TRAIN-GONE-SORRY: THE ETIQUETTE OF SOCIAL CONVERSATIONS IN AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Stephanie Hall

Abstract

Deaf Americans using American Sign Language (ASL) often experience conflict with hearing Americans because of differing conventions of polite conversation. The ethnography of communication (Hymes 1964) is used here to discover the conventions of politeness in a Deaf social club, where polite language is related to contrasting attitudes toward ASL and signing that imitates English syntax. Polite conversation is outlined in detail, including saying hello, turning one's back, ensuring comprehension, taking a person's hands, sharing information, and saying goodbye. The pattern of the conversations is examined to demonstrate how it differs from the conversational patterns of English speaking, hearing Americans. Conversations in ASL begin informally, get to the point quickly, then conclude formally and slowly. Conversely, conversations among hearing Americans are apt to begin formally and slowly and conclude informally and quickly. From these results two of the underlying social attitudes that give rise to the conventions of politeness in ASL are inferred: one should facilitate communication and one should promote unity among the Deaf.

Introduction

Deaf persons using American Sign Language (ASL) in the United States, Canada, and some parts of the Caribbean consider themselves a cultural group and are remarkably close knit (Baker & Padden 1978). While many aspects of Western culture and language are
common to them, their conventions of politeness often differ subtly from those of hearing people. Since these differences in conversational etiquette are rarely recognized, either by the Deaf or by the hearing people who associate with them, the conventions are often the source of friction in Deaf-hearing relations. [The term Deaf is used to denote members of this cultural group, since the term deaf commonly refers only to severe hearing loss.]

To discover these conventions of politeness, I have followed the example of Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication (Hymes 1964). Through participant observation in a Deaf social club in Southeastern Pennsylvania I was able to learn the rules for polite behavior, how these rules may be modified on appropriate occasions, what happens when a rule is broken, and most importantly, some underlying attitudes and assumptions prompting these rules of etiquette.

Because this ethnography was limited to one particular Deaf club, some of the examples may be found only in Southeastern Pennsylvania, or only in the socially relaxed setting of Deaf clubs. Like most areas in the United States with large populations of Deaf people, Southeastern Pennsylvania has regional dialects of ASL that must also be taken into account. Nevertheless, while some of the particular rules for interaction may be unique to this setting, I have made several generalizations that apply to all Deaf users of ASL and suggest directions for further ethnographic studies of this aspect of Deaf culture.

Signing that uses English word order or syntactic patterns has been given a variety of names: Manual English (Stokoe 1970), Ameslish (Bragg 1973), and Pidgin Sign English (Woodward 1972) among them, but as Woodward has pointed out, this variety of signing is not a discrete language but part of a continuum between ASL and English gesturally encoded (Woodward 1980). In Southeastern Pennsylvania Deaf communities one must also consider "Mt. Airy Signs" (the dialect of Deaf people who attended the state school for the deaf in Mt. Airy, Philadelphia), as well as a Black sign language dialect brought to the state by Southern Black signers who migrated to the area, and the "college" or "modern sign language" used by Deaf Pennsylvanians who have attended Gallaudet College.

Nevertheless, as elsewhere in the United States, the most important distinction is between ASL and Anglicized signs. The latter are generally used in formal setting: church, lectures, school, and in the business meetings of the Deaf club. ASL is used in informal settings and in ordinary conversation. For the majority of Deaf Americans ASL is the first language in which they are truly fluent -- whether they learn it in childhood or as adults. Thus they prefer to socialize in ASL, though most still feel that signing in English order is
"better language."

Politeness in conversation at the Eastern Silent Club (a pseudonym) is influenced by these varieties of sign language and by its members' attitudes towards them. A speaker may choose English phrases with the words coded as manual signs, such as HOW ARE YOU, EXCUSE ME PLEASE, or ONE MINUTE PLEASE, or may select equivalent phrases from ASL, or use some variety between fully Anglicized signs and ASL. Even speakers who are not completely fluent in one language or the other usually know a number of stock phrases in both ASL and Anglicized signs, which they use in appropriate situations, trying to approximate the language in which the partner to the communication is more fluent. When Deaf people talk to the hearing, the hard-of-hearing, or the orally trained Deaf person who knows only a few signs, they often speak as they sign and sign in English word order. Except in these instances, the informal atmosphere of the club encourages the use of ASL, as it is the language of informality and familiarity.

Social status, age, and sex must also be considered when observing the conventions of verbal politeness. Deaf Pennsylvanians' attitudes toward gender roles are similar to those of other conservative Americans: women are responsible for home and family; men are expected to provide financial support and take care of dealings outside the home. At the Club, women are supposed to behave in a ladylike fashion as prescribed by the rules of the Ladies' Auxiliary. They are not allowed to gamble and may drink with extreme moderation, if at all. Younger people have more liberal attitudes about the roles of men and women, but even they are more conservative than their hearing peers. There is much deference to age by youth, and older Club members display a parental attitude toward younger people. This may not always be apparent to the hearing observer, as Deaf young people often enjoy joking relationships with their elders, but at critical times it is clear that the older people accept a parent role with the young. The officer and ex-officers of the Club are active in looking after young people and are especially deferred to by them. Similarly, classmates from a school for the deaf often behave like siblings and maintain close lifelong relationships. For many Deaf people, especially those whose hearing families may not use sign language, the Deaf community is their surrogate family.

Additional factors influencing a person's social status and behavior in the Deaf community arise from language ability and those things influencing it. Whether or not a person has Deaf parents, whether he was deafened before or after acquiring speech, and whether he is hard-of-hearing or deaf all may influence his mode of social interaction.
Hard-of-hearing is a particularly difficult category to define, because a person can be physically hard-of-hearing (i.e. have enough hearing to understand amplified speech and use the telephone) and yet identify himself socially with the Deaf. Or the person may choose to identify himself as hard-of-hearing, a socially ambiguous status in both the hearing and the Deaf communities. The social importance given to the foregoing factors varies from individual to individual, depending on how the individual and his or her peers choose to call attention to them.

The following seven sections describe the conversational rules of etiquette I observed at the Eastern Silent Club. I have included as many variations or options for each circumstance as possible. To a certain extent the conventions I have noted are peculiar to the relaxed atmosphere of the Club. In all the cases I am describing the interactions of speakers known to each other; the etiquette of introductions and conversation with strangers is a vast topic in itself. Because most of the members of the Eastern Silent Club have known each other for many years, even a lifetime, the appearance of a stranger would be a special event. The interactions I describe are the more usual.

1. Saying hello. The special problems of deafness and of communicating in a visual language are unfamiliar to people who speak and hear. Getting the attention of a person to whom one would like to speak is no simple matter when that person cannot hear. If that person is not too far away it is customary to look him or her in the face until the look is returned, if not, to tap the person on the shoulder or upper arm. In the less than serious setting of the Club one can playfully jostle others to get their attention.

Physical contact is so commonly a part of Deaf communication that Deaf people find it amusing and sometimes puzzling when hearing people are startled or averse to being touched. Commonly, men touch other men, although when they embrace in greeting it is usually side by side rather than face to face. Older married men and women may touch or hug members of the opposite sex without restriction. Younger married people seem to express affection toward their friends of the opposite sex a little less freely, although they are certainly more relaxed in this regard than are hearing persons of the same age. Young unmarried friends who are not an established couple are more restrained in the manner in which they touch each other, hugging each other only side by side if at all. Since illicit flirting is difficult in a situation where everyone knows everyone else, married people are
free to be physically affectionate with their friends and may even play at being flirtatious.

If the person one wants to converse with is too far away to touch, across the bar for example, getting attention is more difficult. A person may try waving to the friend in an exaggerated manner. If this does not work, the initiator may thump the bar or stamp on the floor, causing vibrations that the other may respond to; but this method is not favored because it often disturbs everyone in the vicinity. One can shout the name of the person called if he knows the other has enough hearing to respond. (This is the only instance in which voice communication is used unless hearing people are involved.) The person desiring another's attention may also try to get the attention of a third party closer to the person intended and get that one to attract the attention of the other.

These methods are also used to indicate to someone already engaged in conversation that one would like the next speaking turn. [Speaking turn is the technical term in ethnography of communication; here literally a signing turn is meant.] Another way to ask for a turn is to stand very close, touching or nearly touching shoulders.

The person engaged in a conversation acknowledges the presence and purpose of one who wishes to speak by taking his or her hand, by putting a hand on the other's shoulder, or by signing "YES" or "ONE-FIVE" (lit. 'just a minute'). The speaker (signer) can do one of these things but cannot look away from the person he or she is addressing if that one is signing; for this will disrupt the conversation. The person making a bid for a turn must also avoid disrupting the conversation in progress.

As often occurs, this rule became obvious to me only when it was broken. I was watching Mr. Q., the Club's former president and senior member, tell a story when Mrs. C. came up behind me and patted me on the arm. Startled, I turned to look at her (Hearing habits die hard). Mr. Q. stopped in the middle of his narrative. "I thought you were telling a story," Mrs. C. signed.

Mr. Q. laughed and signed, 'I was until you interrupted!' 'Sorry, go ahead. I'm paying attention,' answered Mrs. C.

It is significant that from Mr. Q.'s perspective the interruption was caused by Mrs. C., not by me. Such interruptions are usually tolerated, unless an older person is interrupted by a younger person, as in this example. Although Mrs. C. has grown children, she is still Mr. Q.'s junior and perhaps not insignificantly, a woman. Mr. Q.'s status in the Club gives him reason to expect that no one will interrupt him, although he is too good natured to get angry about it. Conversely, when young people are conversing and an older person wishes to
speak to one of them, the younger people break off their conversation at once and never complain of being interrupted.

To greet another after getting attention, one may grasp a hand, hug the person, hold up a hand (the hand held still distinguishes this form of salute from the hand waved to get attention), or may fingerspell h-i. One may also sign "FINE?" or "HOW YOU?" [The question mark indicates that the manual sign represented by the gloss is accompanied by appropriate nonmanual behavior.] Younger people conversing with each other sometimes use the greeting "FEEL?" in the sense 'What's happening?' To this the response is often "ZERO," 'Nothing's happening' -- consciously or unconsciously parallel with the familiar Spanish-American routine: "Que pasa?" "Nada." Another appropriate response to FEEL? is "FINE FINE" to which the first responds "FINE FINE" to indicate that he also feels fine.

Names and name signs are not used when addressing someone except in formal situations and introductions. Usually names are used only to refer to someone absent.

2. Taking turns. Charlotte Baker-Shenk has noted several conventions of turn taking by signers, such as holding for a moment the last sign made, looking into the face of the person one is speaking to, and/or putting one's hands to one's sides (Baker 1977). In special situations there are additional turn-taking behaviors that can be used. Folding one's arms while frowning and leaning back a little is a device used to invite someone to take a turn or to insist that the other take a turn if reticent. This is often used as a way of demanding an opinion from someone. Rather than indicating disapproval [as the frown might suggest to a hearing person] the behavior conveys seriousness and insistence, although I do not think it would be appropriate for a younger person to address to someone older.

Baker-Shenk has also described two conventional "question faces." The first is an expression with eyebrows raised and head thrust forward. The second expression is one of eyebrows drawn together and chin raised. The first is used with yes-no questions and the second for wh- word questions (who, what, when, where, and why). The first expression used with a headshake may be the response of the person questioned that one does not know the answer. The first expression is also used throughout the manual expression of a rhetorical question, even though such questions may begin with a wh- word (Baker 1980). To indicate that one wants the floor to ask a question one may make the first of these
question faces and accompany it with a raised finger or the sign WAIT.

A shrug or open hands indicate one has nothing to say and gives the floor to someone else. Raised eyebrows with a smile or an open mouth ask for a turn when one has a sudden idea or inspiration. This facial signal may be emphasized with the manual sign KNOW, or in the case of an especially clever idea, the sign LIGHT made above the head. To request the floor while someone else is speaking in the case of a disagreement or misunderstanding one may hold up the index finger, or for a still more emphatic interruption, one may wave as when asking for attention.

3. Ensuring comprehension. During a lengthy speech a signer will often pause and ask his listeners "UNDERSTAND?" The speaker may be literally asking if everyone is following, or may be indicating that he has just made an important point and is providing an opportunity for the others to respond.

This is particularly important when three or more people are participating in the conversation.

Ensuring comprehension in a language received visually requires that everyone involved in a conversation share responsibility for understanding. A speaker has several methods to make certain everyone is paying attention. If a participant is momentarily distracted the speaker will often pause until that one looks at him again. If a speaker becomes frustrated with a person who continues to be distracted, he will tap that one on the shoulder, wave, or if circumstances require an especially forceful expression, will sign "ATTENTION."

