their language, and they also know many individual words or signs. The collection

DEAF (plain, denotative form)

DEAF (puff cheek, connotative form)

Figure 87. Denotative and connotative forms of DEAF.

of words or signs that they know is called the *lexicon*, and the individual words or signs in that collection are called *lexical items*. One area of semantics concerns the possible meaning relationships between lexical items in the lexicon. A number of different relationships can exist, including *hyponymy*, *part/whole relationships*, *synonymy*, *antonymy*, *converseness*, and *metaphor*. We will briefly dicuss each relationship.

Hyponymy

Consider the signs BLUE, RED, YELLOW, GREEN, ORANGE, and PURPLE. You will quickly see that all of these signs are signs for colors. Now, ASL also has a sign COLOR. The referent for COLOR includes all of the signs in the set listed above, along with many other colors not listed. Each of the individual color signs has a meaning relationship with the sign COLOR: the sign COLOR is an inclusive term, and the meaning of each of the individual signs is included in the meaning of the sign COLOR. The signs for the individual colors are *hyponyms* (the prefix *hypo*-meaning "below"), and the sign COLOR is the *hypernym*. Another example is the hypernym SIGN LANGUAGE, which includes the hyponyms ASL, LSF (French Sign Language), LIS (Italian Sign Language), and LSQ (Quebec Sign Language).

Part/Whole Relationships

Another meaning relationship between signs is the one found between signs like HAND and ARM. This is not a hyponymic relationship because a hand is not a kind of arm. A hand is a part of an arm, and the referent of the sign HAND is included in the referent of the sign ARM. That is, an arm includes a hand. Another example might be the relationship between the signs PHONOLOGY and LINGUISTICS because phonology is a part of linguistics. The meaning of the sign LINGUISTICS includes the meaning of the sign PHONOLOGY.

Synonymy

We describe two signs as being synonymous if they "mean the same thing." When we say two words or signs "mean the same thing," we are generally talking about their referential meaning. For example, most users of English would agree that the words *sofa* and *couch* mean the same thing or that *soda* and *pop* refer to the same thing. But often words or signs that have the same referential meaning have different social or affective meaning. For example, the English words *think* and *cogitate* refer to the same mental activity, but *cogitate* tends to be used in fairly formal settings and not in more informal ones, unless the user is making a joke about the relative formality or informality of the situation. In ASL, DEAF signed with a 1 handshape from ear to chin has the same basic referential meaning of "audiological status" as DEAF signed with an A handshape at the ear then opening to a 5 handshape. However, the two signs have very different social and affective meanings. While the first is fairly neutral, the second generally has the meaning of "profoundly deaf," and its usage is sharply restricted—it is generally not considered socially appropriate for hearing non-native signers to use this sign. So while the two signs may look like synonyms and are at one level, they are not synonymous at another level.

Another interesting comparison involves the pairs of signs in ASL such as BED and #BED, CAR and #CAR, or BUSY and #BUSY. One member of each pair is a lexical sign, while the other is lexicalized fingerspelling. They appear to be synonymous, and yet their occurrence may be governed by discourse factors. Although this has not been researched as yet, it is possible that the fingerspelled sign is chosen for emphasis. Again, these pairs of signs seem to be synonymous at a referential level but not at a discourse level.

Antonymy

Antonymy describes the relationship between two signs that are opposite in meaning, and it is a binary relationship; it can only describe the relationship between two signs at a time. There are two basic kinds of antonymy—gradable and nongradable. The signs LARGE and SMALL are antonyms, but it is easy to see how the concept of "large" and "small" are relative. For example, in the domain of vegetables, a cucumber is larger than a pea but smaller than a pumpkin. Gradable antonyms can

Figure 88. An example of variation in handshapes used for depiction.

thus show degrees of the concept to which they refer. Something can be relatively larger or smaller, something can be relatively harder or easier, even though LARGE and SMALL and HARD and EASY are pairs of antonyms. The English words *alive* and *dead* and the ASL signs ALIVE and DEAD are considered to be nongradable antonyms, in that one is either alive or dead but not both. But it should be pointed out that users of both English and ASL sometimes use nongradable antonyms as if they were gradable, as in the English expressions "half-dead" or "barely alive" and their ASL equivalents.

This brings us to some interesting observations about antonyms in ASL. One concerns the way in which the language shows gradation. For example, in English, degrees of size (large or small) may be shown by suffixation, that is, by adding the suffix *-er* or *-est* as in *largest* or *smaller*, or with separate and formally unrelated lexical items—*tiny*, *enormous*, *midsize*, etc. In ASL, when the goal is to show degrees of meaning, the first question the signer may ask is "what exactly am I talking about?" Representing the size of an object, place, or person is usually accomplished with depiction, and, as we know from the section on depicting verbs in unit 19, different handshapes are used for different entities. For example, the handshape used for representing the size of a car would vary depending on the actual size of the car being described. The handshape chosen to represent a limousine will be different from the handshape chosen to represent a small car, like a VW bug (see Figure 88). The handshape chosen to represent a thick book will be different from the one chosen to represent a thin book.

Specific handshapes may be accompanied by specific nonmanual signals; pursed lips may accompany handshapes representing thin objects, while puffed cheeks may accompany handshapes representing larger objects. In addition, it is also possible to show gradation when depicting varying characteristics of a specific entity. For example, the signer may choose a particular handshape to represent a limousine, but the relative size of the limousine can be varied by changing the ending location of the sign. Normally, the sign begins with the hands touching or close together, and then they move apart from each other; how far they actually move apart indicates the relative size of the limousine (usually with an accompanying nonmanual signal as well).

Figure 89. An example of gradation in lexical signs.

This, then, shows gradation by changing some aspect of the sign structure, in this case, location and nonmanual signal.

This is also the case for lexical signs. For example, the ASL equivalent of "half-dead" might consist of producing the sign DEAD but producing the final hold in a location closer to the initial hold than where the final hold is produced in the citation form of the sign. Gradation, then, is not represented by adding a whole new sign, but rather by altering some feature of the already existing sign (see Figure 89).

In this regard, consider the ASL signs GOOD and BAD. In English, the words *good* and *bad* are antonyms, but their respective phonological forms are completely unrelated. The ASL signs GOOD and BAD are also antonyms, but unlike the English pairs, their phonological forms are clearly related—they share a hold-movement-hold structure, as well as handshape and location. The difference in meaning lies in the difference in the final palm orientation, up for GOOD and down for BAD. There are other pairs of signs like this in ASL, such as LIKE and DON'T-LIKE, WANT and DON'T-WANT, and KNOW and DON'T-KNOW, pairs that also represent opposition in meaning. It would appear that these antonyms are related by a morphological process because the change in the final palm orientation has the effect of changing the meaning of the sign. While it is not clear that this morphological process is productive, that is, that new pairs of antonyms are being created, there does seem to be a difference between these pairs of antonyms in ASL and pairs of antonyms in English.

Converseness

Another semantic relationship between signs or words is called *converseness*. It is similar to antonymy and is seen in pairs of signs like WIFE and HUSBAND. If A is the husband of B, then B is the wife of A; WIFE is said to be the *converse* of HUSBAND. Other examples in ASL are pairs of signs like TEACHER and STUDENT or AUNT and NIECE. As with antonymy, the English words *wife* and *husband* have no formal resemblance to each other. However, in ASL, it seems that many pairs of signs that exist in a converse relationship also resemble each other phonologically. For

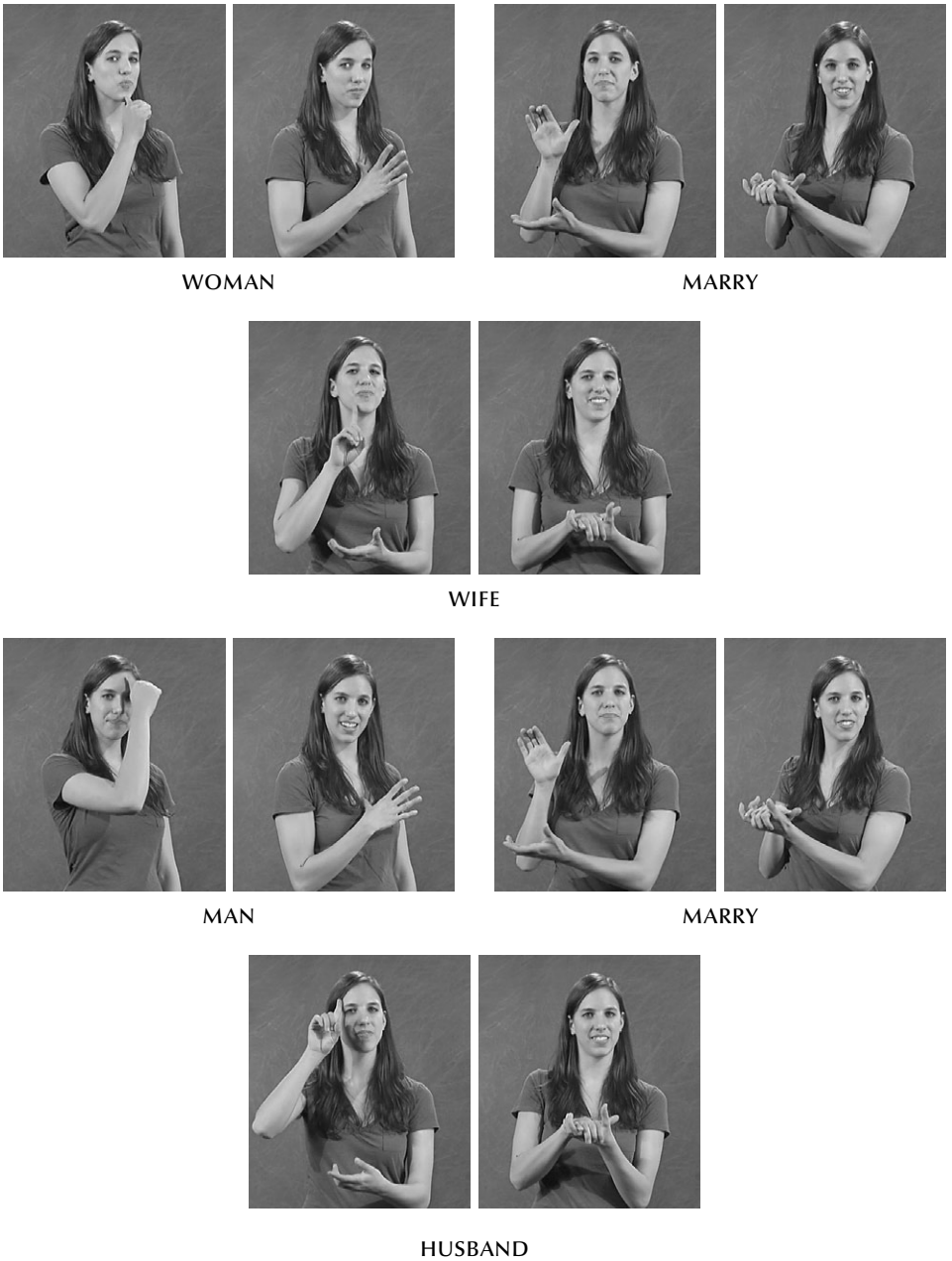


Figure 90. Signs can have a semantic and phonological relationship.

example, WIFE and HUSBAND are both compounds respectively resulting from the joining of WOMAN and MARRY and MAN and MARRY, and their form is very similar (see Figure 90). Likewise TEACHER and STUDENT probably result from a process of affixation in ASL, whereby a form having its origin in a sign for PERSON is attached to verbs, in this case TEACH and STUDY. Likewise, AUNT and NIECE have the same

structure and are produced in the same location with similar palm orientations; they differ only in handshape. So once again, it seems that in ASL, signs that have a semantic relationship may also share a phonological relationship.

Metaphor

The location feature of the ASL signs AUNT and NIECE brings us to another kind of meaning relationship between words and signs known as *metaphor*. A metaphor is generally defined as an extension of the use of a word or sign beyond its primary meaning to describe referents that are similar to the word or sign's primary referent. In English, for example, the word *head* (whose referent is "top part of an animal's body") is found in phrases such as *the head of the class* or *the head of the line*. In these phrases, the meaning of the word *head* has been extended to mean not only the top part of an animal but also the top part of other things.

In their book *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson define three different kinds of metaphorical meaning: orientational, ontological, and structural. Orientational metaphors rely on spatial information to communicate the metaphor. For example, in many languages, the concept of *up* is related to positive meanings, while the concept of *down* is related to negative meanings. In English, this is seen in expressions such as *cheer up*, *lift one's spirits*, and *lighten up*, as opposed to *feeling down*, *what a downer*, and *being down and out*. Researchers such as Woll, Wilbur, Boyes-Braem, Frishberg and Gough, and Wilcox have researched metaphor in ASL and have pointed out that ASL also makes use of orientational metaphors. We see this in signs such as DEPRESSED and TIRED, in which the movement of the sign is downward, as opposed to THRILLED and HAPPY, in which the movement is upward. Upward and downward movement in ASL signs can also carry a metaphor of presence or absence, as in the signs APPEAR and DISAPPEAR.

Sarah Taub (2000) has researched metaphor in sign languages and discovered that there is a strong link in sign languages between metaphor and iconicity. Metaphor is the use of one domain of experience, the concrete one, to describe or reason about the abstract domain, and the iconic system of depiction in sign languages has movements, locations, and handshapes that can be used for the metaphorical description of abstract (nonphysical) situations. Taub explained that metaphor in sign languages involves *double mapping*—that is, there is a relationship between the concrete and the abstract, and a relationship between the concrete image chosen to represent the abstract and the forms (handshape, location, movement, palm orientation, nonmanual signals) of the language. The ASL metaphor ANALYSIS IS DIGGING shows this double mapping: DIGGING is a metaphor for the abstract concept of ANALYSIS, and this metaphor is represented in ASL by two oscillating Bent V handshapes moving downward in neutral space in a digging motion. This kind of double mapping for metaphor is widespread in sign languages.

Ontological metaphors treat abstract entities, states, and events as though they were objects. In English, for example, people talk about falling into or climbing out of a depression, as if the emotional state of depression were a tangible place. Likewise, they talk about working their way through a problem or being so busy

that they feel like they are treading water or just barely keeping their heads above water. In all of these cases, abstract emotional states are represented as though they were actual locations or objects. ASL also has ontological metaphors. For example, a signer might express strong interest in a particular academic area by producing the sign that could be glossed as FALL-INTO, with a Bent V handshape moving sharply downward (the base hand for this sign is a B handshape). The area of interest is thus portrayed as a location into which one can physically move. Likewise, during a discussion, a signer can indicate that a particular idea should be held until later in the discussion by producing a sign that consists of a C handshape closing to an S handshape. This sign strongly resembles the instrumental handshape used to represent the holding of various real objects. In the case of its metaphorical use, the idea is being treated as an object that physically can be held.

Finally, structural metaphors treat one concept in terms of another more tangible concept. A common example from English is the expression "time is money," in which the abstract concept of time is treated as a tangible object that can be saved, wasted, spent, and so forth. Time is dealt with in a similar way in ASL, such that time that has run out may be represented with the same extent handshape that is used to show a depletion of tangible substances like water or paper.

One kind of metaphor that occurs frequently in ASL has to do with handshapes. Frishberg and Gough make reference to "families of signs," that is, groups of signs that share the same handshape and that also share a portion of their meaning. For example, many signs produced with an Open 8 handshape have to do with emotions such as FEEL, EXCITE, DEPRESS, PITY, SENSITIVE, and SICK. Similarly, many signs having to do with negation and negative concepts are produced with an A handshape (e.g., NOT, DENY, REFUSE, BLAME, and SUFFER). Handshape would be considered metaphorical in these signs because while there is nothing inherently negative or emotional about the actual handshape, those handshapes have come to be associated with those meanings by users of the language. We cannot say that these handshapes are morphemes because they are not consistently associated with those meanings and handshape cannot be substituted in these signs to change the meaning of the sign in the way that it can in numeral incorporation, for example, where it is a morpheme. They are more like the examples of sound symbolism that we discussed for English, that is, groups of words like *lump*, *stump*, *hump*, and *bump* that share the sounds *-ump*. We don't want to say that *-ump* is an English morpheme, but users of English would say that *-ump* symbolizes a meaning of heavy and thick.

This, then, is a brief introduction to some of the kinds of meaning relationships that may exist between signs. In the next unit, we will look at the semantics of sentences.

Supplemental Reading

"Semantics: The Analysis of Meaning," by William O'Grady (2005); pp. 431–458

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Homework Assignment 16

1. Find examples of ASL signs that illustrate the difference between *denotation* and *connotation.*

2. Find additional examples in ASL of the following meaning relationships:

a. hyponymy

b. part/whole relationships

c. synonymy

d. antonymy

e. converseness

f. metaphor

UNIT 22

The Meaning of Sentences

Word Order and Semantic Roles

We have seen some of the ways in which individual signs have meaning. We now turn our attention briefly to the ways in which sentences have meaning. First of all, we will see that it is not enough to simply say that the meaning of a sentence comes from just adding up the meanings of all the signs in the sentence. There is more to it than that. We can see this from the following two ASL sentences:

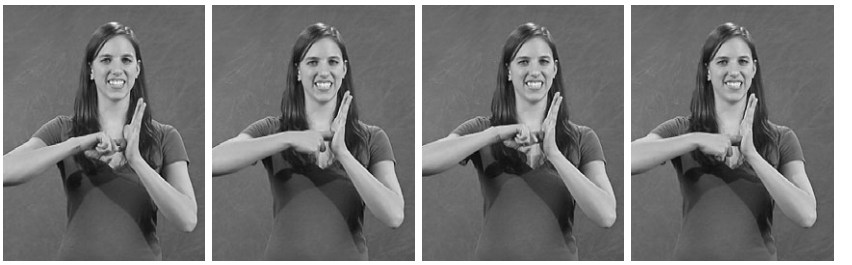
CAT CHASE DOG *The cat chases the dog.*
DOG CHASE CAT *The dog chases the cat.*

These two sentences have different meanings, and the difference in meaning comes from the *order* in which the signs appear. So, sign order or word order is an important factor in determining the meaning of a sentence. What is also important is the relative *semantic role* of each sign in a sentence. By *semantic role*, we mean how sentences show who did what to whom, with whom, or for whom. Examples of semantic roles are *agent*, *patient*, *experiencer*, *instrument*, and *cause*. For example, in the first sentence above, the cat is the agent, the "doer" of the action described by the verb, and the dog is the patient, the "receiver" of the cat's action. In the second sentence, the same signs have opposite semantic roles—the cat is now the patient, and the dog is now the agent, showing us how important knowing the semantic role of a sign is in understanding a sentence. In the sentence JOAN LIKE PIZZA, Joan is the *experiencer*. She is not really doing anything or receiving any action; she is experiencing some physical or psychological sensation. In the English sentence *The key opens the door*, the semantic role of the word *key* is as *instrument*. The ASL version of that sentence might be as follows:

t
DOOR, KEY, dv: KEY-OPEN-DOOR

It is interesting to note that the semantic role of instrument is often realized in ASL with the use of a specific handshape during depiction, along with the sign for the instrument (see Figure 91).

DOOR



KEY

KEY-IN-DOOR

TURN-KEY

KEY-OPEN-DOOR

t

DOOR, KEY, dv: KEY-OPEN-DOOR

Figure 91. An example of the semantic role *instrument.*

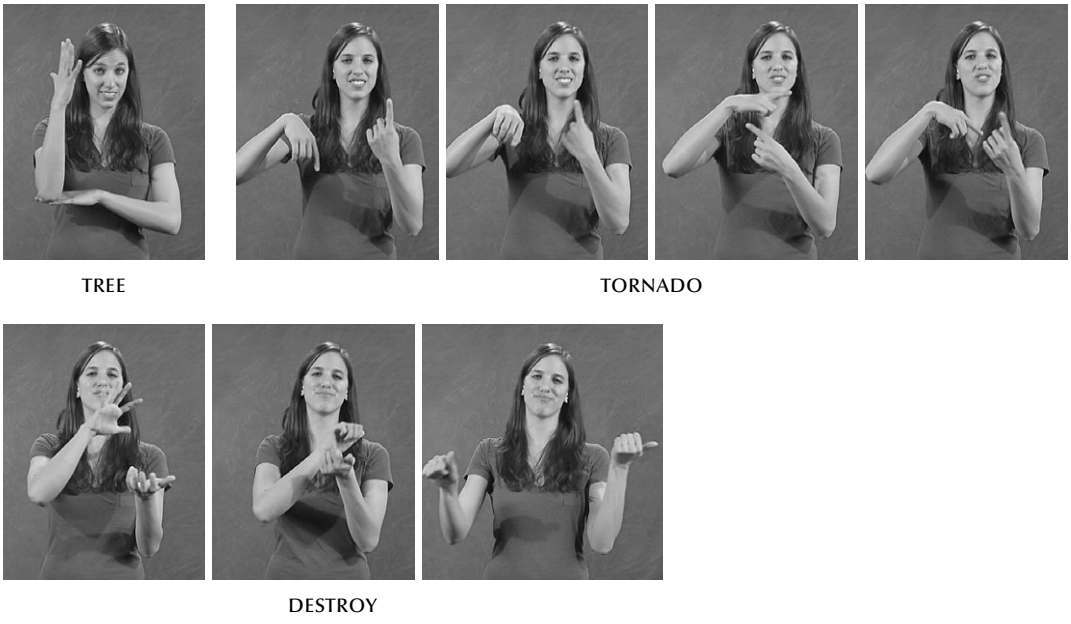


Figure 92. An example of the semantic role *cause.*

The final semantic role we will discuss is cause. In the English sentence *The tornado destroyed the trees,* the semantic role of *tornado* is that of cause. The same is true in the ASL version of this sentence, <TREE>t TORNADO DESTROY (see Figure 92).

Function Words or Morphemes

Another way in which we understand the meaning of sentences is through the *function words* or morphemes in a language. Function words or morphemes indicate *tense*, *aspect*, *reference*, and *deixis.*

In spoken languages, tense is often indicated by bound morphemes that attach to verbs, as in the English past tense marker *-ed.* Tense may also be indicated by separate lexical items such as *last night* or *next year.* As we saw in the chapter on time in ASL, tense in ASL is often indicated by separate signs in a sentence and possibly also by the position of the body and the location of the hands in the signing space. For example, a signer may lean slightly backward and to one side while talking about an event that happened earlier than another event being discussed. Other markers of tense may exist in ASL, but research in this area has just begun.

Aspect has to do with the manner in which the action of a verb is performed, as we saw in the unit on temporal aspect. While in spoken languages aspect may be indicated by bound morphemes or by separate lexical items, we saw that ASL aspect is often shown by altering the basic structure of the sign, as in the sign SIT-FOR-A-LONG-TIME as opposed to SIT, or an X M H structure instead of a repeated M H structure.