Listeners must keep their eyes directed toward the signer's face, but the signer may look away for a brief interval if the grammar of sign language demands it. The audience responds to the sign UNDERSTAND? with the manual signs YES, RIGHT, or TRUE. In spite of these efforts, however, the speaker must sometimes repeat. An expression used to indicate frustration with having to repeat too often is the sign glossed TRAIN-GONE-SORRY, which translated means 'I am not going to repeat myself you should have been paying attention the first time.' But I have never seen this used except in a joking manner when the speaker relented and repeated himself after all.

One is also expected to facilitate conversations other than those he is participating in. Politeness in this community requires one to move out of the way of people who are signing
to each other and to convey an attention-requesting signal to someone who has not noticed it.

4. Turning one's back. As has already been emphasized, maintaining visual contact is essential in ASL. If one wishes to insult another all one need do is turn the head and close the eyes, thus cutting that person off. Done improperly, turning one's back on someone can also be interpreted as an insult.

When circumstances make it necessary for someone in a conversation to turn away, he can sign ONE-FIVE 'just a minute' and explain what he is about to do. He can also maintain physical contact with his conversational partner by putting a hand on that one's shoulder or arm or knee if sitting. Two unusual methods of turning around occurred at the Club. One that seems to be used by older women with each other is to take the hand of the person one is conversing with and then turn around and sign briefly to another. The other, used by older men when they must turn their backs on a lady, is for the man to take the lady's hand under his elbow while speaking to someone else. This latter resembles formal etiquette among hearing people. Both of these forms struck me as unusual, because it is generally impolite to take the hand of another person except to shake hands. Inquiring among Deaf people in other areas and among younger people in Southeastern Pennsylvania, I found that they also regarded these ways of capturing a hand when one must turn away during a conversation.

The etiquette of turning around is rarely violated except in anger, although other strong emotions are sometimes an excuse for turning improperly. I once observed a widow complaining to friends that she was lonely and missed her husband. They responded that she should get out and do things more; their husbands were often off at work or playing cards with friends but they did not feel lonely. Turning away from the group, the widow signed, 'You don't understand;' and walked off. The other women shook their heads at each other, and then one of them went over and took the widow by the shoulders, said something to her which made her laugh, and brought her back to the group. No one was angry, nor did the woman seem terribly upset. Apparently her grief and her need to communicate something beyond words excused what would otherwise have been unacceptable behavior.

5. Taking another's hands. Although it is usually acceptable to take another person's
hand in greeting or to touch the hands of a person who is not signing, it is extremely rude to take another person's hands to stop them from signing. As Baker-Shenk has observed, this is the equivalent of putting a hand over the mouth of a person speaking (Baker 1980). I have seen this rule violated only once, by no less a person than the president of the Club. He was trying to get the attention of a woman who was very angry with him. She was signing violently and ignored his emphatic waving. Finally he stopped her hands with his, then signed, 'Please, I'm sorry; please, you misunderstand me.' He then proceeded to explain himself. I believe that few people of lesser social standing could have got away with this no matter how much they apologized. His action was parental and therefore allowed because as Club president he holds the status of a parent.

6. Sharing information. Members of the Club do not attempt to hold private conversations, for generally privacy is difficult in sign language. Once a conversation is begun, anyone who wishes to may join in or watch. Conversations between only two people do not last long before they are joined by others. Privacy can be had by signing very small, by fingerspelling behind a hand, or by going behind closed doors. But secrecy, except as a joke, is not considered appropriate in the social setting of the Club and so may be considered rude. If one receives a call on the Club's TTY, one must expect to share its contents with friends afterwards.

Hearing people often comment that Deaf people do not keep secrets among themselves -- although they may keep their secrets from hearing people! Yet it should not be surprising that among people for whom all information is precious, even sacred, secrecy is considered anti-social. Sharing information is an affirmation of the unity of the Deaf community. Deaf people in turn often think a hearing person's attitude toward privacy infuriating and perplexing.

7. Saying Good-bye. Leavetaking in this community is always fairly formal and lengthy. When a person finishes a conversation, he must explain where he is going and what he is going to do. The other person will then reciprocate. Conversations are never considered completely over until everyone leaves for the night, at which time people look for their friends to say good night to them. As might be expected, this process can take a long time. People put on their coats and head slowly for the door, finally leaving as much as An hour
or two later. As they say good night to each other the sign expressions like: GOOD-NIGHT, IT WAS GOOD to SEE YOU, I WILL SEE YOU NEXT WEEK, I'M HAPPY YOU CAME TONIGHT, and so on. These phrases may be accompanied by hug and a kiss or squeezing hands. People almost always indicate when they will see each other again, sometimes repeating the date and the place several times. Since the opportunities for face-to-face interaction among Deaf friends in their native language are limited and treasured, leaving the Club is a sad affair. Leaving too quickly might also deny someone the opportunity to talk to one; so indicating repeatedly that one is about to leave is a way of announcing to Friends that if they want to say something they had better do so.

Conversational Patterns.

Considering the pattern of conversations as wholes, it is interesting that interactions often begin informally and jokingly and end formally and seriously. People say 'hello' in ASL; they often say 'good-bye' in more formal Anglicized signs. The pace of conversation is rapid at the beginning -- people say hello and get straight to the point -- but ending the conversation is a gradual process. Getting to the point and being direct is never rude, as it sometimes is in hearing conversations; while ending abruptly as is sometimes done in American English interchanges, may be construed to mean that the person so ending the conversation does not care about the other. This could be one source of hearing people's complaints that Deaf people are too blunt (at beginning); likewise of Deaf people's feeling that hearing people do not care about them or talk down to them.

While it is easy to see why partings from friends who make up an extended family might be lengthy, it is less easy to explain why these partings must contain the formality of phrases signed in English word order. I have noticed that peers may sometimes part informally by patting one another on the shoulder and waving, but non-peers nearly always use phrases signed in English phraseology. Perhaps the special familial relationships between the old and the young are reaffirmed by a formal parting.

People often make a point of saying good night to the president of the Club, particularly the revered former president, Mr. Q. As young people leave they are often told to be careful and to be good. Young women are cautioned not to go to their cars alone. Although I suspect that the young people sometimes get tired of having so many parents, they seem to take this parting advice with respect and make an effort to say good night to
certain older people as they leave.

Once when Mr. Q. was leaving for the night, a young man came up behind him and poked him in the ribs. 'Why are you leaving so soon? The night is young!' he asked. 'Oh, I'm a busy man. I have to get up early,' answered Mr. Q. (This was a joke; at eighty-three, Mr. Q. has earned his retirement.) The two continued to joke for a moment, then the young man signed to me: 'You know, Mr. Q. is a very important man here at the Eastern Silent Club. He has watched many, many Deaf people grow up. Many Deaf people look up to him.' Mr. Q. stood up to demonstrate his five-foot-two stature. 'They don't have to look up very far!' he cracked. Then as he began a round of good nights, he paused and asked the young man and me, 'Will I see you next Wednesday?' We replied he would. 'Now you be a good girl,' he signed to me.

In this exchange the young man broke off his joking manner to make a formal declaration of respect. Mr. Q. reestablished the joking relationship with his quip, then reasserted his parental role with his admonitions as he left the Club. In this particular instance the young man's speech about Mr. Q. was certainly an exaggerated display of respect for my sake (perhaps in case I misinterpreted their joking), but it demonstrates the reaffirming of relationships that may occur as people leave the Club.

Perhaps as the Deaf Club members go out into the relatively hostile hearing world they feel the need to reassure themselves that they have a home and a family that will be there when they return. The formality of Anglicized signs aids in this small ritual of saying good night, in effect, to all of the Deaf community.

Conclusion.

One basic principle of etiquette seems to be clear despite its complex manifestations: one should always act in a way that facilitates communication and access to information. Rudeness inhibits communication -- whether it is by keeping a secret, turning one's back on someone improperly, or leaving the Club too hastily. This basic rule also explains why some behavior that is rude among hearing people, blunt speech or telling a secret, is not rude among the Deaf.

Another underlying principle of verbal politeness suggests that people must act in a way that will promote unity among the Deaf. To act well one is expected to share everything from personal experiences and the content of TTY messages to one's poker and raffle
winnings. Open displays of affection such as hugging, kissing, and jostling solidify ties and demonstrate one's positive attitude to everyone nearby. This feeling, that unity must be actively promoted, also fosters the sense of obligation Deaf Club members feel toward one another. Maintaining unity is related to the principle of facilitating communication because sharing information and keeping the lines of communication open are also ways of promoting group unity.

Hearing people, even those who work closely with the Deaf, rarely perceive fully the culture of the Deaf community. Those who do come to understand some aspects of that culture, such as these rules of conversational etiquette, must do so by trial and error. Often they fail to understand cultural differences between Deaf and hearing communities -- differences that may begin with the very way in which Deaf people and hearing people say hello to one another.

REFERENCES

Baker, Charlotte
Bragg, Bernard
Ferguson, Charles
1959 Diglossia, Word 15, 325-340. Hymes, Dell
Stokoe, William
1972 Implications for sociolinguistic research among the deaf, Sign Language Studies 1, 1-7.


Stephanie A. Hall is a doctoral candidate in Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania, where she is completing her dissertation on the use of folklore in Deaf social clubs. She wishes to express her gratitude to Professors Dell Hymes and Steven Feld of that university for their help in preparing this paper.

SIGN LANGUAGES STUDIES FORUM

Because the task of assessing competence in sign languages or manual communication or both is complex and entails consideration of basic linguistic and sociolinguistic questions, the following article was not submitted to the usual review process but with the authors' permission was sent for comment to others who have addressed the assessment task. Two of those from whom comments were sought, David Knight and Dennis Cokely, both of the Gallaudet Research Institute, have provided the comments printed below. (Comments promised but not yet received may be printed later if the interest in this question warrants.) The authors' response to the comments and appendices to the original paper conclude this mini-forum in sign language evaluation.


ADAPTATION OF THE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (LPI) FOR ASSESSING SIGN COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

William Newell, Frank Caccamise,
Abstract.

The LPI, a test for assessing communicative competence in a foreign or second language has been adapted for use as a Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI). Discussion covers (a) an SCPI Rating Scale, (b) linguistic and cultural factors important for sign communicative competence, and (c) skills in communicating simultaneously in signing and speaking.

Adapting the LPI. [The] conversation should be considered the basic context of language structure since all dimensions of a formal language system are embedded within it. (Norlin & Van Tansell 1980: 13). A number of investigators have discussed factors important to the selection and development of instruments for assessing language and communication skills. One important factor is determining the purpose of the assessment. Will the results of the assessment be used: (a) as a basis for class placement? (b) as a measure of student progress? (c) as a measure of the effectiveness of an instructional method? (d) as a predictor of present and/or potential skills? and/or (e) as a measure of a person's functional communicative competence (i.e. how well the person can communicate with other people?)

This paper discusses the last of these, sign communicative competence, by use of an adapted form of the Language Proficiency Interview (LPI), an integrative, direct test of oral [i.e. vocal face-to-face] communicative competence developed by the U. S. Foreign Service Institute (Liskin-Gasparro 1982, Woodford 1982). The LPI has been used for more than 60,000 language assessments by such groups as the Peace Corps, Central Intelligence Agency, Illinois Bilingual Service Center, California, Massachusetts, and New Jersey Departments of Education, and the Bank of Canada. This test of spoken language communicative skills places emphasis on what a person can do and it is flexible, thus avoiding many of the frustrations that occur with less flexible approaches to assessment of language and communication skills. Below the LPI and its adaptation for assessing sign communicative competence are described.
History.

If you are interested in communication, then you are interested in the exchange that is occurring. (Omark 1981: 256) Before World War II foreign language testing in the United States focused on the student's or candidate's knowledge about language (e.g. grammar, rules, culture, and appreciation of literature). World War II experiences, however, resulted in official awareness of the need for personnel to possess skills in using foreign languages for communication (Sollenberger 1978). Traditional language tests of listening to audio tapes, answering written questions, and translating written passages did not measure directly skills in using language for communication. The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), referred to as the LPI by the Educational Testing Service, was developed by the Language School of the U. S. Foreign Service Institute (FSI) after World War II to meet the need for a direct test of speaking proficiency in foreign languages. Consistent with the OPI as developed by the FSI, the purpose of the LPI is to determine how well the candidate/interviewee can use a spoken second language for communication on a variety of social and professional topics with skilled users of the language (Clark 1978, Wiig 1982).

The LPI. The LPI is a direct test of functional language skills in which the candidate/interviewee is interviewed (in a conversational format) by an interviewer who is proficient in the spoken language in question. Because candidates have different interests, background, and communication needs, the questions asked by interviewers vary with each candidate. The LPI, therefore, is a single proficiency test method with an infinite number of forms, since topics discussed may be varied for each candidate. The LPI is a criterion-referenced rather than a norm-referenced test, since each candidate's performance is compared to a predetermined, standard performance scale based on an "ideal" language user, rather than to other candidates. As developed by the U. S. Government, candidates are rated immediately upon the completion of the interview by the interviewer and a second trained observer, who is present during the interview (Wilds 1975).

The LPI has four parts or phases. The first is the warm-up. It consists of social conversation designed to put the candidate at ease. This phase, which takes three to five minutes, provides an opportunity for the candidate to relax and become accustomed to the
communicative style of the interviewer. The interviewer also obtains an initial impression of the candidate's general communicative performance level.

The next two phases, level check and probes, function together and compose the major portion of the interview. During these two phases the interviewer establishes the highest functional level at which the candidate is able to use the language consistently for communication. Establishing this level of sustained performance is accomplished through questions at and above the candidate's performance level. Questions at the candidate's highest sustained performance level are referred to as "level checks" and those above this level are termed "probes." (See Table 1 for a listing of LPI question types in relation to candidate performance.)

When the interviewer is satisfied that the candidate has been given an opportunity to demonstrate his or her maximum sustained performance level, the fourth or wind-down phase begins. The purpose of the wind-down is to give the candidate a feeling of accomplishment. It generally consists of a few questions at a comfortable communicative performance level on a topic familiar to the candidate. This helps to lessen
Table 1. LPI question types related to candidate performance (from Liskin-Gasparro, 1982)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTFL/ETS LEVEL</th>
<th>DLI LEVEL</th>
<th>CANDIDATE</th>
<th>TECHNIQUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>0 - 0+</td>
<td>Single words Memorized material Recycles material from testers Barest communication</td>
<td>*Props *Yes/no questions *Choice questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>1 - 1+</td>
<td>Questions &amp; answers Painful pauses</td>
<td>Props *Polite request *Information questions *S-I situations *Candidate interviews testers *Ask &amp; tell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>2 - 2+</td>
<td>Questions &amp; answers Some description Some narration Productive pauses Some polite gap fillers</td>
<td>Information questions S-I situations with complications *Rephrasable questions *Hypothetical questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Questions &amp; answers Full description Full narration Core grammar basically correct Some circumlocution in vocabulary Some supported opinion</td>
<td>Information questions *Unfamiliar situations *Hypothetical questions *Descriptive prelude questions *Information passing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Questions &amp; answers Extensive description Extensive narration Precise vocabulary &amp; idioms Full supported opinion</td>
<td>Information questions *Rephrasable questions Unfamiliar situations calling for tailoring language Hypothetical questions Descriptive prelude questions *Conversational prelude questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Signifies new question type

the frustration that the candidate may have felt during the probes part of the interview. Interviews average 20-25 minutes, though interviews with candidates having minimal communicative skills may only require 5-10 minutes.

In addition to the conversational questions and responses that make up the majority of the interview, role playing, referred to as situations, may be used as an elicitation technique. Situations in which the interviewer and the candidate each assume a role (e.g. hotel clerk and guest, apartment owner and tenant) are always used during low level interviews and are recommended for supplementary level checks and probes at higher levels.
LPI Rating Scales: The U. S. Government Defense DLI and ACTFL/ETS. Language Institute (DLI) Rating Scale for oral language proficiency is a numerical scale that ranges from 0 to 5, '0' indicating no functional skills in a language, and '5' proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker (See Table 2). Plus ratings (0+, 1+, etc.) indicate some use or irregular use of skills characteristic of the next higher level. (See Liskin-Gasparro for more description and discussion of the Government Rating Scale.)

As a result of three U. S. Foreign Service Institute workshops on the use of the LPI for college teachers of French and Spanish in 1979-80, the academic community became interested in using the LPI for assessing students in foreign language classes in secondary and post secondary academic settings.

S-0) No Functional Skill
S-1) Elementary Proficiency: Able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements
S-2) Limited Working Proficiency: Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements
S-3) Minimum Professional Proficiency: Able to speak the language with proficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics
S-4) Full Professional Proficiency: Able to use the language fluently on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs
S-5) Native of Bilingual Proficiency: Speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker

Table 2. Defense Language Institute (DLI) Government Rating Scale (from Wilds, 1975).

Recognizing that instruction in typical academic foreign language classes does not bring
students to high levels of performance, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) secured two U. S. Department of Education grants and revised the government scale for use in academic settings. This work was done in cooperation with the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the resulting LPI rating scale is referred to as the Academic or ACTFL/ETS Scale (See Table 3). The ACTFL/ETS Scale is more sensitive at the lower performance levels and less sensitive at the higher performance levels than is the DLI Scale; and the ACTFL/ETS Scale uses word labels instead of numbers: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior.

### Linguistic & cultural factors considered in LPI ratings

Although communicative competence is the basis for awarding an LPI rating, specific linguistic and cultural factors are considered. These factors are vocabulary, grammar, accent, fluency, comprehension, and sociolinguistic or cultural knowledge. Vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension are considered highly important in using a language to communicate effectively. Accent, fluency, and cultural knowledge contribute in lesser degrees. All six factors interact in the communication process and are considered in rating candidates' performance during interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RATINGS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice Low</td>
<td>No ability whatsoever in the language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice Mid</td>
<td>Unable to function in the spoken language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice High</td>
<td>Able to operate only in 8 very limited capacity within very predictable area of need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Able to satisfy immediate needs using learned utterances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Low</td>
<td>Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Mid</td>
<td>Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Language Proficiency Interview (ACTFL/ETS) Academic Rating Scale (from Liskin-Gasparro, 1982).

**The LPI & sign skills assessment**

At the III. National Symposium on Sign Language Research and Teaching (Boston, 1980), Protase Woodford of the ETS concluded his presentation on the LPI with the following: The issues I have discussed all deal with foreign or second language testing. It would be presumptuous of me to attempt to tell you what might be relevant or useful for your needs. You are the best judge. But many of the needs and problems in foreign language training that are met and resolved by effective measurement are similar to those you face in testing ASL skills. (Caccamise et al. 1982: 231) Woodford may not have been comfortable telling sign language instructors and researchers how the LPI could be best applied to assessment of signing skills, but his presentation provided us with the motivation to explore the LPI further. A review of the LPI literature and experimental use of adapted LPI techniques have supported his suggestion that the method can contribute significantly. Adapted LPI procedures have been tried at Gallaudet College, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), and the Louisiana School for the Deaf (LSD). We have labeled our adaptation the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI; see note 1 below). In this section we discuss: (a) the development of an SCPI Rating Scale, (b) linguistic and cultural factors important to the assessment of sign communicative competence, and (c) assessment of simultaneous communication skills.
Development of an SCPI Scale.

As previously stated the LPI involves a comparison of the candidate's performance to a predetermined scale based on an "ideal" language user. The scale must accurately reflect the skills required of a language user for effective communication. Three basic revisions of the LPI scales were needed: (a) the descriptors for each rating level needed to reflect functional signing skills instead of speaking skills; (b) the SCPI Rating Scale had to be sensitive to the wide range of functional skills demonstrated among sign users; and (c) because the LPI scales assume that the candidate is being tested for second language skills, the descriptors for the SCPI had to reflect the candidate's sign communication skills as first language or second language.

Table 4 provides a listing of the rating levels, and their functional descriptors, for the SCPI Rating Scale. In brief, the scale reflects skills needed for sign communicative competence, discriminates throughout the possible sign skills range, and may be used to rate a signer's skills in a first or a second (sign) language. The scale also identifies the skills a candidate needs to have for each of the rating levels, while it avoids the use of language stating what the candidate cannot do. Higher SCPI rating levels assume the candidate possesses all skills described for lower level ratings. Lower level ratings assume the candidate does not possess skills described for higher rating levels. Appendix A provides a functional trisection for the SCPI rating levels, considering function, context and content, and accuracy.

Superior +  Able to use all aspects of signing fluently and accurately to discuss in depth a variety of topics, including social work, current events, religion, etc. Has complete fluency such that signing on all levels is fully accepted by highly skilled native signers, including breadth of vocabulary and idioms, grammar, colloquialisms, accent/production, and cultural references.

Superior  Able to use sign vocabulary and grammar fluently and accurately on all levels pertinent to social and work needs. Comprehension (sign reception) is excellent and can respond appropriately even in unfamiliar situations. Able to negotiate, persuade, counsel, and tailor language to audience.
Advanced + Able sometimes to use grammar, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge in ways consistent with superior/superior plus signers.

Advanced Able to sign with sufficient grammatical accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations or social and work topics. Comprehension is good, vocabulary is broad, grammar is good, and errors seldom interfere with understanding and rarely disturb native signers. Able to handle unfamiliar topics hypothesize, and provide supported opinion.

Intermediate + Able to satisfy with confidence most social demands and work situations. Good control of general everyday sign vocabulary.

Intermediate Able to satisfy with some confidence routine social demands and limited work requirements. Demonstrates use of some sign grammatical features in connected discourse. Able to narrate and describe topics related to background, family, interests/hobbies, work, travel, and current events, although groping for some everyday sign vocabulary still

Survival + Able to satisfy most survival needs in social and work situations. Can use most question forms and shows beginning of other sign grammatical features. Able to engage in simple conversations within a limited range of topics.

Survival Able to satisfy basic survival needs in social work or work situations. Can ask and answer basic questions and has some skills in creating sign utterances based on learned sign vocabulary. Can get into, through, and out of simple survival situations.

Novice + Able to use connected sign utterances for learned/memorized sign phrases, with most or all utterances related to everyday social question/topic areas, such as names of family members, basic objects, colors, numbers, names of weekdays, and time.

Novice Basically limited to single sign utterances with vocabulary primarily related to everyday social, question/topic areas such as names of family members, basic
objects, colors, numbers, names of weekdays, and time.

O  No functional skills in signing.

Table 4. Sign Communication proficiency Interview

It is important to recognize two other characteristics of the SCPI Rating Scale. First, as with the LPI scales, there is a range within each rating level; i.e. all intermediate level signers do not have the same signing skills exactly, nor do all superior level signers, etc. For example, sign vocabulary skills will be influenced by the social and working environments within which a candidate functions, and those with the same rating level may vary in the sign grammatical features they are able to use fluently for communication. Second, minimal skill development is needed to proceed from the 'O' or no functional skills level to the novice level; but as one proceeds up the scale, greater and greater increments in skills are necessary to proceed to the next rating level. These two concepts, of ranges within and ranges between rating levels, are depicted in Figure 1.

Although the SCPI Rating Scale has been designed specifically for rating sign communicative competence, it maintains the principles of the Government (DLI) and Academic (NCTFL/ETS) Rating Scales.

**Linguistic & cultural factors in SCPI ratings**

Like the LPI, the SCPI is an integrative test of functional communication skills. Also, as with the LPI, the following factors influence the SCPI rating that a candidate receives: vocabulary, grammar, accent, fluency, comprehension, and sociolinguistic or cultural knowledge. The influence of these factors at the various rating levels of the SCPI is similar to that described for the LPI rating levels.
Figure 1. SCPI Rating Scale Ranges.

Figure 2. Approaches to signing in the U.S. and those currently covered in the SCPI.

Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of the current approaches to signing in
the United States. These involve two languages, American Sign Language (ASL) and English (represented by manual signs). Figure 2 is designed to reflect the following: (a) as with all languages there is a range of acceptable performance within ASL, a function of dialects, social and geographical, and idiolects, differences due to style variations within signers (Klima & Bellugi 1979, Stokoe 1980, Stokoe et al. 1976); (b) sign English may include vocabulary, grammar, and other features of both ASL and spoken or written English, traditionally identified as Pidgin Sign English and so indicated in Figure 2 (Caccamise et al. in press); and (c) sign English, at least in theory, may be based totally on spoken or written English or on both, identified in Figure 2 as Invented English Sign Systems (IESS) (Wilbur 1979).

We believe that all skilled signers use features traditionally associated with ASL, whether they are signing ASL or English. [Strong confirmation of this belief is given by Livingston in SLS 40. Ed.] Among the most important of these features are: (a) the use of space, (b) sign movement directionality, (c) eye gaze, (d) question-asking devices, (e) classifiers, and (f) inflections such as number incorporation, reduplication for plural, and movement variation to distinguish noun and adverbial information.