Reference provides information about the relationship between noun phrases and their referents. For example, the English sentences *A cat is on the porch* and *The*

BOY DET SILLY

Figure 93. An example of a determiner providing *reference.*

cat is on the porch mean different things, and the difference in meaning comes from the use of the deteminers *a* and *the.* The same holds true for ASL. The following sentences have different meanings:

BOY/DET SILLY	*The boy is silly.*
BOY SILLY	*A boy is silly.*

The determiner in ASL provides the meaning of "that specific boy" as opposed to "any unspecified boy" (see Figure 93).

Deixis (which comes from the Greek verb *deiktikos* meaning "to point") marks the orientation or position of objects and events with respect to certain points of reference. For example, a teacher in a classroom asks the students "Do you have any questions about that?" while pointing to a problem on the blackboard. The pronoun *you* is considered an example of personal deixis (as are all personal pronouns) and refers to the students. The word *that* is an example of spatial deixis, and to understand it, the students must be able to see what it refers to (i.e., the problem on the board). A third kind of deixis, temporal deixis—the position or orientation of actions or events in time—is accomplished with separate lexical items or bound morphemes, such as the ones we discussed with relation to tense. Deixis is extremely complex for both spoken and signed languages, but it is easy to see that ASL has examples of all of the kinds of deixis mentioned (see Winston 1993 for examples). We see personal deixis in the personal pronoun system already discussed. When a signer mentions a place, a person, or an object during the course of a conversation and establishes it in space and then subsequently refers to that place, person, or object with an index finger or perhaps with eyegaze or both, that is an example of spatial deixis. And temporal deixis is done with separate lexical items and possibly body position and hand position, as we mentioned earlier.

CONTEXT

Even if we know the meaning of all the signs in a sentence and we can see what the semantic role of the signs is and can identify the function words or morphemes, sometimes that is still not enough to figure out the meaning of a sentence. Very often, the physical and social context in which a sentence is produced plays a

y/n
HOME PRO

Figure 94. An example of the semantic role of *pragmatics*. The meaning of the sentence can vary depending on the context of the situation.

central role in revealing the meaning of that sentence. It is important to know who is producing the sentence, what his or her relationship is to the person seeing or hearing the sentence, and where the sentence is being produced. For example, the English sentence "It's hot in here" may often be interpreted as a request for someone to open the window. There is nothing in the words themselves about a window or about opening a window. The sentence is simply a description of the condition of the room, but in many contexts it is seen as a request for action, and someone will get up and open a window. Given that there is nothing in the sentence itself that overtly mentions opening a window, that meaning must be coming from the situation or context in which the sentence is being produced. A similar sentence can be produced in ASL with similar results, so clearly context is important in understanding the meaning of ASL sentences as well.

The area of linguistics that investigates the role of context in understanding meaning is called *pragmatics*. In unit 1, we said that one thing that makes languages unique is that one sentence may have more than one meaning. What makes this possible is the role that the social and physical context plays in the meaning of the sentence. The ASL question HOME PRO may be simply a yes-no question with the function of requesting information (see Figure 94). However, it may also be a request for a ride home, even though there is no mention of a ride or of home, or it could also be a complaint by a boss to an employee who is leaving too early. Which meaning of the sentence is intended is in large part determined by the situation in which it is produced. We see, then, that what a sentence means is a lot more than just the sum of the signs or words produced.

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Homework Assignment 17

1. Find an example of an ASL sentence in which word order changes the meaning of the sentence.

2. Find an example of an ASL sentence that can have different meanings depending on the context and explain what the different contexts are and what the different meanings of the sentence are.

PART SIX

LANGUAGE IN USE

UNIT 23

Variation and Historical Change

When we study a language it is important not only to look at its structure (phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics), but also how the language is used. Human beings use language every day in a variety of social settings and for a variety of reasons. Ralph Fasold (1984), a sociolinguist, pointed out that while we do use language to communicate information to each other, we also use language to define the social situation; in other words we use language to make our social and cultural identity clear, to show our group loyalties, to explain our relationships to other people, and to describe what kind of event we think we are involved in. Language, therefore, has different functions: it has communicative functions and it has social functions.

Dell Hymes, an anthropologist, introduced the concept of *communicative competence*. According to Hymes (1972), when someone knows a language, he or she knows how to use the forms of the language; knows the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the language; and knows how to use the language appropriately. This means the person knows how to enter or leave a conversation properly, what kind of language to use for a request or an apology, what kind of language is appropriate for different social situations, and so forth. When a user of a language is communicatively competent, he or she knows how to use language for both communicative and social functions.

Sociolinguistics is the study of the interrelationship of language and social structure. Sociolinguists study variation in language, contact between languages, language planning and policy, language attitudes, and the relationship between social interaction and language, including the structure of conversation. In this section, we will provide an introduction to three major areas of sociolinguistics—variation, discourse, and bilingualism and language contact.

Variation

Variation in language means that people have different ways of saying the same thing. The earliest studies of variation in language focused on *regional variation*. People in one geographic area may use a language differently from people in

another geographic area, even though the language they are using has the same name. For example, in the United States, many regional differences are found in the vocabulary of spoken English. Some people use the word *sofa*, while others say *couch*, and still others say *davenport*; some people say *soda*, while others say *pop* or *coke* or *soft drink*; some people say *bag* while others say *sack* or *poke*; some people use the word *supper* while others use *dinner*, and so forth.

Regional differences can also be found in the phonological system of the language. Those differences may be referred to as *accents*. For example, someone from Boston may have a New England accent, while someone from Atlanta may have a southern accent. This simply means that certain sounds in the speaker's phonological system are consistently produced in a way that is different from the sounds in another speaker's phonological system. A speaker from Boston may say the *a* in the words *car* and *father* differently from a Chicagoan, and the Boston speaker may not produce the *r* in either word. There also may be some morphological and syntactical regional differences.

Variation is not limited to regional variation. Other kinds of variation include *social* variation, *ethnic* variation, *gender* variation, and *age* variation. For example, people from different socioeconomic groups within the same society may speak differently—differences have been described between working-class and middle-class speakers of American English. African American people may speak differently from white people, men may speak differently from women, and old people may speak differently from young people.

The same kind of variation exists in American Sign Language. We see variation at all levels of ASL structure: phonological variation, morphological variation, and lexical variation. Many examples of lexical variation have been documented. Ask a group of native ASL signers to show you their signs for PICNIC, BIRTHDAY, HALLOWEEN, EARLY, and SOON and you will see examples of regional variation (see Figure 95). Some of the variation exists because, in the past, deaf students attended the residential school in their region and did not have much contact with signers from other areas. Another reason for variation is that ASL was not formally taught or even recognized in the schools.

Despite the variations in ASL, it seems to be somewhat more standardized than other sign languages. Italian Sign Language (LIS), for example, seems to have much more regional variation than ASL. This may be because in the early decades of deaf education in the United States, many teachers, both deaf and hearing, came to the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, from all over the country to learn Laurent Clerc's teaching method. They then returned to their schools. Many graduates of the school in Hartford established schools for the deaf in other parts of the country. As a result, both the teachers and the graduates took with them the ASL they had learned in Hartford. Not so in Italy, where there were few centralized schools and where only fairly recently the deaf communities in the different cities have begun to have contact. For a long time the many deaf communities were isolated from each other, each with its own sign language, and no attempt was made by school administrators to establish contact among students in schools for the deaf. The result is a lot of regional differences.

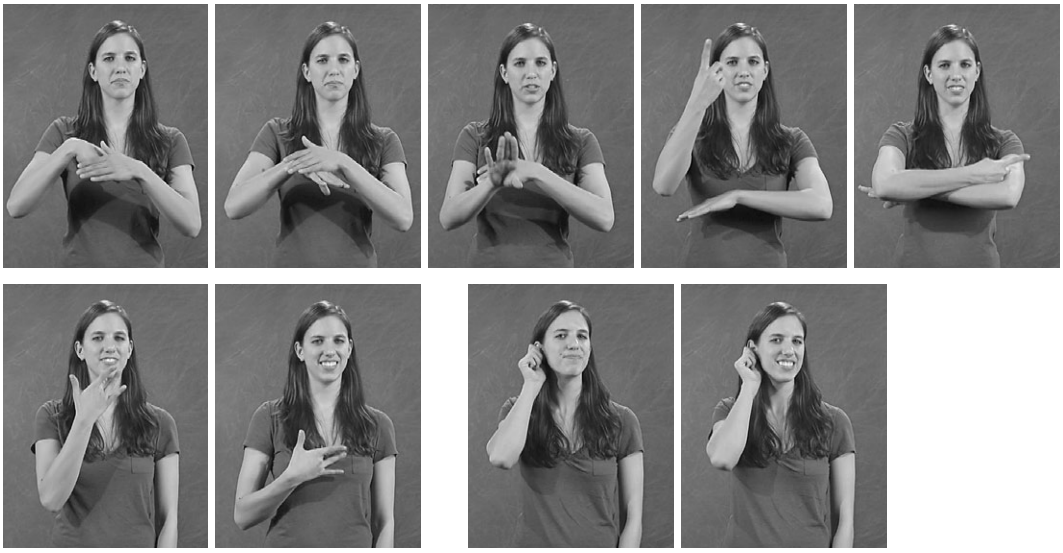
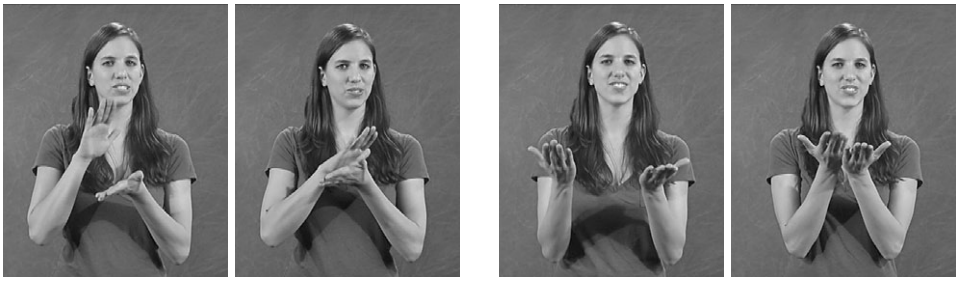


Figure 95. Regional variations of BIRTHDAY.



SCHOOL: White sign SCHOOL: Black sign

Figure 96. Ethnic variations of SCHOOL.

ASL also has ethnic variations. Anthony Aramburo has found that Black signers and White signers use different signs for SCHOOL, BOSS, and FLIRT (see SCHOOL in Figure 96). This variation is probably due to isolation and lack of contact between Black and White Deaf communities as a result of segregated education. Research on the ASL used by Black signers has been done by Jeff Lewis (1997) and by Carolyn McCaskill, Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, and Joseph Hill (2011). The latter study examined whether the same kind of linguistic features that have been identified for African American English (AAE) could be identified for Black ASL. The first school for Black deaf children was established in North Carolina in 1869, and separate schools or departments opened in 16 other southern states and the District of Columbia. The Southern School for Deaf Negroes (SSD) in Louisiana was the last to open, in 1938, and the last to close, in 1978. The researchers interviewed people over the age of 55 who had gone to segregated schools and people under 35 who went to integrated schools, in 6 of the 17 states. The researchers found that

there are features that define Black ASL as a distinct variety and also that, because of integrated schooling, this variety seems to be changing. On the DVD, you can see clips of signers from the six states included in the study.