Given the above and current sign usage at the NTID and other academic and social settings throughout the United States, our application of the LPI has been designed to assess signing within the range indicated by ASL and PSE in Figure 2. More specifically, this signing range involves: (a) sign vocabulary based on meaning with signs primarily drawn from ASL and signs currently used by skilled signers in the geographical area or the program in which the SCPI is conducted, (b) use of important sign grammatical features (previous paragraph and Appendix B), and (c) flexibility in sign word order with appropriateness based on topics, times, actions, actors/agents, subjects-objects of sentences, etc. Support for the use in clinical and academic settings of both ASL and a sign English system that includes the salient features of English and ASL has been provided by Caccamise et al. (1978) and Caccamise, Brewer, and Meath-Lang (in press).

To maximize the probability that candidates' highest sign communicative competence will be demonstrated during interviews, they are asked not to use voiced speech, though lip movements are permitted. Research (Marmor & Petitto 1979) and our experiences have indicated that candidates' signing with speech will not be better than and often will be not as good as their signing without speech. (Assessment of simultaneous communication skills is discussed below.) Also, in order to assess candidates' sign
comprehension, interviewers conduct interviews without either voice or lip movements for speech, although the latter may be added if the candidate begins to become highly frustrated. All interviews are videotaped and subsequently rated independently by one or more raters skilled in SCPI methodology.

Consistent with the LPI, SCPI candidates should be provided a clear explanation of the interview procedures and the bases upon which their interviews will be rated. Appendix C lists the instructions developed for use with the SCPI as discussed here.

The above approach requires interviewers to communicate effectively across a range from ASL to sign English (as described above) within a single interview. This approach may be modified according to the purpose of the interview. For example, if the purpose is to assess a candidate's ASL communicative competence, this can be stated in the instructions to the candidate, and the interviewer will restrict signing to ASL, while the raters likewise base their rating on ASL. Similar accommodations can be made in order to assess a candidate's competence in sign English only.

Assessment of simultaneous communication skills

The SCPI may be modified to assess simultaneous communicative competence by: (a) providing instructions for candidates that reflect the interview procedures and the bases upon which the interviews will be rated, (b) modification of the SCPI Rating Scale to include consideration of the use of speech and signing together, and (c) having interviewers and candidates use simultaneous communication during the interviews.

The above approach to assessing functional simultaneous communicative skills is appropriate for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. It is not appropriate for hearing persons, however, since they have complete comprehension through listening only. One alternative is to have interviewers using signing only as in the SCPI and have (hearing) candidates use simultaneous communication, thus assessing comprehension and receptive sign skills and expressive simultaneous communication skills. Another alternative would be to have the interviewer use lip movements for speech but not voice. Again, the instructions and rating scale would need to reflect these approaches.

If the purpose or emphasis of the sim-com assessment, however, is form rather than communicative competence, an interactive interview is not the most appropriate approach.
When assessment of form is the purpose, the basic question being asked is, "How closely does what this person signs match what this person is saying, and vice versa?" Because this requires assessment of expressive skills only, an adaptation of the LPI situation technique is recommended for this assessment. For example, interviews for assessing sign communicative competence of instructors could include situations that involve candidates presenting in sim-com a mini-lesson for subject areas they teach. Again, candidates should be provided a clear explanation of the procedures and the rating basis for both the sign and the simultaneous communication portions of the assessment. For an approach to analyzing the form of simultaneous communication, see Marmor and Petitto (1979).

Summary & conclusions. An overview of the language

Proficiency Interview (LPI) and its application to assessment of sign communicative competence and simultaneous communication skills have been discussed. The Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) Rating Scale and linguistic and cultural factors important for sign communicative competence have been described.

Currently the SCPI is being used with dormitory personnel at the Louisiana School for the Deaf, graduate students in the NTID/University of Rochester Educational Specialist Program, and staff and students at NTID. Also the use of the SCPI within the interpreting profession and the application of the LPI to assessment of NTID students' spoken English communicative competence are being investigated.

In conclusion, the SCPI is a promising addition to current approaches for assessing signing skills. Like the LPI, the SCPI emphasizes what a communicator can do and avoids the frustrations that occur with less flexible approaches to assessment of language and communication skills. Further investigations may also demonstrate similar benefits of applying LPI methods to the assessment of deaf and hard-of-hearing students' spoken language communicative competence.

Notes

1. At a meeting for persons interested in applying the Language Proficiency
Interview (LPI) to assessment of signing skills, it was decided to rename the Sign Language Proficiency Interview Rating Scale the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) Rating Scale. Further it was decided that a distinction was needed between assessment of American Sign Language (ASL) and assessment of general, natural signing communication skills as described in this paper (ASL-PSE continuum on the sign diglossic continuum; see Figure 2). Therefore, when the SCPI is used for assessment of (only) ASL communicative competence, a colon followed by "ASL" should be added to the scale title (i.e. SCPI Rating Scale: ASL), and when the SCPI is used for assessment of general, natural signing communicative competence, a colon followed by the word "general" should be added to the scale title (i.e. SCPI Rating Scale: General). Participants agreed that the renamed scale (SCPI) is applicable to ASL and general, natural signing communication skills.

Mary Mosleh of the College of Staten Island organized the meeting (at the Educational Testing Service); attending were Keitha Boardman, Frank Caccamise, William Newell, Ted Supalla, Catherine Moses, Will Madsen, William Tomes, Carol Lazorisak, and William R. Gut.

2. The references for this note are so numerous as to take up undue space in the opening paragraph of the text: Battison & Caccamise, Caccamise, Cokely (3 titles), Cokely & Baker, Hatfield & Caccamise, and Rodda.

References

  Battison, Robbin, & Frank Caccamise
  Caccamise, Frank
  Caccamise, Ayers, Finch, & Mitchell
  Caccamise, Brewer, & Meath-Lang
Clark, J. L. D. (ed.)
Cokely, Dennis
Cokely, D., & Charlotte Baker
Hatfield, N., & F. Caccamise
Klima, Edward, & Ursula Bellugi
Liskin-Gasparro, Judith (ed.)
Marmor, Gloria, & Laura Petitto
Norlin, P. F., & D. J. Van Tansell
Ömark, D. R.
1981 Pragmatic & ethological techniques ... children's communicative abilities. In
Communication Assessment of the Bilingual, Bicultural Child, Erickson & Omark eds.

Rodda, Michael

Sollenberger, H. E.

Stokoe, William (ed.)

Stokoe, Casterline, & Croneberg

Wiig, E.

Wilbur, Ronnie B.

Wilds, Claudia P.

Woodford, Protase E.

COMMENT ON THE SCPI (1)

by David Knight

In adapting the LPI for use in educational settings where sign language is used, Newell, Caccamise, Boardman, and Holcomb have done a good job of presenting and
suggesting resolutions for some of the problems that an adaptation can cause. The LPI is a departure from traditional proficiency evaluations and has been extensively used by the Defense Department, the Peace Corps, and the CIA, to name a few. However, it has only recently been used to evaluate communication in settings where sign language is employed. A review of the issues involved in adapting the LPI into an SCPI may be helpful at this early stage.

Five basic issues come immediately to mind regarding the adaptation. First, how can the LPI be adapted to fit the complex psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic contexts in which sign language and English are intermingled and used? The LPI was developed to assess language proficiency of someone (professing it) using the relatively pure exemplar of a skilled native user of a given language. Its judgments of proficiency are scaled to native user competence; however, the intermingling of two languages (ASL and English) blurs the salience of the concept of a native user. This intermingling has resulted in a profusion of varieties of language and language-like behaviors, ranging from attempts to represent English manually (in fingerspelling), to simultaneous communication, to what some refer to as "Pidgin Sign English" (Woodward 1973) and others, as "Foreigner Talk" (Cokely 1983). It is questionable whether these varieties of intermingled ASL and English can represent communities of "skilled native users." Unless relatively pure examples of native users are identifiable (with either ASL or English), the LPI has, at best, a compromised anchor for scaling proficiency. As the entire LPI scaling paradigm rests on the ability of a skilled native user to make intuitively correct judgments about language proficiency, this is not a trivial concern.

The authors describe the English-ASL contact situation (see Figure 2 above) in terms of a continuum ranging from ASL to manually coded English, or Invented English Sign Systems. They maintain that the SCPI is appropriate for the entire continuum except for the manually coded English. However, except in the case of the ASL and English extremes of the abridged continuum, the authors offer no clear guidelines or bases for making judgments regarding proficiency. For example, should conformity to ASL or to English grammatical rules be used to gauge accuracy for the middle portion of the continuum?

The lack of an identifiable "skilled native user" for the majority of varieties represented on the continuum could be ameliorated by clear descriptive guidelines that specify reference points for judging proficiency. Although the authors have adopted a functional trisection from Liskin-Gasparro (1982) for this purpose, it falls far short of
providing useful descriptions or anchors for scaling the signing varieties in question (See Accuracy column of Appendix A). Consequently, the validity of the scaling paradigm remains in jeopardy for all cases but those most obviously ASL or obviously English.

A second major issue concerns the purpose for which the LPI was developed. It was designed to measure a person's ability to use a second language to communicate on social and professional topics with skilled users of that language; i.e. the LPI assesses the candidate's proficiency in conversing about social and professional topics. The authors have focused the paper on assessment of conversational skills, and properly so. However, when one addresses evaluation of communication in an educational context, evaluation of teacher and classroom communication is certainly implied or entailed. Indeed, the authors mention this possibility in their section on assessing simultaneous communication skills, and thus there is a danger of over generalizing the SCPI to all situations in which signing is used. It is important to remember that the LPI, and by direct adaptation the SCPI, exist to measure conversational proficiency.

The measurement of proficiency in conversation obviously meets the needs of the Peace Corps, the CIA, and other groups with similar language-related concerns. It also is obviously suited to measure student progress in acquiring conversational skills in ASL, or a faculty member's ability to converse with a skilled user of ASL in educational settings. What it cannot do is measure directly a teacher's ability to communicate with deaf students in the classroom; at least not without substantive modifications made necessary because the proficiency being addressed is different. The original purpose for the LPI was to evaluate conversational proficiency; while in educational settings the purpose may be to focus on some combination of expository and unequal dialogue as well as conversational proficiency.

One modification required to obtain a valid application of the LPI to the assessment of classroom communication proficiency would be the use of the concept of a "skilled native user who is also a skilled teacher" as the scale anchor. Another modification required by such assessment purposes would be to incorporate situations related to classroom instruction in the interview procedure. The point here is that until strong links can be established between conversational proficiency and, for example, the ability to teach a lesson, the SCPI cannot be thought to index any skills other than conversational ones without extensive modification.

A third basic issue concerns scoring procedures of the SCPI. Most troublesome from a measurement point of view is the notion of ranges within and between rating levels.
Basically this "range within" feature of the LPI and SCPI means that a score of Intermediate for one candidate does not mean the same thing as the score of Intermediate for another. That is, a score can represent a quite different combination of proficiency-related skills (both expressive and receptive) for one interviewee from what it represents for another. The "range between" means when an individual moves from Survival to Intermediate level a different unit of progress is made than when the same individual moves from Intermediate to Advanced level (See Figure 1). Thus, not only do scores mean different things within levels but the units used to measure progress from one level to another are different also. These two features of the LPI and the SCPI preclude any summative treatment of the results, which reduces their applicability to program evaluation. It also clouds interpretation of individual results relative to program influence and includes little, if any, information of diagnostic value.

This last point, the lack of diagnostic value, is worthy of a brief digression. Although the LPI and SCPI were clearly designed as proficiency measures, the raters must observe, evaluate, and then generalize a great deal of information that is valuable from a diagnostic standpoint. However, when all of this information is "crunched" into a single, global proficiency rating, a tremendous amount of information is lost. The important thing is that it is the scoring procedure that causes the information loss and not the interview procedure per se. Consequently, it should be possible to retrieve this information if the appropriate procedures for doing so could be developed. I would encourage the authors and others interested in the SCPI to develop some thinking along these lines. This type of approach would result in a more effective and useful instrument, capable of producing both proficiency assessment and diagnostic information (provided the questions of the validity mentioned earlier can be resolved).

The fourth major issue pertains to an assumption underlying the interpretation of the proficiency index. The assumption is stated thus: "Higher SCPI rating levels assume the candidate possesses all skills described for lower rating levels, and lower rating levels assume the candidate does not possess skills described for higher rating levels." While this assumption may be reasonable in situations where second languages are clearly independent of the first language, it is dangerous in situations where two languages are first intermingled and second occur in two different modalities. Also, sign language instruction has traditionally focused on expressive skills, while second language approaches (used by the Peace Corps and Defense Department for example) foster receptive skills prior to
expression. Consequently, the assumptions made about the LPI regarding the hierarchy of second language acquisition simply may not hold for situations in which the SCPI would be typically applied.