Research has also been done on the sign language used by Navajo Indians in Arizona (Davis and Supalla 1995) and on the Tactile ASL used by deaf-blind people (Collins 2004; Collins and Petronio 1998; Haas, Fleetwood, and Ernest 1995). These studies have revealed some interesting variation patterns.

Signers also report gender variation, that is, differences between the way men and women sign, although this is an area that still needs to be researched. And there are also age differences, such that older signers may have ways of signing that differ from younger signers. Students often report forms of signs that they have seen used by older friends and relatives. This brings us to the issue of historical change.

HISTORICAL CHANGE

As we said, variation means a different way of saying the same thing. Often, the same person will have different ways of saying the same thing and will make a choice depending on the situation. And often the different forms will stay in the language indefinitely. But many times, a change in an existing form will be introduced, or a whole new form will appear. The old form and the new form may coexist for a while, and then the old form may disappear. This process is called *historical change*.

Historical change in languages often takes place in the vocabulary and in the phonology, but some changes may happen in the morphology and syntax as well. An example from spoken languages is the evolution from Latin to the Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian). The changes in Latin were the result of the passage of a great deal of time and social change. However, if we were able to visit what is now France in the year A.D. 800, we would see that older speakers in a given community on a given day in the marketplace spoke differently from younger speakers. For them at that moment in time, it would simply look like variation (i.e., "we have different ways of saying the same thing"). From our modern perspective, it looks like historical change. Gradual changes in all parts of the language took place over a very long period of time, such that modern French is completely different from the Latin that is its base.

Researchers such as Nancy Frishberg, James Woodward, Carol Erting, and Susan DeSantis have described historical change in ASL, and other researchers such as Emily Shaw and Yves Delaporte have described historical change in other sign languages. Many ASL signs bear a close resemblance to French Sign Language (LSF) signs because Clerc was a signer of LSF. We can see evidence of historical change from LSF to ASL. For example, signs such as CAT, COW, HORSE, and DEVIL that were produced with two hands in LSF are produced with one hand in ASL. Some LSF signs that were produced on the elbow (HELP and GUIDE) are now produced on the weak hand in ASL.

Some changes have occurred as a result of assimilation, where the handshape of one hand has become like the handshape of the other. In an older form of the

sign TOMATO, the dominant hand is a 1 handshape while the passive hand is an O handshape. Over time, the passive handshape has become a 1. We see this with other signs as well, such as LAST, BELIEVE, and HUSBAND. Sometimes the location feature of a sign changes with time, as in the sign WRONG, which in an older form was produced on the mouth and is now produced on the chin; or the sign FEEL, the location of which has moved from the left side of the chest to the middle. And while some signs have changed from being two-handed to one-handed, others such as DIE and JOURNEY have changed from being one-handed to two-handed. These are all examples of historical change in ASL.

Documenting Change in ASL

One of the unique characteristics of language is that it changes over time, and the change is continual. We can see evidence of some of the changes that occurred in ASL during the twentieth century by watching George Veditz sign "Preservation of the Sign Language" on the DVD. Veditz, a graduate of Gallaudet College, was a respected teacher and leader in the Deaf community. He taught at both the Maryland and Colorado Schools for the Deaf and served two terms as president of the National Association of the Deaf. In this speech, given in 1913, he expresses his concern for the need to preserve sign languages in the face of strong pressures from educators who endorsed oral-only communication for deaf children.

We also can see changes going on right now with the introduction of new terms for *telephone*, *television*, and *computer technology*. For example, the different signs that exist for *computer* reflect both regional differences and changes in technology. Similarly, the sign for changing channels on a television, an iconic sign of a hand turning the channel knob, is being replaced by a newer sign that is an iconic representation of a remote control.

The older form of HOME was a compound consisting of the signs EAT and SLEEP. The handshape of SLEEP assimilated to the EAT handshape, and the location of EAT assimilated to the SLEEP location. It is not uncommon now to see a form of the sign HOME that touches the cheek twice in the same location on the lower cheek. As we said, language is always changing.

Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, and Clayton Valli, with the participation of Mary Rose, Alyssa Wulf, Paul Dudis, Susan Schatz, and Laurie Sanheim, conducted an extensive study of variation in ASL (2001). Their seven-year project targeted seven sites in the United States—Staunton, Virginia; Frederick, Maryland; Boston; New Orleans; Kansas City, Missouri; Fremont, California; and Bellingham, Washington. In all, they videotaped 207 ASL users engaged in everyday conversation. The study looked at phonological variation in signs made with a 1 handshape (recall the discussion of assimilation in unit 7), variation in the sign DEAF (signed from ear to chin, from chin to ear, or as a single contact on the cheek; recall the discussion of metathesis in unit 7), and variation in the location of signs such as THINK, KNOW, and SUPPOSE, which are produced on the forehead in citation form but can move down and be produced below the forehead.

The researchers' original hypothesis was that the variation observed in all three variables could be explained by phonological factors (that is, the characteristics of the location or handshape of the preceding or following signs). But when they analyzed almost 10,000 examples of the three variables (1,618 for DEAF, 2,862 for location signs, and 5,356 for 1 handshape signs), they found that while phonological variables do show some effect, the major factor in explaining the variation is the grammatical function of the sign. Specifically, DEAF can function as an adjective, noun, or predicate, and the noncitation forms (chin-to-ear or contact-cheek) are much more likely to be adjectives, while the citation form (ear-to-chin) is more likely to be a predicate. With location signs, verbs favor citation forms (at the forehead), while function words like prepositions favor the lower noncitation forms. First-person pronouns favor noncitation 1 handshapes (thumb open or all fingers open) second person is neutral, and third-person pronouns and content signs (nouns and verbs) favor citation forms (thumb and all fingers except index closed).

The study also found correlations with social factors. For example, with the sign DEAF, younger and older signers in general favor the chin-to-ear form, while middle-age signers favor the ear-to-chin form. Signers from Boston and Maryland strongly prefer the ear-to-chin form, while signers from the other areas are neutral or prefer the chin-to-ear form. And while older signers prefer the forehead level for the location signs, younger signers prefer the lower forms.

Morphosyntactic variation includes the dropping of subject pronouns with verbs that usually require a subject, such as FEEL, KNOW, and LIKE. Lucas et al. (2001) looked at plain verbs (verbs that do not include any information about the subject) and found that these verbs are more likely to occur without a signed pronoun than with one. Key factors in accounting for the variation are switch reference (whether the subject of the target verb is the same as the immediately preceding subject or different), the person and number of the pronoun (a first-person pronoun is more likely to be signed than other pronouns), and English influence (a pronoun is more likely to occur in a more English-like sentence). Older signers and women are more likely to produce pronoun subjects than omit them.

Lucas et al. (2001) also studied lexical variation by asking signers to demonstrate their sign for 34 separate concepts, such as RABBIT, COMPUTER, AFRICA, and JAPAN. They found a distinction between lexical innovation and phonological variation. For example, the new signs for AFRICA and JAPAN are lexical innovations and these new signs have been adopted by all age groups in all seven regions of the study. The old and new variants of signs like RABBIT (the old sign produced at the forehead and the new sign made on the hands in neutral space) are used by all age groups, indicating that while change may be in progress, it is not a completed change. If the change were completed, we would expect younger signers to use only the newer forms. This project shows that ASL, like other languages, has sociolinguistic variation, with both linguistic and social factors accounting for the variation. The Black ASL project (McCaskill et al. 2011) revealed similar results. The signers interviewed demonstrated many signs unique to the Black community and also unique to their geographical areas.

Supplemental Readings

Files 10.1, 10.2, and 10.3 from *Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics* (2004); pp. 459–469

"Analyzing Variation in Sign Languages: Theoretical and Methodological Issues," by Rob Hoopes, Mary Rose, Robert Bayley, Ceil Lucas, Alyssa Wulf, Karen Petronio, and Steven Collins (2000); pp. 470–491

"Variation in American Sign Language," by Ceil Lucas and Robert Bayley (2010); pp. 492–511

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Woodward, J. C., and DeSantis, S. 1977. Two to one it happens: Dynamic phonology in two sign languages. *Sign Language Studies* 17: 29–46.

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Homework Assignment 18

1. Find and list as many examples as you can of signs that vary from region to region. Are the signs completely different or are they basically the same, with variation only in handshape or location or palm orientation? Do you see any signs in the Kansas and Louisiana conversations or in the ASL PAH! stories that are different from the signs you use?

2. Find and list examples of signs that older and younger people use differently and discuss the differences you see. One area in which you might find differences are in the signs for countries.

3. Watch "Preservation of the Sign Language" on the DVD. This clip is taken from a speech George Veditz made to the National Association of the Deaf in 1913. As you watch the speech, you will see many examples of the differences between ASL in 1913 and now. List as many of the differences as you can find and classify them. For example, are the differences in parts of signs or in whole signs?

UNIT 24

ASL Discourse

Throughout this textbook, we have seen that the different parts of ASL have internal structure. In the phonology section, we saw that signs have parts and that the parts are structured. In the morphology section, we looked at the smallest meaningful units of ASL and talked about how they are used to build new units in the language. In the section on syntax, we saw that ASL sentences are also structured; word order is not random, and nonmanual signals play a very important role in the construction of ASL sentences. So, we have seen that there is structure at each level of the language. But there is more to language than single isolated sentences. People talk to each other, they sign to each other, and they write letters, novels, and newspaper articles. These are all examples of the use of language, and the use of language involves using many sentences.

When people talk or sign or write, the language they use also has structure; that is, words and sentences are not just thrown together in any order. In sociolinguistics, the term *discourse* is used to refer to any use of language that goes beyond the sentence. Discourse can refer to how language is organized in conversations, and it can also refer to how the sentences in a written text, such as a novel or a linguistics textbook, are organized. Language has social functions as well as communicative functions, and, therefore, language is a kind of social behavior. The analysis of discourse has a lot to do with the social functions of language. In this unit, we will provide a brief introduction to discourse analysis and look at some examples of the structure of discourse in ASL.

As explained by sociolinguist R. A. Hudson (1980), the study of discourse involves a number of different areas, four of which we will discuss here — the functions of language, language as skilled work, the norms and structure of language use, and language as a signal of social identity.

The Functions of Language

Language has social functions as well as communicative functions. We do not always use language just to communicate information. Often, language is used to establish

or reinforce social relations or to control the behavior of other people. For example, imagine that you are walking down the street and you see an acquaintance — not someone you know well, not a friend, but someone you recognize — coming toward you. You don't really want to stop and chat, so you keep walking, but as you walk by, you make eye contact and either nod your head or sign a greeting. You may even sign WHAT'S UP and FINE or nod your head as a greeting as you walk by, and the other person may sign the same signs or nod at the same time. The function of language in this situation is not only to exchange information but also to let the other person know that you see him and that you are not ignoring him.

To get a better understanding of the social functions of language, imagine how strange it would be to walk by an acquaintance and not sign anything! If someone you knew walked by you without a greeting, you might think that person was being rude or impolite. That leads us to ask what politeness means. In part, it means recognizing the existence of another person, and the way we accomplish that recognition is with language.

We use language for other social functions as well, such as apologizing, warning, threatening, commanding, and requesting. All of these functions go beyond the purely communicative function of telling someone something she does not already know. In fact, you may sometimes tell someone something she does already know, as a way of controlling behavior. For example, telling someone "it's cold in here," may have the function of requesting that the person close the window. We can also see that discourse varies in a broader sense, depending on its function. That is, the language used in an everyday conversation is different from that used in a classroom lecture, a sermon, or a conference presentation. The language used in stories and poetry has its own structure, as does the language used when an interpreter is present. These are all examples of different genres of discourse.

Language as Skilled Work

Some people are very skilled at getting what they want through the use of language, and others are not. Many cultures tend to respect and reward skilled language users; for example, elections can be won or lost depending on a politician's ability to use language. In the American Deaf community, storytellers and poets are recognized and valued not for the content of their work as much as for their skill in the use of ASL. At Deaf social gatherings and parties, people play ABC and number games in ASL, and those who do it well receive the most praise and respect.

The Norms and Structure of Language Use

Discourse has internal structure and is governed by norms. By norms, we mean how many people can sign at once, how much one person should sign, what topics, if any, are taboo, and so forth. It is easy to identify the norms by looking at examples of norm violations. For example, in a conversation, only one person can sign at a time. If another person begins signing before the first has indicated that he is finished, the second person will be said to have interrupted. The first person may then signal

that he is not finished yet and that the other person should wait his turn. The fact that the second person's behavior is labeled an interruption shows that the norm is "one person signs at a time and when it is clear that he is finished, another person may begin."

Another norm governs the appropriate behavior when walking between two people who are signing to each other. In spoken-language conversations, it is polite to say "excuse me" as you pass. That is, it is appropriate to use language to recognize the fact that you are temporarily in the way. However, in the Deaf community, it is perfectly acceptable and polite to walk between two people having an ASL conversation without signing EXCUSE-ME. Not only is it polite, but to stop and sign EXCUSE-ME or to duck one's head or bend over as one walks by may even be unacceptable because it almost always brings the conversation to a halt and causes an interruption. This is a norm that differs from the norms for spoken-language conversations.

You probably know someone who has been described as being a nice person but who talks too much. The unspoken meaning is that the person always says more than is necessary or talks about things that are not appropriate. The norms here concern quantity and quality of discourse — how much and about what we should talk. Finally, norms dictate what topics can be discussed in which settings. Not all topics are considered suitable for all settings. Some topics are acceptable in public settings, and others are acceptable in private settings. Language users have ways of communicating to each other that the norm is not being followed, that what is being discussed should be addressed at another time. Spoken-language users have ways of talking about private issues in public places (e.g., whispering), and we see examples in ASL, as well. Signers may use reduced forms of signs or sign with one hand in a very reduced signing space. Unfortunately, not much research has been done on this aspect of ASL discourse as yet.

Internal Structure

Discourse has internal structure that comes about in different ways. One way is *turn-taking*. Since everyone in a conversation does not sign at once, signers have different ways to get and keep a turn in conversation. For example, when a person is signing and then comes to the end of a thought, she may pause. If another person in the conversation *self-selects*, that person will take the next turn. If the second person does not self-select, the first person may continue signing or the conversation may end. Another way to get a turn occurs when the first person asks the second person a question, thereby giving the next turn to the second person.

It is important to notice that turn-taking varies depending on the social setting. In a regular conversation, it is usual for conversational partners to self-select unless one person asks a question of another person. In a classroom, however, it is generally the teacher's responsibility to select who gets the next turn; students generally don't self-select. In a courtroom, it is customary that an attorney asks questions of the witness on the stand and the witness answers; witnesses do not usually ask questions.

We also have ways of keeping a turn in conversation once we have gotten it. You will notice in sign conversations that often, if someone tries to interrupt a signer, the signer will lower or avert his eyes and perhaps hold up an index finger or an open hand to indicate that he is not done yet. In fact, as Baker (1977) and other researchers have found, eye gaze is very important in structuring conversations in ASL. Rieger (2001) identified various signs, gestures, and facial expressions used to maintain a turn.

Discourse also may be structured by topic. That is, when a topic is introduced, it controls the flow of a conversation. We may stay on the topic, we may go from general to specific aspects of the topic, we may introduce issues related to the topic, and we may stray from the topic or introduce a new topic. Language has ways of showing how we are dealing with a topic. For example, speakers of English may say, "On a related topic . . ." or "I don't mean to change the subject, but . . ." to inform others that a change is taking place.

We see examples of structure by topic in ASL. Roy (1989) looked at the structure of a high school science lecture and saw that the teacher used the signs NOW and NOW-THAT to structure his talk. The talk was divided into very clear episodes, and the transitions between the episodes were marked with these signs. In this way, the students watching the lecture were easily able to follow the presentation of the topic and the subtopics. Roy also found that the teacher used *constructed dialogue*, which made the lecture very interesting for the student. Constructed dialogue is used in conversations to tell someone about a conversation that has already taken place—"He said . . . ," "Then I said . . . ," etc. During the constructed dialogue, the signer usually shifts her body and her eye gaze so that it is perfectly clear when she is talking and when the other person is talking. Signers may even report a conversation between two other people and take the role of each by shifting the body and eye gaze.

Hudson suggested that discourse may also be structured by what he calls *encyclopedic knowledge*. That is, the knowledge about a topic that one person brings to a conversation may be very different from the knowledge that another person brings to the conversation. For instance, if you are explaining ASL structure to someone who has no knowledge of it, you will go into much greater detail and have longer turns than if you are explaining it to someone who shares your knowledge. What we know and what we think the other person knows structures our conversations.

Register Variation

The structure of discourse may differ depending on the setting, that is, where and when a conversation takes place. This is known as *register variation*. Register, in this case, means "language appropriate for a certain occasion." This has traditionally been a very difficult area to describe in any language, but a fairly clear example can be seen by comparing signs used in *informal* and *formal* settings. In informal settings, many two-handed signs may be signed with one hand (COFFEE, TEA, VOTE, PEOPLE, etc.; see Figure 97). In many pairs of signs that have the same meaning, one sign is used in formal settings and the other sign is used in informal settings.

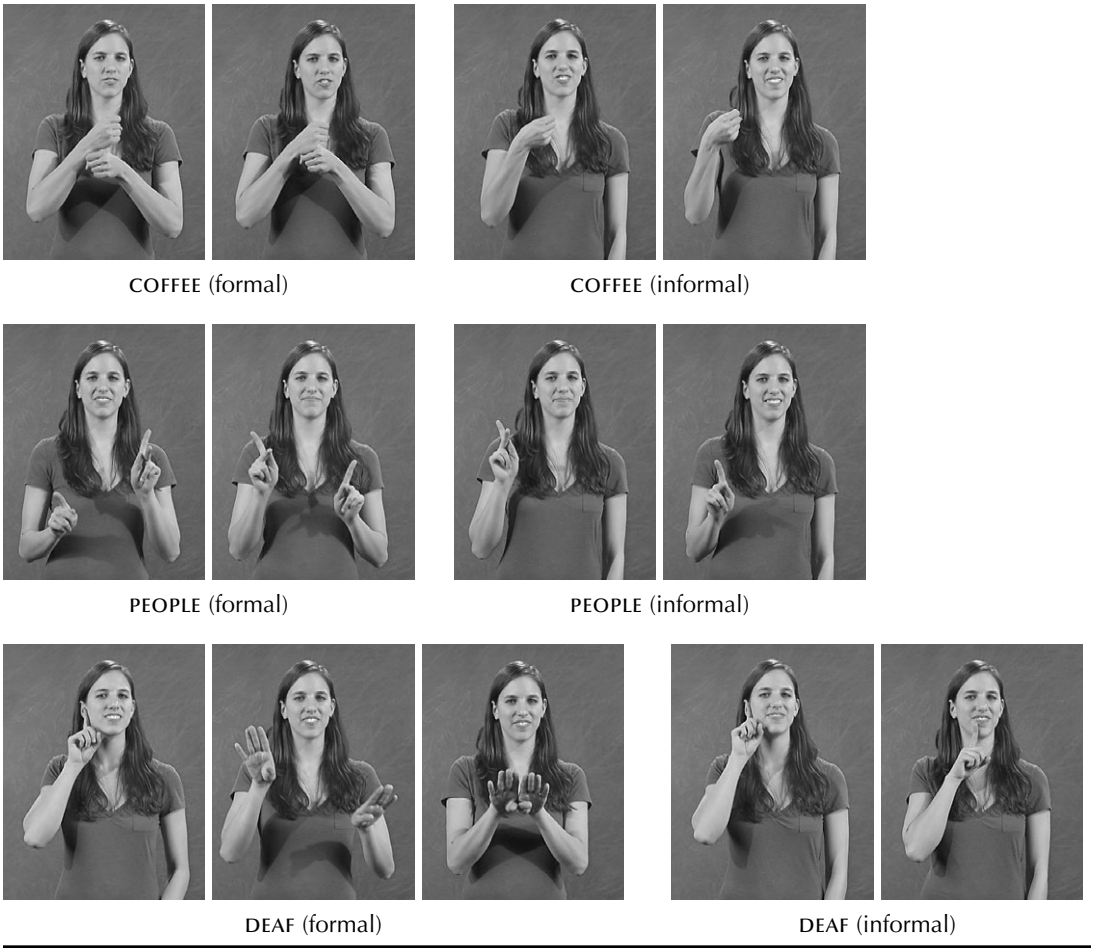

Figure 97. Examples of register variation.

The sign used in informal settings would be totally unacceptable in formal settings. This is true of the two-handed form of DEAF, which is used in formal settings, and the form of DEAF produced at the ear location.

The location of signs may vary depending on the social setting. In formal settings, the sign KNOW may be made on the forehead, while it may be made on the cheek or in the space in front of the signer in informal settings, or it may be a wiggle of the nose. Zimmer (1989) compared one person's signing production in a formal lecture, in a television interview, and in an informal conversation and found that signs used in the informal setting — PEA-BRAIN, WHAT'S-UP, KISS-FIST ("adore") — did not occur in the formal setting. She saw many rhetorical questions in the lecture but none in the informal and television interview settings. She also found that the signing space in the lecture was much larger than in the other two settings and that the signer used more topicalization in the informal setting than in the formal one. Quinto-Pozos and Mehta (2010) examined gestures used in ASL narratives

and found that differences in production depended on whether the narratives were signed in formal or informal settings.

Language as a Signal of Social Identity

The final area of discourse is language used as a signal of social identity. A good example from English is the use of first names as opposed to a title with a last name. Do we call someone we have just met "Dr. Wilson" or "John"? And if we start out calling someone Dr. Wilson, how do we know when it is acceptable to start calling him by his first name? The use of a first name or a title with a last name indicates the social identity of both the speaker and the person being spoken to. It reveals the social relationship between the two people.

If you have studied Spanish, French, Italian, German, or other languages, you know that many languages have complex ways of showing social relationships through pronouns. These languages have pronouns for formal situations and pronouns for informal situations. The pronouns used by a supervisor and an employee may be different from those used between friends. Not very much is known about how ASL or other sign languages signal social identity, but this is a fruitful area for future research. Think about your own use of ASL: Do you use first names and names with titles in your conversations, as spoken languages do? How do you signal that you are a student and that you are talking to a boss or a professor? Do you sign differently with a good friend than with a teacher?

New Areas of Research

In recent years, the analysis of ASL discourse has focused on a variety of areas, including the use of nonmanual signals such as eye gaze and mouthing (Bahan and Supalla 1995; Bridges and Metzger 1996; Hoza, 2008) and the use of space for reference (Emmorey 1999; Emmorey and Reilly 1995; van Hoek 1996; Winston 1993, 1999). Studies also include the analysis of parent-child discourse (Volterra and Erting 1994), interpreted discourse (Metzger 1995; Roy 1996), and classroom discourse (Smith and Ramsey 2004).