Finally, I would question the descriptions under the Function column for the functional trisection (See Appendix A). It is unclear how one should interpret this column. Are we to assume that the candidate below the Advanced level is incapable of hypothesizing? Are we to assume that candidates at the Advanced level cannot negotiate or persuade or counsel until they achieve the Superior SCPI level? If this is the case, then I would strongly argue that the Function column represents activities that may be thought to be quite independent of language form and content. That is, individuals at the intermediate and even survival level can and do "hypothesize" because hypothesizing is a cognitive activity not directly constrained by language form. Thus, the descriptions and their placement in the Function column are puzzling. In fact, the relationships between the functions and the content and accuracy parts of the trisection as rating parameters is quite ambiguous.

I have raised some serious questions regarding the appropriateness of applying the LPI to situations where ASL and English are intermingled and have raised issues regarding measurement by the SCPI. While the authors have ably portrayed desirable features of the LPI, and while I agree with their conclusions that the SCPI is a promising addition to our repertoire of methods for assessing signing skills, there are trade-offs for these advantages. For example, the authors stress the flexibility of the SCPI, but from a measurement standpoint this flexibility makes interpretation of scores ambiguous. I would caution those favoring the SCPI approach to give appropriate regard to its limitations as well as its advantages.

Note

3. A committee at Gallaudet College chaired by Robert E. Johnson of the Linguistics Department has a report in preparation that deals with this issue of signing/English varieties. In it three varieties of signing/English are identified and described within the context of College policy, evaluation, and training parameters. The report should be appearing soon.
References

Cokely, Dennis R.
1983 When is a pidgin not a pidgin: An alternate analysis of the ASL/English contact situation, Sign Language Studies 38, 1-24. Woodward, James

COMMENT ON THE SCPI (2)

Dennis Cokely

In reviewing the proposed adaptation of the Language Proficiency Interview (LPI) from a sociolinguistic perspective, there are three main areas that must be addressed: the object of the assessment "sign communicative competence"), the SCPI Rating -ale, and the interview format itself.

The object of the assessment. The basic premise upon which the LPI and 11 LPI-like assessments are based is comparison. The authors note that it should compare "...the candidate's performance to a predetermined scale based on an 'ideal' language user." Such comparisons are possible only to the extent that the formal linguistic structure used by native language users to accomplish specific linguistic and practical functions can be clearly stated. Alternately, as is often the case with the LPI, one must rely upon the intuitions of native or proficient users to determine the "goodness of fit" of a candidate's performance. As long as the object of assessment remains language proficiency, gradient ratings of a candidate's performance can be made on the basis of discrepancies between the formal properties of the candidate's utterances (e.g. control of grammar, pronunciation, extent of lexicon) and those of the native language user. In recognition of this, the highest interview rating awarded by the Foreign Service Institute has been a level "...equivalent to that of an educated, native speaker" (Wilds 1975).

Certainly an adaptation of the LPI is possible for ~L, inasmuch as it is a naturally evolved language with community of users (thus descriptions of the -performance of native
users and reliance upon the judgments of native users are possible). Of course, adjustment on the upper end of the rating scale "educated, native user") would be needed since there are no native users whose full formal education has used ASL as a medium of instruction.

It is doubtful, however, whether the SCPI as proposed by Newell et al. is possible or reasonable within a "language in contact" situation. As has been pointed out, assessment of ASL is possible using an PI-like procedure. But when the attempt is made to possess "signing within the range indicated by ASL and SE," certain problems and limitations arise. If as has been suggested (Woodward 1973), intermediate signing varieties along the ASL-(manually represented) English continuum comprise a pidgin (i.e.

conditions obtain (Decamp 1971): the language has
   - no native users
   - lexical and structural limitations
   - suitability only for specialized and limited communication
   - reduced redundancy of code
   - restricted function. In short, the functions one can perform by using a pidgin are restricted (as compared to the functions one can perform using a language), as are the formal linguistic devices available for expressing these functions.

If, on the other hand, the continuum of language varieties between ASL and manually represented English results from foreigner talk and learner's grammar (Cokely 1983), then as with all simplified registers, which these are (Ferguson & DeBose 1977), the following conditions obtain: in foreigner talk,
   - slow, exaggerated enunciation
   - short sentences
   - repetition of words
   - use for special functions or purposes; and in learner's grammar,
   - simplification (restriction) of target language
   - mismatch of grammatical categories and ranges of meanings of lexical items
   - characteristics of "errors" depending on social context of use
   - preference of users for general and undifferentiated items.

Regardless of whether intermediate varieties along the ASL-manually represented English continuum are explained as pidgins or as the result of processes like that of learner's grammar or processes resulting in foreigner talk, there are certain implications here for the
proposed SCPI. First, there are no native users of the intermediate signing varieties. Thus comparisons with the formal linguistic structures of native users is impossible, as is comparison of functions of languages with different functions. Second, in the absence of native users, one is forced to rely on the judgments of those who are "proficient" users of the PSE or FT/LG. Of course this begs the question: who is a proficient user? Those who have received a rating of Superior + on the SCPI? Those identified by the SCPI's developers? There is inescapable circularity here.

Third, given the inherent formal and functional variability and restrictions of either a pidgin or FT/LG, the proposed list of features -- "traditionally associated with skilled signers" and their use in the 'I rating scale (e.g. "extensive vocabulary, good control of grammar, beginning emergence of basic grammatical features") -- lacks the stability of the scalar anchor one has in assessing a naturally evolved language; i.e. the performance and intuitions of a native user.

Fourth, the assumption that a single assessment procedure and its rating scale can be used to assess language (ASL) and (an indeterminate number of) varieties of signing that have arisen from inter-language contact fails to recognize the inherent functional limitations of those varieties; that is, certain functions may be outside the range of these varieties and indeed may be inappropriate for expression in a pidgin or FT/LG.

The SCPI rating scale. The problem of developing a rating scale that applies to a naturally evolved language like ASL and to other pidgin or FT/LG varieties have been mentioned above. However, if one accepts for the moment the proposed SCPI model, then there are certain inherent problems and difficulties with the rating scale. The first area of concern is the implication (Appendix A) that successful communicative functions require a predetermined level of linguistic accuracy. Thus, for example, the functions 'Negotiates' and 'Represents Point of View' are in the functional trisection appendix A) correlated with 'grammar nearly perfect' 'extensive vocabulary.' It is not clear whether one to assume that those functions are not possible in absence of an extensive vocabulary and nearly perfect grammar. If this is intended, it represents a lack of understanding of the relationship between linguistic form and language function; namely, the fact at forms by and large are the means by which functions are attempted. The motivation for attempting language functions derives from social, interactional factors, the grammatical competence and breadth of lexicon (as is demonstrated by pidgins and simplified registers).
If, on the other hand, such a direct correlation is not intended, then one would expect an interviewee to receive three separate ratings (on Function, Context/Content, and Accuracy), since the SCPI claims to emphasize "what a communicator can do" and since it is clear that the functions assigned, for example, to the superior SCPI level can be accomplished with a degree of formal accuracy less than that indicated by the Superior level. What rating is given, one may ask, to a candidate who negotiates or represents a point of view using "short connected sign utterances?" A Superior Level? A Survival Level? If the rating given the candidate is Survival Level, then the decision is not based on the candidate's functional ability but rather on grammatical-lexical competence. If this is the case, then the "Functional Trisection" becomes meaningless because the crucial determinant of the person's rating is Accuracy alone.

The second area of concern is the claim that "Higher SCPI rating levels assume the candidate possesses all the skills described for lower rating levels, and lower rating levels assume the candidate does not possess skills described for higher rating levels." Such an assumption may be true for SCPI Accuracy (i.e. before having "nearly perfect" grammar a candidate may be assumed to have passed through stages or levels of increasing grammatical control. But this is clearly not true for SCPI Context/Content. To imply, as the SCPI Functional Trisection does, that the listed functions exist in a nesting or inclusive relationship fails to recognize that although some functions exist in an implicational or hierarchical relationship, there is no justification for such a "developmental," or "ascending competence" arrangement of language functions. It is likely that individuals possessing "lower level" grammatical competence are quite able to and need to represent points of view, to negotiate, to persuade, and so forth.

A third area of concern with the SCPI scale is the list of "functions" presented in the Functional Trisection. As presented, at least some of them are not functions per se but rather represent contexts or formal linguistic items. For example, "participates in casual conversations" is not a function but a context within which one uses linguistic forms to accomplish certain functions. Again, "past and future" is either contextual or linguistic form, and "some creativity in sign utterances" is not a function but is reflective of the way one uses linguistic forms -- it is true that in some cases creative use of form can serve a particular function, e.g. puns. Likewise, some of the "contexts/contents" seem to be functions or linguistic forms; e.g. "expression and defense of opinions..." is function; and it could be argued that "minimal courtesy requirements" are linguistic form, or if properly
categorized, function.

Not only does there seem to be a lack of consistency in the Function category, but the list that is presented is hardly an attempt at an exhaustive listing, which one would expect if the SCPI is intended to focus on "what a communicator can do..." Consider the following list of functions (those starred appear in the CPI): *Report, *Narrate, *Explain, *Describe, *Request, Reason, *Negotiate, *Counsel, *Persuade, Complain, Comment, Judge/Evaluate, Promise, Approve, Disapprove, Tolerate, Imply, Argue, Agree, Disagree, Deny, Concede, Curse/Swear, Flatter, Greet, Sympathize, Tease/Trick, Criticize, Correct, Apologize, Suggest, Thank, Desire, Introduce, Refuse, Challenge/Question, Joke, Permit/Allow, Scold.

It is apparent that certain vital functions receive no attention in the SCPI. Yet, those functions would seem to be crucial in determining the extent to which a candidate can interact in a range of professional and social contexts. One would hope for a greater degree of specificity of both the Function category and the 'context/Content category in the SCPI if it is to be used meaningfully with "dormitory personnel...graduate students and staff..."

The interview format. As a "spinoff" of the LPI, the SCPI is also subject to those criticisms that have been lodged against interview procedures for testing. Among the criticisms of the interview format are these: (1) The interviewee's success depends, in large part, upon the rapport s/he establishes with a single interviewer. (2) A person's performance in the interview situation "a conversational format") may not accurately and validly reflect that person's performance in non-conversational situations (e.g. a classroom Lecture). (3) "...the examinee may not have sufficient opportunity to ask questions, for example, or to use requests, invitations, or exclamations, or use various types of complex sentences..." (Lado 1978)

The Foreign Service Institute, responding to these criticisms, has altered their Oral Proficiency Test to include three tasks Task-type 1, Social/personal conversation: A chat between the tester and examinee on biographical topics initiated by the tester. Task-type 2, Interviewing: Given a choice of topics (presented in written English), the examinee interviews the tester in the target language, and reports point-by-point (in oral English) on the tester's views. Task-type 3, Briefing: Examinee briefs the tester in the target language on information contained in one of three (written English) background papers, and responds to the tester's target language questions and comments. (Adams & Argo 1983)
Such a revised format has at least the advantage of eliciting performance from candidates in other than the social interview setting and format, and it allows the candidate to initiate topics, to question the tester, and the like, which the SCPI does not seem to do.

Apart from these criticisms of the interview format, the SCPI as proposed by Newell et al. introduces at least one additional problem. As adapted, the SCPI "...requires interviewers to communicate effectively across a range from ASL to sign English...within a single interview." This represents the basic approach in the SCPI, which the authors indicate may be modified - such modifications might be restricting the interview to ASL only or to "sign English" only. In normal conversational situations, however, participants quickly find a comfortable register, style, and range of linguistic forms that proves effective for that setting. Thus, based on an assessment of the situation and the other participant, a participant in a conversation may consciously rule out the use of certain communicative behaviors or sign varieties or both. This has historically been the case, for example, with Deaf and hearing people and the use of ASL (Kannapell 1980, Cokely 1983). Thus, the interviewer who makes predetermined shifts in styles, registers, and/or sign varieties "within a single interview" is not only behaving in an artificial, unnatural manner but may negatively influence the behavior of a candidate whose conversational experience with deaf individuals likely has not included "a range from ASL to sign English" within a single interaction. (Even if it could be demonstrated that such "code-switching" in a single interviewing is not problematic, then there is still a problem of rating: Is the candidate given a separate rating for ASL and another for "non-ASL" varieties of signing? If given a single rating, how is it to be interpreted?)