Mulrooney (2009) examined ASL personal narratives and found that signers use a consistent structure to organize spontaneously produced narratives. This structure consists of six possible parts: an introduction identifying the topic of the narrative, background information about the events, the main events describing what happened, explication of the most significant event, reflection on the events, and a closing. This research used features not traditionally incorporated into a narrative analysis, including eye gaze, body postures, facial expressions, gestures, and partial demonstrations of actions. Mulrooney argues that these features are critical to an effective analysis of ASL. Her findings align with other research about space and gesturing in ASL that may provide important information about spoken language discourse as well (Taub, Galvan, Pilar 2009).

Supplemental Reading

"Discourse Analysis," by Melanie Metzger and Ben Bahan (2001); pp. 516–541

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Homework Assignment 19

1. You are walking along and you see a group of your friends talking. You want to join the conversation. Think about and describe how you enter the group and how you get a turn to talk. What signs do you use? What about eye gaze? What is the correct way to enter a conversation and what is the "wrong" way?

2. What do you do in an ASL conversation when you want to change the topic? What signs do you use? Is there a particular way to change the subject?

3. Make a list of five signs that are signed differently in formal and informal situations, and describe how they differ. For example, KNOW may differ depending on the setting.

4. Watch a conversation from the Kansas or Louisiana segments of the DVD. Identify what signers do to indicate they want to take the floor. Identify the ways a signer keeps the floor when someone else attempts to interrupt.

UNIT 25

Bilingualism and Language Contact

Bilingualism and contact between languages is another important area of sociolinguistics. François Grosjean, who has done research on bilingualism, has stated that "bilingualism is present in practically every country of the world, in all classes of society, in all age groups; in fact, it has been estimated that half of the world's population is bilingual" (1982:vii). W. F. Mackey, another researcher, observed that "bilingualism, far from being exceptional, is a problem which affects the majority of the world's population" (1967:11). Obviously, bilingualism is an issue that is of interest to deaf people all over the world, for two reasons:

1. It is almost impossible for members of a deaf community not to have contact with the majority language of the country in which they live. In fact, most often they have been forced to learn that language in its spoken and written form while use of their natural sign has been forbidden. Deaf people almost always live in a situation of bilingualism and language contact.
2. Most of the research on bilingualism and language contact in the deaf community has focused on contact between the spoken language of the community at large and the natural sign language of the deaf community. However, the opportunity for language contact between natural sign languages has been increasing as the members of different deaf communities around the world begin to interact with each other. The results of this language contact are very interesting and deserve a lot of research attention.

The Reasons for Bilingualism

Bilingual situations happen for many reasons. One main reason is that individuals or groups of people who speak one language move to an area where another language is spoken. This can happen as the result of military invasions or colonization. For example, English and French are spoken in many countries of the world as the result of colonization; the Romans invaded Britain many centuries ago and brought Latin with them; and Spain colonized South America beginning in the fifteenth century and brought Spanish.

People also move for social or economic reasons. In Europe, many "guest workers" have moved from Italy and Turkey to Germany and Sweden to find work, and have brought their native languages with them. Following the end of the war in Vietnam, many people from Southeast Asia came to the United States, bringing with them languages such as Cambodian, Hmong, and Vietnamese. More recently, many Soviet citizens have emigrated to Israel, bringing Russian with them. Some people move for reasons of trade and commerce. One of the earliest examples would be the Portuguese-speaking sailors who traveled to West Africa in the sixteenth century, coming in contact with different African languages.

Bilingual situations also come about through nationalism and political federalism. This has happened in many countries upon gaining independence from the European nations that colonized them. The newly independent nation chooses a national language to be used for education, government, newspapers, and so forth. A bilingual situation comes about because many people learn the national language but also want to keep their native language. Countries where this has happened include India and Nigeria.

Education and culture can also result in bilingualism. For example, the language of education in Europe during the Middle Ages was Latin, and educated people knew both their native language (e.g., French, Italian, or Spanish) as well as Latin. For many years before the revolution in Russia, the language of education and culture was French, and most educated people knew both Russian and French.

Urbanization and intermarriage can also result in bilingualism. When people from the country move to the city to find work, they may have to learn the language of the city. In Guatemala, for example, many people who live in the country speak one of twenty-two different Indian languages. If they move to a city or a big town to find work, they may have to learn Spanish, the official language of the country. Likewise, a speaker of one language may marry a speaker of another language, and they may learn each other's language.

In a deaf community, bilingualism comes about in different ways. In the American Deaf community, people who have Deaf parents learn ASL as their native language and English as a second language both from their parents and in school. However, for many years teachers and deaf students were not permitted to use ASL in classrooms. The language emphasis was either spoken English or some form of what we call sign-supported speech, that is, spoken English with signs added. Many deaf children have learned ASL from their peers in residential schools. Still other children have learned to sign from the interpreter provided to them in mainstream programs. Some deaf children do become bilingual in ASL and some form of English, but many deaf people do not become bilingual until they are adolescents or adults.

Maintained Bilingualism

When two languages happen to be used in the same location, they may both stay, or one of them may gradually disappear. The situation where they both stay is called *maintained bilingualism*. In one case, two separate monolingual communities can exist close together with some contact, as with French and English in the province

of Quebec in Canada. In this situation, not everyone speaks both languages. Maintained bilingualism may also mean that everyone is bilingual and that the languages serve different purposes in the community. In Paraguay, for example, two languages are used—Spanish and Guaraní, an indigenous language. Almost everyone speaks both. They use Spanish for official purposes, such as school and government, and use Guaraní at home and among friends. The situation in the American Deaf community is generally one of maintained bilingualism. Most deaf people know some form of English and ASL.

Sometimes, bilingual situations result in a return to monolingualism. The second language may disappear, and the first may stay as it did following the Germanic invasions in Italy many centuries ago when the Germanic languages disappeared and Latin stayed. In other cases, the first language may disappear, and the second may stay. This has happened in the American West with many Native American languages that now have given way to English. One final situation may occur as a result of bilingualism: a new system may evolve through the processes of pidginization and creolization. The social conditions that usually accompany the emergence of pidgins and creoles are very special. Many people have suggested that there is a kind of pidgin in the American Deaf community, but we disagree with this perspective.

Language Contact between Signed Languages

Lexical Borrowing

When two languages are in contact, the languages may borrow words from each other. This is called *lexical borrowing*, and it occurs in both spoken and signed languages. English has borrowed words from Italian (pizza, spaghetti, ravioli), Arabic (algebra, coffee), French (quiche, bouquet), American Indian languages (tobacco, squash), and many other languages. Similarly, ASL has borrowed signs from other sign languages. The best examples are the signs for the names of countries (see Figure 98). This borrowing is the direct result of American deaf people coming in contact with deaf people from other countries. Another example is the sign CLUB, which was introduced at the Deaf Way conference in Washington, DC, in 1989 (see Figure 6 on p. 9). The sign was adapted from a sign used widely in Europe meaning "deaf club," and it responded to the need for a sign that could readily be used and understood by the 5,700 conference participants from around the world.

Deaf people from different countries are interacting with each more often than ever before. As a result of increased contact and interaction, they have begun to borrow signs from each other, and this is how lexical borrowing is distinct from fingerspelling. Lexical borrowing involves borrowing whole signs, while fingerspelling is the manual representation of writing systems.

Code-Switching

Code-switching happens when a bilingual person is using one language and then switches to another language. The switch may be just one sign or it can be a part of

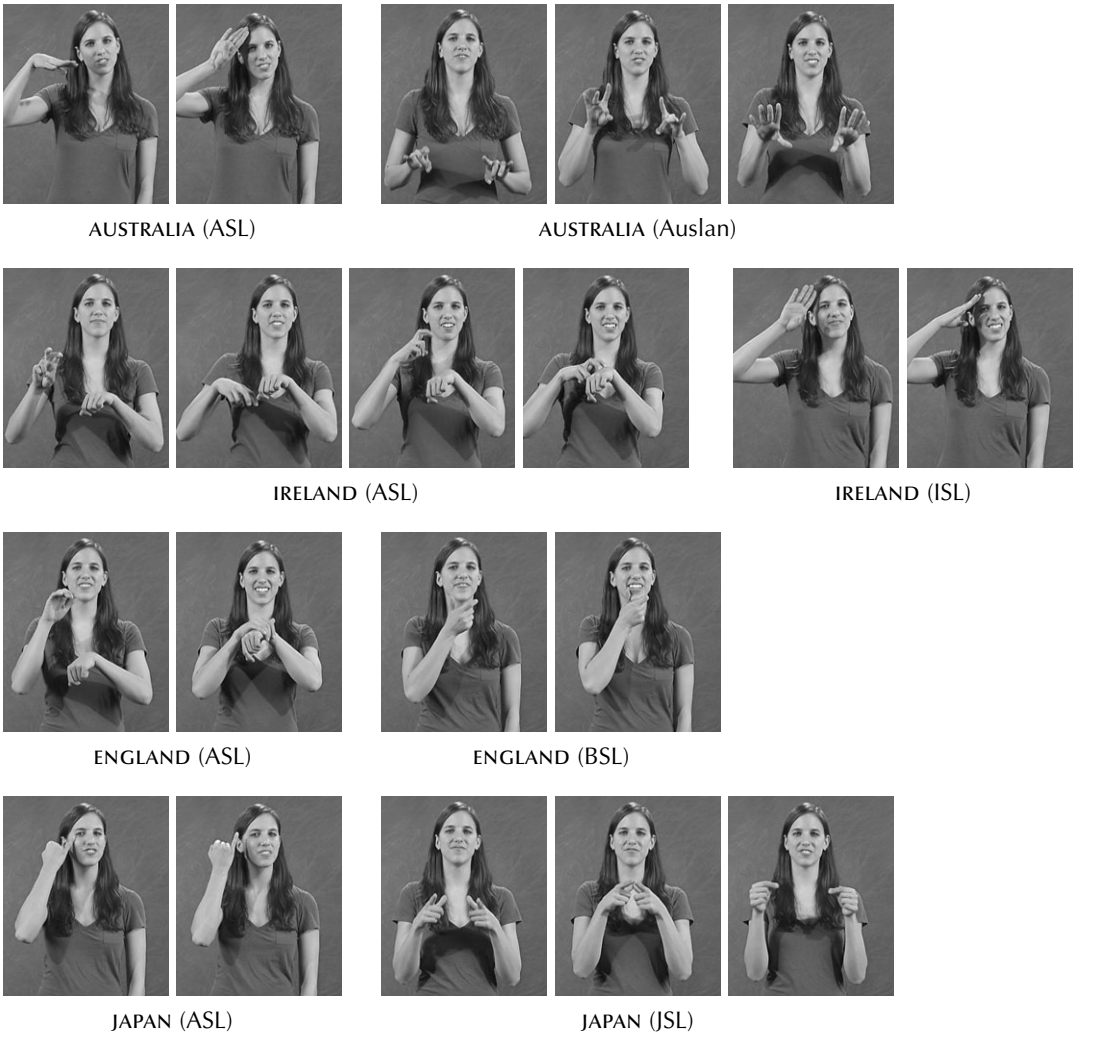

Figure 98. Examples of borrowed signs.

a sentence, a whole sentence, or a whole paragraph. This might happen if a native signer of LIS switched to ASL for part of a sentence, and then switched back to LIS. Generally with code-switching, the forms do not change; they are not incorporated into the other language.

Foreigner Talk

Foreigner talk may occur when the user of one sign language (Signer A) is signing with the user of another sign language (Signer B). Suppose Signer B is trying to learn Signer A's sign language or does not know it well. Signer A may simplify her language so that Signer B will understand. She does not include signs from other languages; she just simplifies her own language for the foreigner.

Interference

Interference may happen when a bilingual person unconsciously uses parts of one language in another language. The signer may use a handshape or a movement that is not part of the language he is using, simply by accident.

Pidgins, Creoles, and Mixed Systems

Theoretically, contact between two sign languages can result in pidgins, creoles, and mixed systems. Researchers disagree as to what the words *pidgin* and *creole* mean, but there does seem to be some agreement that the conditions under which they occur are special. Usually a pidgin is the result of language contact between the adult users of mutually unintelligible languages. The language contact occurs for very specific purposes, like trade. These adult users are usually not trying to learn each other's language but, rather, a third language (such as English) that will help them improve their social and economic status. Often, they are removed from the situation in which they can continue to be exposed to their first language. They also may have restricted access to the language they are trying to learn and may end up learning it from each other. This was the sociolinguistic situation during the slave trade in West Africa and the West Indies, when many pidgins emerged.

The pidgins that emerge from these situations seem to share many linguistic features, including a greatly reduced morphology and syntax. Many linguists agree that when children are born in these situations and learn the pidgin as their native language, they begin to change it and make it more complex. The result is what linguists call a *creole*. Although such a situation has not yet been observed in signed languages, it is possible to imagine a scenario like the following in the American Deaf community: Two signers of different sign languages are in contact and are trying to learn ASL, but basically only have access to ASL through each other; they are also removed from their native sign languages. The outcome of their interaction might look like what linguists have called pidgins. A final possibility is what linguists called a *mixed system*, a language resulting from language contact that combines elements of both languages.

Language Contact between Signed and Spoken Languages

When language contact occurs between a signed language and a spoken language, we make a further distinction between *following spoken language criteria literally* and *unique phenomena* (see Figure 99). When following spoken language criteria literally, a signer who code-switches from ASL to English will literally stop signing ASL and begin speaking English, or vice versa. This occurs when a deaf person signs ASL with a bilingual hearing person and then puts down her hand and says an English word, maybe for emphasis; it also happens when a hearing bilingual who is speaking English to another hearing bilingual stops speaking and uses an ASL sign.

Sign and spoken language may also borrow from each other, following the literal definition for borrowing. For example, the ASL signs BOY⌒FRIEND, GIRL⌒FRIEND,

Contact Between Two Signed Languages	*Contact Between Signed Language and Spoken Language*	
Results in:	Results in:	
Lexical borrowing	Following spoken language criteria literally:	Unique phenomena:
Code-switching	Code-switching	Fingerspelling
Foreigner talk	Lexical borrowing	Fingerspelling/Sign combination
Interference		Mouthing
Pidgins, creoles, and mixed systems		Code-switching
		Coda talk
		Contact signing (code-mixing)

Figure 99. Outcomes of language contact. Adapted from C. Lucas and C. Valli, *Language Contact in the American Deaf Community* (1992): 26. San Diego: Academic Press.

HOME‿WORK, HOME‿SICK, and BLACK‿BOARD are all examples of English compounds that have been borrowed into ASL. Conversely, hearing bilinguals may take the mouth configuration from an ASL sign and turn it into an English word. For example, the mouth configuration that is part of the depiction meaning "large pile of papers" or "thick book" can be glossed as "cha." We have heard this used by hearing students in the sentence "I have cha homework."

Unique phenomena seem to occur only as a result of the contact between a sign language and a spoken language. Fingerspelling, for example, is unique. As we pointed out earlier, fingerspelling is a representation with ASL forms of the orthographic system of English. Some researchers have said that fingerspelling is an example of borrowing, but borrowing is a relationship between two *phonologies*, be they signed or spoken. We have seen examples of borrowing between two sign languages. But fingerspelling is a relationship between the *phonology* of a sign language and the *orthography* of a spoken language, and the forms are always part of the sign language. Sometimes signers produce combinations of fingerspelling and signing, as in the sign LIFE#STYLE or the phrase #TAKE-CARE-OF.

Another unique phenomenon is *mouthing* of English words, distinct from the mouth configurations that are part of ASL signs. Davis (1989) discussed the difference between full English mouthing, where the word is essentially pronounced without voice, and reduced mouthing, where the word is not fully pronounced. Davis also described *lexicalized mouthing*, such as the mouth configurations in the signs FINISH or HAVE, which clearly derive from the English pronunciation of those words but have become part of the ASL signs.

A fourth unique phenomenon is the code-switching that may occur between ASL and one of the invented systems for coding English manually, such as SEE 1 or SEE 2. We describe this as a unique phenomenon and not as contact between two sign languages since these codes are not natural sign languages and are heavily influenced by the structure of spoken languages. We can imagine a situation, for

example, in which a signer might switch from ASL to SEE 2 to represent a quote in English.

Contact signing is also a unique phenomenon. Contact signing results from the contact between English and ASL and has features of both. This is what has traditionally been called Pidgin Sign English (PSE) in the American Deaf community. We have done a lot of research on this kind of signing. We don't use the term *pidgin* because this kind of signing does not seem to have the linguistic features of what linguists call pidgins, and the social situations in which contact signing is used are not like the ones in which spoken language pidgins come about, as we explained earlier. We have seen contact signing being used not only by deaf people with hearing people, but also by deaf people with other deaf people. Its linguistic features include English word order, the use of prepositions, constructions with *that*, English expressions, and mouthing of English words, as well as ASL nonmanual signals, body and eye gaze shifting, and ASL use of space. It may also include the other unique phenomena we have mentioned (i.e., fingerspelling and combinations of fingerspelling and signs).

A distinct version of contact signing occurs among hearing people who have deaf parents (children of deaf adults or Codas). Their *Coda talk* combines features of ASL and spoken English in a way unique to those who are hearing but whose parents are deaf and for whom ASL is a native language. In a recent analysis of written correspondence between Codas, Bishop and Hicks (2005, 2008) found evidence of the influence of ASL grammar on the way Codas write in English, including dropping of determiners and the verb *to be*, and using English descriptions of signs rather than the equivalent English words (for example, writing "fork-in-throat" instead of *stuck*.

One important thing to keep in mind about contact signing is the wide variety of the language backgrounds of the people in contact situations. Everyone is unique, and so what happens in each contact situation will be unique. The contact signing produced by a hearing bilingual who is a native English speaker will be different from the contact signing produced by a deaf bilingual who is a native ASL signer. Their contact signing may share some of the same features, but it may not be identical in its structure. It is also possible for signers to switch during a conversation from ASL to contact signing or from contact signing to ASL. Again, we consider this to be unique, as contact signing itself is the result of contact between English and ASL.

The contact between two sign languages is different from the contact between a sign language and a spoken language. Quinto-Pozos (2007) talks about three factors that play a role in the contact among sign languages. The first is the prevalence of *iconicity* in sign languages. All sign languages contain a lot of iconicity, and studies have shown that because of it, deaf people can quickly understand sign languages they have never seen before and can communicate fairly easily with the users of other sign languages.

The second factor is the *use of gestural resources*. Many of the gestures used by hearing people are found all over the world—the thumbs up or F handshape for "OK!"; a twisting B handshape, palm down, for "so-so"; and the wagging 1 hand-

shape for negation. Deaf people recognize these gestures and may have incorporated them into their sign languages, so they understand them if a deaf person from another country uses them.

The third factor is the *similarity in structure* of sign languages across the world. Research since 1960 has shown that sign languages share many elements of structure, unlike spoken languages, which can be radically different from each other. Deaf people from different countries share a basic understanding of the use of the signing space, depiction verbs, nonmanual signals, and so forth. This is very different from what happens when a speaker of English, which has a relatively simple morphology, encounters a speaker of Russian, which has a very complex case system, or a speaker of Chinese, which uses a system of tones to distinguish meanings. Sign languages have a lot in common and this makes a difference when their users come into contact with each other.

Supplemental Reading

"Language Contact in the American Deaf Community," by Ceil Lucas and Clayton Valli (1989); pp. 542–564

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UNIT 26

Language as Art

ASL is not used only for everyday communication. Artistic forms such as storytelling (which includes A-to-Z stories, number stories, and stories with depicting verbs), percussion signing, drama, comedy, poetry, and film have long existed in the Deaf community. The artistic forms of ASL have played an important role in the transmission of culture and history from generation to generation of Deaf people. The artistic forms of ASL are often quite distinct in their structure. For example, storytelling, a popular art form among Deaf people, demonstrates a complex structure that includes the extensive use of formulaic elements.

Storytelling

Storytelling is a fundamental part of Deaf culture. As with spoken language stories, ASL stories can be fables, personal experiences, anecdotes, or legends. Ben Bahan's "Bird of a Different Feather" (1992) is an excellent example of a fable. It tells the story of a singing bird who lives in the world of eagles and struggles to live up to their expectations. It very much applies to Deaf people's common experience of being raised with hearing people's expectations. "For a Decent Living" by Sam Supalla (1992) is a good example of a legend about a Deaf young man's dramatic fate. Like many other anecdotes and personal stories about funny experiences with house parents and teachers at residential schools, it also contains "paving the way" experiences—situations in which the Deaf hero of the story paves the way for other Deaf people through his pioneering experience.

A-to-Z Stories

A-to-Z stories (also called ABC stories) have been passed down through the generations dating back to the nineteenth century. In an A-to-Z story each sign represents one of the twenty-six handshapes in the manual alphabet, from A to Z. The stories cover a wide range of topics, including an operation, a haunted house, a romantic couple, a car race, and a basketball game. The transition from A to Z

must be very smooth, as in a regular story. A-to-Z stories are not easy to translate into English since their meaning depends on the visual effect created by the alphabet handshapes. The following example illustrates a classic A-to-Z story about a car race:

Handshape	Equivalence
A	A driver gripping the steering wheel;
B	the back of the race car being raised, still not moving forward;
C	lights being flashed from top to bottom real fast;
D	the front of the race car being raised up as it is spinning;
E	the sound effect for the screeching tires, EEEEEEEEE;
F	the audience's eyes following the race car that zooms off;

And the story continues until it ends with the Z handshape. Some very creative stories can also be told from Z to A!

Number Stories

Number stories are similar in form to A-to-Z stories. Each sign includes a handshape that represents a number from 1 to 15 or higher. A clever short, sharp, slap story, "Got it?!", starts with the sign for "hey you" made with a 1 handshape, followed by LOOK-AT-ME with the 2 handshape, TERRIBLY-LOUSY with the 3 handshape, and continues up to 11 where it ends with GOT-IT?! After several repetitions, the audience members finally understand what the narrator was trying to tell them about the hidden numbers and they nod, "Got it!" Stories can also be created with A-to-Z handshapes and numerical handshapes together.

Stories with Depicting Verbs

Storytelling using depiction is a very rich, creative art form. One of the many classic depiction stories is about a golf ball. In this story the storyteller's head represents a golf ball. It creates a point of view as it is put on a tee and watches a club approach several times before it is hit. After the ball is hit, it flies high over the trees, and then it descends and lands on the ground, bounces, rolls slowly, and finally stops. It is hit again, rolls toward the cup, and circles the rim of the cup before going down into the hole. Many funny visual images are created in this story.

Percussion Signing

Percussion signing consists of using only one instrument, such as a bass drum, to beat rhythmic vibrations that Deaf people can feel while a performer signs with the beats. The beats are linked to the movements of the signs. Percussion signing started in the 1940s at Gallaudet University football games when it was performed for the song of the Gallaudet mascot. Now this art form is growing. It also can be done without an instrument, relying on the clapping of hands to create the rhythm

for the performer. This kind of percussion signing was seen at the Deaf President Now events at Gallaudet University in 1988.