Although there is an undeniable need for assessments of functional, communicative competence, the proposed SCPI seems to create more problems than it solves. While the interview testing format offers promise in assessing conversational competence, it is clear that if it is to be effectively applied to assessing ASL and sign varieties along the ASL-manually represented English continuum, then at least the issues and problems addressed here need to be resolved.

References

Adams & Argoff
AUTHORS’ RESPONSE

We thank the editor for providing this forum to discuss application of the LPI to the assessment of sign communication, and David Knight and Dennis Cokely for their comments.

Relative to assessment concerns, when there is an intermingling of two languages, Haugen (1977) stressed that the concept of “language norm” is "highly ambiguous and slippery," especially in bilingual communities. Does one choose as the norm the formal, stylized norm of the rhetorician or the communicative norm found in the everyday conversations of skilled communicators? The answer, as is usual for such questions, is that it depends on your purpose or goal. Given that our emphasis is on communicative competence, we have chosen the communicative norm which "...is more like a spectrum embracing the wide variation of situations in which a bilingual finds himself" (op. cit., 93). Further, "We have to recognize that the communicative norm which grows up in bilingual communities is more elastic and less predictable than that of a monolingual community" (op. cit., 98).
Given the above, we believe a flexible approach to sign assessment that incorporates local, regional variations that are important for effective sign communication is appropriate. (This is true whether one is assessing ASL or PSE/sign English communicative competence.) As suggested in the original paper -- and in a subsequent application at the Louisiana School for the Deaf, described by Caccamise, Newell, & Mitchell-Caccamise (in press); who can better decide what is important for sign communication than sign communicators within the locales or programs where assessments are conducted?

Further, the issue of language norm and variance was addressed at the meeting organized by Mary Mosleh at the Education Testing Service, and is reflected in the name change from Sign Language Proficiency Interview to Sign Communication Proficiency Interview: ASL and General (See Note 1, p. 329).

Relative to the information available from SCPI ratings, it is important that these ratings be viewed as global communicative competence or performance ratings. Although language form and function are integrally related (especially at the highest levels of communication proficiency), our major purpose in applying the LPI to signing skills is not to judge the form of a person's signing (a diagnostic concern), but rather to assist in assessing the competence of individuals to function as sign communicators in the various situations in which they want and need to function. Like Knight and Cokely, we recognize the importance of diagnostic testing, and have addressed the use of videotaped SCPIs for diagnostic purposes (Caccamise, Newell, & Mitchell-Caccamise, in press). In using the SCPI for diagnostic purposes, lists of sign grammatical features (such as those in Appendix B of our paper) can be used as guides to specify the strengths of each signer and those sign communication skills that may need development or refinement. We say may because we recognize that in any assessment or test a person may not have either the opportunity or need to use certain language skills they possess. If there are sign skills that are considered essential, and which are not evident in an SCPI, a second interview and/or use of discrete point tests may be appropriate.

Relative to formal communication needs (such as teaching, lecturing, and professional meetings), SCPI "situations" may be used to assess communicative competence in a variety of simulated settings. Further, we recognize the complexity and range of skills required of many jobs, and we encourage on-the-job observations as a critical part of a total appraisal process.

We agree with Knight and Cokely that the SCPI cannot be used to judge whether a
person can "hypothesize" and perform other cognitive functions. Rather, the SCPI is designed to assess how well a person can "communicate" hypotheses and other ideas and feelings to a skilled signer. Further, the functions listed in Appendix A are not intended to be comprehensive, but only guideposts for making rating judgments. Improvements in these "guideposts" are expected (and welcome) as we learn how to better assess sign communicative competence.

Regarding the issue of "native Signer" versus "skilled user of PSE/sign English," we agree that presently only ASL signers could be awarded a Superior or Superior + rating. A careful reading of SCPI rating category descriptions would indicate that this is so. Since adult models of native sign English communicators are not available, the highest rating currently possible in PSE/sign English interviews is Advanced.

In regard to PSE and sign English, we believe that what has traditionally been labeled PSE (toward the English end of the continuum) is appropriate "grammatical" sign English. Further, unlike traditionally described spoken language pidgins and "Foreign Talk," the type of PSE/sign English described in our paper has been and continues to be used to discuss complex and technical topics (including politics, religion, science, etc.) in both formal and informal gatherings of deaf and hearing persons. We believe that both ASL and PSE/sign English have important roles to serve within and outside academic settings, that both will continue to evolve and grow in a manner that is consistent with the communicative needs of signers, that they will continue to influence each other, and that both are part of the heritage of sign communication in the United States. We concur with Haugen (1977: 101) that, "Acceptance of useful convergence between codes is better than a total rejection of the mother tongue, which is likely to result if one always and everywhere insists on the rigid rhetorical norms of the academicians."

Reliability and validity of the LPI has been addressed by Mullen, Bartz, Lado, Adams, Quinones, Lowe, Clifford, and Clark. Like the LPI, the face validity of the SCPI is high since the interview situation is an actual communication situation that requires questioning, turn-taking, and other important conversational skills. Further, situations, as indicated earlier, allow for simulation of more specific and/or formal social and work communicative competence requirements. Reliability for the LPI has been shown to be high, and the use of more than one rater (each rating done independently) helps to ensure a check on the reliability of each rater. Further, the right (and responsibility) of raters and interviewers to request another interview helps to ensure that the candidate is given an
opportunity to demonstrate her/his highest communicative competence. (See Caccamise et al., in press, for further discussion of this.) We recognize the importance of conducting formal validity and reliability studies for the SCPI.

In conclusion, application of the LPI to sign evaluation is in its infant stages, and we have much to learn about its potential strengths and limitations for assessment of sign communication. As suggested in our support for the use of discrete point tests and observational techniques, we believe that the SCPI should be considered as one approach within a battery of performance and diagnostic assessment/test instruments, which may be used alone or in combination as appropriate. Through continued cooperative efforts, supportive critique, and sharing of experiences, the appropriate issues raised by reviewers will be addressed. What we and others must keep in perspective is that communication is what is most important.

References (Additional)

Haugen, E. 1977 Norm & deviation in bilingual communities. In Bilingualism: Psychological,
Social, & Educational Implications, Hornby ed.

Lowe, P.
1978 Third rating of FSI interviews. In Clark (above).

Mullen, K.

Quinones, J.

APPENDIX A
Functional trisection for SCPI Rating Scale
(Adapted from Liskin-Gasparro 1982).
### APPENDIX A
Functional trisection for SCPI Rating Scale
(Adapted from Liskin-Gasparro 1982).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLPI Level</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Context/Content</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>Represents Point of View</td>
<td>All nontechnical situations</td>
<td>Grammar nearly perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiates</td>
<td>Professional experiences</td>
<td>Extensive vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persuades</td>
<td>All topics for professional expression</td>
<td>Errors only occasional and un-patterned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counsels</td>
<td>Tailors language professional needs and social of a general nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Handles unfamiliar topics and situations</td>
<td>Most formal and informal social and work topics</td>
<td>Good control of grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypothesizes</td>
<td>Expression and defense of opinions about current events and similar topics</td>
<td>Broad vocabulary for only low frequency and complex structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provides supported opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td>Errors neither interfere with understanding nor disturb native signer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B
Some important grammatical features.

1. Use of space/present referent
2. Use of space/absent referent
   a. Indexing
   b. Eye-gaze
   c. Non-dominant hand as referent
3. Use of space/contrast
4. Directionality
5. Facial Expression
   a. Negation
   b. Affirmative/Assertion
   c. Time adverbial (proximity)
   d. Conditional
   e. Manner Adverb (carelessly, routinely)
   f. Degree and Intensity
6. Reversal of Orientation/Negation
   (DON'T-WANT, DON'T-KNOW, DON'T-LIKE)
7. Yes/No Question Expression
8. Wh-Question Expression
9. Whet-Question Expression
10. Time-line/Tense
11. Incorporation of number
12. Plurality
    a. Horizontal and vertical sweep
    b. Replication
    c. Cluster
    d. Indexing
APPENDIX B (Continued)

13. Classifiers
   CL-F (buttons, coins, spot, token)
   CL-C (campaign button, silver dollar, large cookie)
   CL-U (hockey puck, flat round paper weight)
   CL-C (cup, bottle, pipe, post)
   CL-I (person, pencil, pole)
   CL-A (legs of a person)
   CL-1 (legs, manner of gait)
   CL-V (small animal, rabbit, bird)
   CL-H (people sitting)
   CL-5 (buildings, piles of something, clumps)
   CL-A (object occupying space, lamp)
   CL-B (flat object, paper book)
   CL-C (thinness, picture frame, book binding)
   CL-C (thickness, cover of snow)
   CL-2 (two people)
   CL-3 (three people)
   CL-3 (car, bus, train, ship)
APPENDIX C

Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI)
Procedures: Information for Candidates.

1. We will have a conversation about social and work topics. I will ask you questions, and you should ask me questions.
2. We want to get the best sample of your signing skills.
3. We will evaluate your signing skills, including: (a) sign vocabulary; (b) clarity and control of sign production; (c) use of sign grammar (for example, use of space, sign directionality, and time indicators); (d) fluency or smoothness of sign and fingerspelling production; and (e) comprehension/understanding or skill in receiving signed information.
4. This interview allows you to demonstrate your highest skill level. There are no trick questions.
5. Please answer my questions as completely as possible.
6. I will use only signs when I ask you questions. This is to test your reception for signs alone when there is no speech. Sometimes, however, I may use signs with lip movement or signs with voice.
7. Please do not use any voice; some lip movement is OK.

Do you have any questions? Please use signing to ask them.

SIGN LANGUAGE & LANGUAGE SUPPRESSION

This is an interesting book, but before broaching some of its subjects of interest, it would perhaps be best to consider what the book is not. To begin with, the title ('The language of the deaf') is something of a misnomer -- this is really a book about the history of deaf education in France; and in particular about the suppression of sign language in the schools and the rise of oralism during the 19th century. In this regard, I have found it useful to compare the book to another recent book on the subject, Lane's Wild Boy of Aveyron (1976), and will do so at greater length below. Given the title of Cuxac's book, one expects some treatment of either the linguistics or the sociolinguistics of French Sign Language (FSL), and of this there is almost none, nor is there any discussion of the now voluminous literature on the linguistics of ASL, a presumably closely related form.

How, then, is this book to be understood, and what are its strengths? I think this book can be most usefully understood as a work in political advocacy, and as such it has considerable power. At the heart of the book is an attempt to explain how a system of education of the deaf based almost exclusively on some form of signing (whether FSL or Signed French, signes methodiques) could be rapidly supplanted by an almost exclusively oral system. Cuxac takes several approaches to solving this problem; I will attempt to summarize and categorize them here. First is a category of causes that might be termed "social currents" and related to official or unofficial government policy. Foremost among these would be the linguistic and cultural unification of France in the post-revolutionary era. Suppression of the sign language of deaf people could be seen under this theory as part and parcel of a larger attempt to homogenize the "new" French nation through suppression of the languages and cultures of its minorities (Alsatians, Basques, Bretons, Catalans, Flemings, Occitans). Related to this drive toward homogenization is a more general "social current" toward normalization. According to this theory, it is to the individual's pecuniary as well as emotional advantage to fit into the general society as easily as possible, and mastery of the spoken (majority) language is the only way to this goal. The first resolution of the Congress of Milan (cited by Cuxac, p. 138) is couched in these terms:

The Congress, considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs to return the deaf-mute to society and to give him a more perfect knowledge of language,
declares: that the oral method must be preferred over that of sign language for the education
and instruction of deaf-mutes. (Translation and emphasis by the reviewer)

Cuxac identifies another and more sinister set of motivations to support oralism on
the part of hearing educators of the deaf. I will call these "hidden agenda" causes. First
among these is the observation that there were many physicians among the leading
educators of the deaf in the mid 19th century and that they naturally adopted a "deafness as
disease" model. Deaf education then became treatment, and through a logical process, "to
induce speech is to cure (p. 124), since "to induce speech is to induce hearing" (p. 121). This
motivation toward oralism is obviously related to the normalization process noted above, as
Western medicine traditionally has as its goal to return the patient to normality (health) and
so to the bosom of society. In the course of describing this 19th century medical paradigm
Cuxac incidentally discusses several of the barbarities to which deaf children were subjected
during the course of "treatment." Another and more self-serving item Cuxac finds on the
"hidden agenda" of the hearing educators was their apparent failure, in many cases, to
master FSL. In a rigidly hierarchical educational environment it would be unthinkable for
the student to be superior to his master in command of the principal vehicle of
communication. Rigid adherence to oralism would, from the point of view of the hearing
instructor, have the salutary effect of placing the student in a properly subservient posture.

This latter reason fits in nicely with the general socio-economic effect Cuxac
identifies with the oral movement. He suggests that the great residential schools employing
sign language were simply too egalitarian in a strictly hierarchical society. Large classes
could receive adequate instruction in topics of general education through the medium of
sign, while the technique of oral instruction required a much more expensive tutorial
situation in order to be effective.

Oral education on a mass scale would simply not be effective, and this was perhaps
desired to rectify a situation under the method of teaching in sign language: a deaf child at
one of the large residential schools could receive an education regardless of his social class:

As the teaching was done by gesture, coaching at home -- for want of knowing the
language -- could not work in favor of students from the higher socio-economic strata. The
national institutions in France were, thus, the only educational milieu where the
reproduction of hereditary social roles was not in effect. How, then, could one not see in the
appearance of small private schools, with an oralist tendency, and in the bitter attack that they were to direct against the large schools -- right up to the definitive victory of oralism in 1880 -- an attempt to put the educational house back in order? Oralist education, in the micro-society of the deaf, appears then, contrary to education based on sign language, as the anamorphosis of the class-based educational system in force for hearing children. (PP. 35f)

How sound are Cuxac's arguments and evidence for the positions outlined here? First, it is important to recognize that we have here explanation on at least two levels. The first is a sociological level of analysis of general trends in French society toward "normality" and homogeneity of social groups (i.e. "social currents"), while the second concerns the motivations of individual people involved in the education of deaf students. In order for the first set of explanations to be valid, one need not show immediate causal linkage between general social and political movements and forces impinging directly on deaf education. For this line of argumentation to have value, I believe it is necessary only to show that the effects were the same. The linguistic and ethnic minorities were to a great extent homogenized and sign language was suppressed. Moreover, a long-term trend in Western educational systems has been toward hierarchical control: "tracking" based on socio-economic level (often thinly disguised as based on a narrow set of supposedly objectively measured scholastic abilities). There has also been a general reluctance in Western education to accept linguistic variants. Cuxac's arguments at the sociological level are quite plausible within this context.

For the second level of explanation a different standard is required. Imputation of motives is a tricky business. Whereas it is not difficult to see how a physician would come to approach deafness as a disease, it is somewhat less clear whether or not the hearing educators of deaf students in France during the 19th century possessed some of the more nefarious motives imputed to them by Cuxac. Two of the principal villains of this book are Sicard and Itard, because they fell away from the sign language approach developed by the Abbe de l'Epee. Cuxac is not really clear about their motives, although Itard, as a physician, is seen as wanting to "cure" deaf people, and both are seen as provincials who embraced the life of Paris and lost their identification with their local languages and cultures. It is possible to contrast this portrayal of Itard and Sicard with that put forward by Lane (1976). Lane presents a much more balanced and favorable portrayal of the two men, suggesting that they had, at bottom, complex but humanitarian motives. Winefield (1981) has recently argued
persuasively that the motives underlying individual decision to support either oralism or sign language may be quite complex indeed. Writing about E. M. Gallaudet and A. G. Bell, Winefield argues that their views on education of deaf people were highly conditioned by individual deaf people in their lives: in the case of Gallaudet his mother; in the case of Bell his wife. Economic and social factors aside, it may be very difficult, in the case of individual actors, to piece together complex patterns of motivation.

In sum then, with respect to the principal arguments put forward in this book, I think that Cuxac has been most successful in relating the rise of oralism in France to dominant socio-economic trends, and least successful in elucidating the motives of the individuals involved. There are several additional topics covered in the book that should be considered. Cuxac makes several points that are well taken and worth repeating. For example, he points out that one of the principal fallacies of the pure oral method lies in the artificial way that it require language to be learned. He rightly points out that a native language is learned by use in social settings and not by drilling in a classroom. A deaf child deprived of a native language is thus deprived of the major vehicle by which one learns how to enter into ordinary social relations.

In general, Cuxac's championing of the rights of deaf people to their own mode of communication forms the book's strongest aspect. However, there are several pitfalls in this form of advocacy that Cuxac has not avoided. First and most serious is what might be termed a version of Moore's naturalistic fallacy (1965: 10).

According to Moore those who fall foul of this fallacy confuse statements of ethical principle with statements of fact, and confuse statements containing the verb is with statements containing the verb ought. In the course of advocating bilingual education, Cuxac appears to fall into this fallacy:

This signifies for us that everything that a hearing child of a given age is supposed to know and to have acquired -- with the exception of French; the second language for a deaf child -- should be known and acquired by a deaf child of the same age. (p. 182n)

The exception is a large one; Cuxac's statement presupposes that there should be a literature in transcribed (or videotaped) sign language comparable to that of French (to the extent that the deaf children know French less well than their hearing peers they will have less access to literature in French), and that FSL should have undergone the centuries of
evolution that transformed French from a local patois into a scholarly world language. This is a process of evolution that is only now beginning for American Sign Language and is presumably yet to begin for French Sign Language. I will maintain here that what Cuxac really intends to make is an ethical argument for the right of deaf people to choose their own language and to have access to it in the schools. In fact he does make this argument strongly:

The right of deaf children to live deaf entails permitting deaf adults to take charge of their education in order to reestablish an adult-child: teacher-pupil communication that has been cut for a hundred years. (p. 183)

This is a statement that has implications for educational policy and that is firmly grounded in humanistic principles. It would be a mistake, however, to tie it to "factual" statements that are insupportable and that will continue to be so in the foreseeable future, namely that the ethically correct and humane position of allowing deaf children to learn in their own language will result in their reaching educational levels comparable to those of their hearing peers. As Moore (1965) points out, ethical positions are not amenable to support by statements of fact, nor do they need such support. They stand alone, although factual statements may be used to delineate the probably outcome of adopting a particular ethical position. Moreover, by attaching a statement of fact to an ethical statement, one risks refutation. Cuxac would risk this refutation because of the supposed educational attainments of deaf students at the time of the Abbe de l'Epee and Bebian, but these are impossible to evaluate or to relate to the current situation.

There is a general tendency for linguists, especially when they are working within a political context, to assert that all languages in their current configurations are equally able to support all kinds of human endeavor. In an important article written a decade ago, Hymes (1973) questioned this assumption. I will quote at length from this article because I believe that it is quite relevant in the current context:

Occasionally linguists have been so carried away by ideological certitude as to state that all languages are equally complex. this is of course not no. It is known that languages differ in sheer number of lexical elements by an order of magnitude of about two to one as between world languages and local languages. They differ in number and in proportion of abstract, superordinate terms. They differ in elaboration of expressive and stylistic devices --
lexical, grammatical, and phonological. Languages differ in number of phoneme-like units, in complexity of morphophonemics, in complexity of word-structure (both phonological and morphological), in degree of utilization of morphophonemically permitted morpheme-shapes, etc.

The usual view is that such things are distinctions without a difference, that all languages are equally adapted to the needs of those who use them. Leaving aside that such equality might be an equality of imperfect adaptations, speech communities around the world simply do not find this to be the case. They are found to prefer one language for a purpose as against another, to acquire some languages and give up others because of their suitability for certain purposes. No Third World government can afford to assume the equality of languages within its domain.

The usual answer to this objection is that all languages are potentially equal. In fact, this is so in one vital respect: all languages are indeed capable of adaptive growth, and it is a victory of anthropologically oriented linguistic work, particularly, to have established this point. The difficulty with the usual answer is twofold. First, given that each language constitutes an already formed starting point, it is not at all clear that expansion of resources, however far, would result in languages being interchangeable, let alone identical. Limiting consideration to world languages, we find that many who command more than one prefer one to another for one or more purposes, and that this is often enough a function of the resources of the languages themselves. The other difficulty is that the realization of potentiality entails costs. The Chomskyan image of the child ideally acquiring mastery of language by an immanent unfolding misleads us here. It has an element of truth to which the world should hearken, but it omits the costs, and the constitutive role of social factors. Most of the languages of the world will not be developed, as was Anglo-Saxon, into world languages over the course of centuries. (It is speculated that Japanese may be the last language to join that particular club.) (Hymes 1973: 77f)

Cuxac also bases his hopes for bilingual education on what he perceives to be the educational situation for deaf people in the United States. Here I think he is altogether more sanguine about the situation than most close observers of deaf education in the United States would be. (In this regard, see Moores 1978.) I think Cuxac's purpose here can once again best be understood within a political context. What better way to shame French policy makers than to suggest that the Americans are ahead of them in some field of endeavor,
especially if it is one in which humanistic principles are at stake. Once again, however, it is not clear that Cuxac will derive any benefit by hanging his argument on a non-existent American peg--there is certainly not a well developed bilingual approach to the education of deaf children being practiced on a large scale in the United States. Moreover, the situation with respect to bilingual education involving only spoken languages is very difficult to evaluate. In a recent review of the literature on the educational efficacy of bilingual programs, Rotberg (1982: 155f) presents the following quotations from Paulston (1978):

At the world level, the field of research on bilingual education is characterized by disparate findings and inconclusive results....a study can be found to support virtually every possible opinion.

Rotberg rightly points out the distinction between the philosophical-ethical-social policy questions underlying bilingual approaches to education and the empirical-research questions regarding efficacy:

Deciding whether the goal of federal education programs should be to teach children their native language and culture or to encourage assimilation is political and value judgment, not a research question. However, research can help to determine whether or not a bilingual-bicultural approach is the most effective way to teach children English and other academic skills. (1982: 155)

An additional element further clouding the picture for deaf children is the fact that unlike the more ordinary bicultural situation, the large majority of deaf children do not come from homes in which the first language is a signed language. Promotion of a bilingual approach for these children would, therefore, have to entail a process of education for their parents as well. This educational process would probably have to deal with the potential social and emotional benefits of allowing a deaf child to develop in a signing environment (see e.g. Stokoe & Battison 1981, Mottez 1981) and with the question of identification with the hearing or deaf communities as well as poorly understood questions concerning educational efficacy. My intention here is not to argue against Cuxac but to support him in pointing out that there are a host of political and philosophical questions surrounding
bilingual educational approaches and that there are probably no simple answers to these. Furthermore, we should expect that development of truly effective bilingual approaches will take a great deal of time and experimentation and can probably not be accomplished overnight.

In conclusion, Cuxac is most effective when he argues for the linguistic and cultural rights of deaf children and adults; least effective when he tries to tie these arguments to possible educational outcomes. The book performs a valuable service by putting forth arguments in support of rights for deaf people, but I think it would be a mistake to expect that even fundamental changes to the French educational system would lead to rapid changes in the educational attainments of deaf children in that country. The process of developing an educational system in a particular linguistic setting is a long and difficult one, although in the case of signed languages, a linguistics is now developing that can aid in the process. It is hoped that Cuxac's book will have a positive influence on educational policy makers in France, and will aid in attempts to reestablish sign languages in the schools in that country. It should also certainly have a positive impact on attitudes regarding linguistic variation generally.

Notes

1. This separates bilingual approaches to education for deaf children from those for hearing children (e.g. Hispanic children in the U.S.) who are speakers, to use the terminology of Swadesh, of world languages.

2. It is not clear whether Cuxac means to include "total communication" under his rubric of bilingual education (e.g. p. 182), an equation most Americans would probably not accept.

3. The argument for teaching in their own language is even stronger for deaf children than for hearing children, since deaf children do not have access to the

References
Hymes, D.
1973  On the origins and foundations of inequality among speakers, Daedalus Summer, 59-86.
Lane, H.
Moore, G. E.
Moores, D.
Mottez, B.
C.T.N.E.R.H.I.
Paulston, C.
Rotberg, I.
Stokoe, W., & R. Battison
Swadesh, M.
1971  The Origin and Diversification of Language. Chicago: Aldine. Winefield, R.

PERSPECTIVES ON PERSPECTIVES

Joe Grigley

There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip, Nay her foot speaks; her wanton
spirits look out At every joint and motive of her body.
-- Troilus and Cressida, IV.v. 55ff

Sign language research is like a big complicated jigsaw puzzle; the more people you
have around the table, the quicker the pieces find their proper places. The Second
International Symposium on Sign Language Research, in Bristol, England, between 19 and
25 July 1981 (the proceedings here reviewed), was a massive attack on the puzzle:
researchers from eight countries read and signed papers before an interacting audience
representing seventeen nationalities. The published proceedings contains twenty-five papers
on linguistic, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and educational implications of Sign, and
almost every one inspires a contented "ahhhh" as another puzzle piece drops into place

Language in Sign is subtitled "An International Perspective on Sign Language," and
this is a welcome approach at a time when Sign research -- particularly in America --
has become increasingly narrow and technical. The perspective we get is valuable because it
allows us to make much needed comparisons between national sign languages. It is common
knowledge now that Sign is not universal, and early researchers like Epee (1776), Mallery
(1881), and Wundt (1900) were no doubt wrong to classify signing as a natural gestural
activity. But how much they erred and in what ways they were wrong or right has never
been satisfactorily answered. How different is difference? The most frequent reply is to say
that signers of one country cannot readily understand those of another country, and that
national dictionaries of Sign reveal different lexicons (Battison & Jordan 1976). But alas,
this proves little. The dialectal variations between British English and American English
present some of the same problems, but this does not mean the languages are different. Even
signers from different parts of one country occasionally have difficulty understanding each
other (Battison & Jordan 1976, Deuchar 1981). So the oft-repeated syllogism is really a bad one.