Drama

ASL plays and skits probably emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in the residential schools (Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan, 1996). Dramatic performances flourished in the twentieth century in Deaf clubs, Deaf colleges, Deaf theater groups, Deaf TV/film production groups, and Deaf celebration groups. Drama in ASL is characterized by large and rhythmic sign movements and clear visual facial information such as facial grammar (questions, adverbs, conjunctions, and so forth) and emotions.

In the early 1970s, the National Theatre of the Deaf debuted an original ASL play called *My Third Eye* about ASL and Deaf people, and it was a huge success. Regional Deaf theaters have sprung up around the U.S., including the Onyx Theatre (New York City), The New York Deaf Theatre, Cleveland Signstage Theatre, Deaf Bailiwick Artists (Chicago), and Deaf West Theatre (Los Angeles), as well as in college theaters at Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. There have also been efforts to create original productions in ASL. For example, *Tales from a Clubroom* by Bernard Bragg and Eugene Bergman, *Institution Blues* by Don Bangs, and *Broken Spokes* by Willy Conley have been produced in local and college theaters.

Deaf actors also have appeared in mainstream theater productions. Phyllis Frelich won the Tony Award for Best Actress in 1980 for her portrayal of Sarah in *Children of a Lesser God*, and she appeared in the 2004 revival of *Big River*. Tyrone Giordano played Huck Finn in this production, and Linda Bove and Deanne Bray both appeared in the touring companies. Both of these productions had mixed deaf/hearing casts.

Deaf Humor

Deaf humor developed in the Deaf community partly as a way of coping with the oppression Deaf people face in the hearing world. ASL comedy amuses Deaf audiences. It includes funny stories, jokes, sketches, and other similar forms that make people laugh. One classic example of a funny story goes like this:

> A crowd goes crazy when a deaf giant comes into town. He spots one woman lying down frightened, comes toward her, and gently lifts her onto his huge palm. She lies motionless on his palm, still frightened. The giant says, "You are so beautiful! I want to marry . . . !" The audience laughs, knowing that the woman is smashed to death when the giant signs MARRY, as the active hand moves fast and hard toward the palm. Then the giant says, "Oh uh . . . oral is better, oh well."

This statement is very ironic and is intended to make Deaf people giggle uncomfortably since they know about the history of oral oppression.

Mary Beth Miller is a well-known comedienne. One of her more popular routines involves her "live" hands that fight each other in ASL. It is really masterful when she, the right hand, and the left hand are in turmoil. For example, the left hand protests that the right hand is being used most of the time and the left hand thinks this is not fair, so it won't cooperate with the right hand. This gives Mary Beth some trouble and she scolds the hands for their silly behavior. The skit goes on and on and it really makes the audience laugh very hard since they know the use of both hands is important in ASL.

Two ASL comedians, Charles McKinney and Al Barwiolek, formed a comedy team (CHALB) that had much success and performed in many places all over the world during the 1980s and 1990s. One of their most famous shows was called *Deaf Pa What?* It was about Deaf people's habits in the Deaf world. In one sketch they exaggerated Deaf people's "long good-bye": They put on coats and hats, indicating they are about ready to leave, but they continue chatting for another half hour. Then they realize they must go, but again they continue chatting for a half hour or more with coats and hats on. This is a big hit with all audiences in the Deaf community because it is so much a part of Deaf people's daily lives.

Poetry

ASL poetry emerged in the 1970s and is a fast developing art form. It is believed that from the 1840s (when residential schools flourished in the U.S.) to the 1960s (when William Stokoe recognized ASL as a language), there were some ASL poets, but they went unrecognized because of the oppression of ASL and the inability to document signs and sign performances. In the 1970s, videotape equipment became widely used, and, as a result, it became possible to record and preserve ASL and ASL poetry. Several ASL poets—Patrick Graybill, Ella Mae Lentz, and Clayton Valli—published their works on tape in the 1990s.

In *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture* (1988), Carol Padden and Tom Humphries discuss rhythm of movement in two ASL poems, "Eye Music" by Ella Mae Lentz and "Windy Bright Morning" by Clayton Valli. They describe the rhythmic quality in both poems in an effort to point out how movement can express notions like harmony, dissonance, and resonance differently in poetry than in ASL prose.

Valli (1996) also explored the features and functions in prose and poetry in ASL. At the phonological level, signs in prose are not specifically chosen for phonetic form. However, signs in poetry are chosen for specific phonetic form (physical image) to accomplish rhyme, rhythm, and meter; the signs also are more flexible in regard to changing of phonetic parameter(s). The morphological and lexical features are treated quite differently. Signers can create a new sign by compounding, inventing, borrowing, and other processes, but new signs generally must be approved by the community through use. Poets, on the other hand, can create new signs through invention. The new sign is created by the poet and does not require a history of use by the Deaf community. As for syntactic features, depiction in prose tends to be used after identifying arguments of the verb. This is not so in

ASL poetry, where depiction often is used without explicitly identifying arguments. Gilbert Eastman, an ASL poet and performer, uses a lot of depicting handshapes and physical images in his poem about the historic and dramatic Deaf President Now movement, "DPN Epic." This poem shows clearly that ASL poetry is very different from ASL prose.

Poetic Features

ASL poetry contains the same features found in spoken language poetry—rhyme, rhythm, and meter (Valli 1996). All of these features are found in Clayton Valli's poem, "Dandelions," on the DVD. We see several different kinds of rhyme in this poem. For example, the signs indicating the quantity of flowers and the flowers swaying in the breeze have the same 5 handshape. The signs showing the angry man pulling the dandelions and mowing use an S handshape. Later in the poem, we see that the rain and the sun have the same 5 handshape. This is called *handshape rhyme*. The signs showing that the flowers close overnight repeat a circular movement, illustrating *movement path rhyme*. The same location is also repeated, showing *location rhyme*, and the poet repeatedly looks left and then right and repeatedly puffs his cheeks, showing *NMS (nonmanual signal) rhyme*.

Rhythm in ASL poetry is created in a variety of ways: movement paths, assimilation, change of a sign, choice of a sign, handedness, alternating movement, movement duration, and movement size. The rhythm in our example is dominated by enlarged movement paths and use of handedness.

Meter is a count of something we can see. The essence of meter is the contrast between heavy and light syllables. We see this kind of meter in the example. They are *pentametric* (five feet in a line). The first signs in each line are *double-spondaic*. A spondaic foot shows equivalent stress in both of the syllables. The second signs in each line are *double-trochaic*. A trochaic foot consists of a stronger syllable followed by a weaker syllable. The last signs in each line are *iambic*, a weaker syllable followed by a stronger one. As you can see, the meter of ASL poetry depends heavily on visual movement.

Film

Film is not new to the Deaf community. In fact, ASL has been in films for more than a century. "The Preservation of the Sign Language," signed by George Veditz, the president of the National Association of the Deaf, in 1913, became one of twenty-five films selected by the Library of Congress in 2010 to be included in the National Film Registry (Gallaudet University 2011). Veditz signed in noticeably large, slow motions within a frame that left much space surrounding his body. At the time, the limitations of the medium were still uncertain, and film was extremely expensive. Deaf filmmaker Ernest Marshall produced feature films between 1937 and 1963 in which all the actors used ASL. Another example of Deaf film production, *Think Me Nothing* (1975) by Peter Wolf, represents the strong core of the Deaf world.

As technology has evolved, ASL signers have appeared in every type of film, TV show, and, more recently, self-produced videos uploaded through sights such as YouTube. Beginning in the 1980s, deaf actors began to appear in mainstream film and television productions. Linda Bove was a regular on *Sesame Street*; Howie Seago had starring appearances in several television series, including *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and in films; Marlee Matlin performed the role of Sarah in the film version of *Children of a Lesser God*, for which she won an Academy Award, and she has appeared in numerous films and television programs; Phyllis Frelich starred in the television film *Love Is Never Silent*, and has had roles in many television series; Julianna Fjeld coproduced and appeared in *Love Is Never Silent* and won an Emmy for producing the film; and Deanne Bray has made guest appearances in various television series, in addition to starring in the series *Sue Thomas: F.B.EYE*.

Many of the films created each year worldwide that portray sign language, Deaf culture, and Deaf individuals do not receive wide or mainstream distribution. Representations range from Deaf actors portraying people in everyday life, such as in *Gerald*, to the British mockumentary about a Deaf porn star and his amazing hand capabilities in *Hands Solo*. However, there have been an increasing number of international as well as national Deaf film festivals.

Film content, similar to art, poetry, and theater, generally portrays topics of cultural significance. However, unlike these other artistic expressions, film is closely connected to technology, and the rapidly changing ease of accessibility and affordability of new equipment has had some of the greatest impact thus far on the Deaf community. Feature filmmakers and individuals are experimenting with editing and filming techniques to present new portrayals of ASL. Time will reveal what impact, if any, such technological advancements might have on the linguistics of ASL.

Cinematic expression is deeply imbedded into Deaf cultural and linguistic expression. It is rife within storytelling, poetry, and everyday conversation. Highly skilled signers use elements of cinematic "editing" almost constantly and with remarkable execution. Prime examples include filmmaker and orator Sam Supalla's "Best Whiskey in the West" and Ben Bahan's more commonly known "Bird of a Different Feather." In the opening scene of his story, Bahan signs a close-up of an egg moving, then the eye gaze of both parents shifts toward the egg while their facial expressions show anticipation and excitement. The egg moves again. The parent on the left glances at the other parent, which is shown through eyeball movement, then looks back to see the egg moving, cracking, and a head popping out like a jack-in-the-box. Bahan continues to describe specific features of the face, such as the short beak, huge eyes blinking, and so forth, all through the creation of carefully depicted "shots."

The seemingly simple sequence of Bahan's story would require many different edited shots if it were told on film, making it difficult to execute without overwhelming an audience. This kind of ingrained cinematic awareness and ease of execution by skilled Deaf signers is why a genre such as film should be full of Deaf individuals. Through Internet sites that host video content, such as YouTube, individuals within the Deaf community are posting creative short stories and signed translations

of songs, as well as exploring the capabilities of film and editing to see what can be accomplished.

Summary

One of the major aims of studying the artistic uses of ASL is to help learners discover the richness of the language, its multiple meanings, its enormous flexibility, and its complicated and very useful structures. Thus, this knowledge is the gateway to success in education and careers as well as to full participation in our bilingual/multicultural society.

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Homework Assignment 20

1. Think of a significant event that has taken place in your life, something that you may have told other people about before. Organize your thoughts into a story that you can present to your class. This is different from just telling someone about an event during a conversation—what you are preparing is more like a performance. As you rehearse your story, you may want to videotape yourself so you can see clearly what your story looks like and which parts you may want to change. Memorize your story and perform it for your class.

2. Analyze your story and describe how your presentation is different from just telling someone about the event during a conversation. Look at specific features such as the use of space, eye gaze, sign choice, speed and size of signing, handedness, possible repetition of signs and phrases, and so forth. What is the structure of your story? Does it have a clear beginning, middle, and end? How many parts does it have and what is the function of each part?

3. Watch the poem entitled "My Favorite Summer House" on the DVD and identify examples of different kinds of rhyme: handshape, location, movement, and NMS.

4. Explain the meaning of the poem "Dandelions" on the DVD. What is it about and what is its message?