The syllogism continues to break down when we look closely at the grammatical
structure of Sign. The most fascinating aspect of Language in Sign is that almost every
paper on Sign structure reveals a grammatical process that can be found in more than one
sign language. Similarities in British and American Sign Languages have recently been
noticed (Stokoe 1983, Woll et al. 1981) and it is both enlightening and reassuring to see
similarity in the morphological processes of British, Swedish, Norwegian, American, and
Russian Sign Languages. Consider reduplication. Fischer's examination (1973) of slow
reduplication for iterative aspect modulation and fast reduplication for habitual aspect
modulation is echoed in studies of Swedish Sign by Brita Bergman and of British Sign
Language by Mary Brennan. The parallels are sufficiently detailed to be disarming; indeed,
one is almost driven to speculate that the differences between sign languages are primarily
lexical rather than morphological.

Other parallels can be cited: classifiers are found in ASL by McDonald (cf. Kantor
Lars Wallin has discovered that compounds in Swedish Sign have undergone spatial and
temporal reductions, precisely as Frishberg found in ASL (1975). Even approaches to syntax
reveal parallelism; Deuchar asks if British Sign is an SVO language and concludes, as Britta
Hansen has for Danish Sign (1975) and Lynn Friedman for ASL (1976), that analysis in
terms of topic and comment is more appropriate. Right in Deuchar's wake comes Zaitseva,
writing on Russian Sign: presence or absence of the topic of the talk may directly influence
the construction of an utterance. If the topics are "given" in the situation, they need not be
expressed in verbal (sign) expression. This peculiarity is situation involvement. (p. 77)

Call it what you will, the fact that American, British, Danish, and Russian Sign
Languages reveal similar syntactical patterns takes us closer to the hypothesis that sign
languages differ most on the lexical not the grammatical level.

The greatest evidence of this can be found in the volume's detailed treatment of
nonmanual sign cherology, which may be, as Stokoe asserts in his conclusion, "the larger
part of signing." (p. 265) Whether or not a foot can speak, as Shakespeare says in the
epigraph, will have to await later treatment, but we have much evidence here to show that
Helen's lips, eyes, and cheeks are indeed formal components of language. The pioneering
work of Charlotte Baker-Shenk (Baker 1980, Baker & Padden 1978) has done much to draw
our attention to the significance of three primary nonmanual features: eye gaze, brows, and
mouth movement.

In Language in Sign the last of these gets the most treatment: Brita Bergman
examines "oral adverbs" in Swedish Sign, while Marit Vogt-Svendsen investigates, with perceptive insight and clarity, mouth movements in Norwegian Sign. Similarly, Lilian Lawson shows that British Sign is much more than moving hands: her classification of nonmanual features ranges from head movement, facial expression, mouth patterns, and shoulders all the way down to body movements. Nothing on foot movements though -- yet.

Two surprising aspects about nonmanual features emerge. The first was voiced by Vogt-Svendsen: a change in the oral movement of a sign can result in a sign "with a different meaning or no meaning at all." (pp. 90f) HAPPY (in ASL) is obviously signed with a smile, but a smirk can designate ambivalence and render the translation, "well, I'm sort of happy, but..." This makes nonmanual features a definite and indivisible part of Sign cherology -- as important as the hands, in fact.

The second revelation about nonmanual features was signed by Sten Ulfsparré, whose stimulating lecture on panto-signs -- one of the best of the symposium -- is not to be found in the proceedings. The fact that his lecture was in Swedish Sign perhaps accounts for this unfortunate and unnecessary omission; let us hope that future papers presented in Sign by native signers will be videotaped for reference and distribution. At any rate, Ulfsparré dropped a bombshell hypothesis when he suggested that while lexics may vary among different sign languages, corresponding facial expressions are the same or similar.

The problem here, of course, is that Ulfsparré's speculation conflicts with undertones of Epee's and Wundt's theories of Sign universality. There is no evidence to prove him wrong. In fact he may possibly be right. Woll (1981) has shown that facial expressions for related questions are the same in ASL and British Sign Language. Although her evidence is slim and requires more thorough investigation, the related morphologies and syntaxes of national sign languages offer theoretical support of Ulfsparré's hypothesis and further suggest that Sign may indeed be more "universal" than we have yet conceded -- universal not in terms of lexical structure (as early researchers believed) but in terms of grammatical structure. This is not to say we are dealing with one Sign Language and numerous national dialects; just because German and Latin are inflected and show other similarities does not mean they are dialects of one language. Instead, evidence is beginning to suggest that we are slowly recognizing a set of Sign universals based on constraints of the visual-gestural modality. We need more evidence, of course, but this once latent idea amongst researchers is becoming increasingly manifest as our knowledge of national sign languages expands.
Limitations of sign structure

Linguistic study is an on linguistic description. attempt to order and classify what seems on the surface to be disordered confusion. Spoken languages are particularly suited for this task because of their structure: each utterance is linear and sequential, and analysis is basically the division and classification of this sequence. Sign, however, is also simultaneous -- we all know this -- and does not adapt well to theories of sequential analysis because so much is going on at once: the hands move, the eyes shift, the brows and mouth perform related tasks. All of these cheremic and morphological processes convey a great load of temporal information, and its organization is complex; as Stokoe has said, "Sign ... has such interesting structure that it challenges all theories of grammar" (Stokoe 1976). One can add that Sign is so unusual a system that it challenges Sign researchers themselves. Cutting up a sequence is no real problem, but how does one cut up a tightly packed mass of simultaneous information?

Sign researchers have been wrangling with this question ever since Stokoe's pioneering study of Sign structure appeared in 1960. Despite great advances made in understanding the grammatical structure of Sign, there remain problems, and Zaitseva's paper on Russian Sign draws attention to a big one. Throughout the volume, researchers frequently refer to major parts of speech in Sign utterances: verb signs, and (less often) noun signs. (Aspect modulation for adjectival and adverbial marking is widely regarded as a concomitant feature of these major Sign classes; see Klima & Bellugi 1979: 243-315). The question is: do these "parts of speech" (as we know them to exist in spoken languages) actually exist in signed languages? In other words, are we correct to refer to "nouns" and "verbs" in signed utterances.

Zaitseva doesn't think so. She points out that the simultaneous nature of Sign structure inclines Russian Sign towards a characteristic she describes as syncretism: verbs are not distinguished from nouns, because one sign has the potential to be either; e.g. AXE and HACK are the same sign, just as are HANDLE and SWEEP. Instead of speaking about nouns and verbs, Zaitseva suggests we speak of polysemes.

To many seasoned Sign researchers, this view will perhaps seem naive, even antiquated. It parallels Mallery's comments on American Indian Sign Language: "The sign radicals, without being specifically any of our parts of speech, may be all of them in turn." (1881: 359) Naive or not, both Mallery and Zaitseva may be right simply because no research has yet demonstrated that Sign verbs exist per se. There have been two attempts to do this in ASL, but neither is wholly convincing. Fischer and Gough (1978) identify "verbs"
through glosses rather than the signs themselves; so their list of "verbs" is really a list of English verbs. In fact, they do not even prove that a verb (as we know it) is necessary to a Sign utterance. Consider a grammatical statement that is part of their data: "SHE CAN'T APPLE." They suggest that we "read in the verb:" understanding 'she can't eat apples.' But must we?

Supalla and Newport (1978) have shown that nouns and verbs may be distinguished by subtle variations in movement: in BROOM the sign is repeated, while in SWEEP it is a slow, continuous movement. The seemingly identical signs are thus actually different, and I find this distinction persuasive -- so persuasive in fact that I wonder if Zaitseva may not have observed these differences in the Russian Sign Language HANDLE and SWEEP. The problem is that the noun and verb forms carry concomitant production features: "sweep with the broom" can be cut up into noun and verb, but can we do this with "SWEEP-WITH-BROOM"? The problem becomes clearer when we look at a set of "noun-verb pairs" in ASL: OPEN - DOOR OPEN - BOOK OPEN - WINDOW OPEN - MOUTH OPEN - HATCHWAY OPEN - CAN We can also add aspect modulation to these utterances; e.g. OPEN DOOR[slowly]. Is it possible to speak here of a separate verb (OPEN), a noun (DOOR), and an adverb ([slowly])? It is this difficulty which makes Zaitseva's description of syncretism plausible. Rather than having discrete parts of speech, Sign seems to exhibit a variable degree of nounness and verbness that is determined by context. By describing these signs as polysemes, Zaitseva has granted Russian Sign a linguistic description that accommodates the language's simultaneous properties. The approach is bold, though by no means unusual; it is also used for descriptions of archaic Chinese (wen yen or wen hua scripts), a language in which parts of speech are also determined by contextual relations (Forrest 1973: 59f, Rosemont 1974, Wu 1969).

Zaitseva's study is thus extremely valuable because it brings a perspective that cannot be found in most other papers in the volume. Since the 1960s ASL researchers have concentrated most of their energy in proving to a skeptical audience that Sign is a legitimate language. This has involved numerous analogies to the structure of spoken languages (phonemes : cheremes, morphology, parts of speech, etc.), and as a result Sign linguistics has been bottled up by these glottocentric models. Zaitseva apparently faced no such challenge from Russian colleagues. While Western researchers are questioning how to break up and classify the simultaneity of signs, Zaitseva seems to question whether this categorization is necessary. The only other paper in the volume to share this approach is Jim
Kyle's study of meaning in British Sign. Kyle suggestively argues that structural analysis of Sign is only a "bottom-up perspective" and that we need to undertake a "top-down perspective" by examining Sign from the standpoint of a variationist. This won't explain everything, of course, but it can give us a more balanced view of the nature of signed languages.

The thrust of Kyle's argument is reiterated in Stokoe's conclusion to the volume where he urges us to enlarge our perspective in Sign study. Certainly there is nothing to lose here. A grammar, we must remind ourselves, is not a rule book for language use but a description of how language is used in various contexts: on the street, in the classroom, in literature. And this is a problem because the lack of an adequate body of Sign literature has prevented researchers from looking at Sign from a more philosophical and less technical point of view. The talent exists in the Deaf community to produce this literature and to examine it, and the present volume is evidence of a solid initiative to join in the task.

Sign and the human organism. In the early days of Sign research, linguists speculated that no research into language per se would eventually be able to ignore Sign, and the prophecy was a good one. As Stokoe remarks in his summary of Language in Sign, "now it is clearer than ever that any language research has to consider signed languages along with spoken languages." (p. 266) It might be possible to add that in a short while no main branch of human study will be able to ignore signed languages and Deaf culture. Language in Sign gives plenty of evidence of Sign's potential to influence a wide variety of research disciplines. Three papers on language acquisition of deaf children -- by Virginia Volterra, John Bonvillian, and Caroline Scroggs -- represent a significant advance in our knowledge of how and why deaf and hearing children learn to sign and speak when they do. Other papers touch upon issues relating to neurolinguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and education: the diversity is daunting, and the implications are great.

Yet to present these findings in a way to be as influential as possible is no easy task. Sign research has always had difficulty in relating to other disciplines, and it probably always will: it has challenged deeply rooted linguistic theories with success, but continues to present challenges to outsiders who regard it as a "closed" discipline which is hard to penetrate. ASL for example is a complex language with a grammar only slowly becoming understood; its descriptive terminology is often baffling; its neologisms are often baffling, redundant, or unnecessary (are "sign radicals," "citation form signs," and "the frozen
lexicon" named in this volume different things?), and they are puzzling until they are learned. Above all, many researchers frequently cite unpublished material or work in progress -- an unimpressive and dangerous habit. The situation relating to these problems has been improving, but the volume at hand provokes a degree of unease in all these areas (one reference by McDonald cites five sources, all unpublished). Although such "problems" are by no means problems for sign researchers only, they do, however, generate perturbation in other fields.

A final word should be said about the volume's editing, or what seems to be a lack of it. The book certainly can benefit from another proofreading; errors can be found on almost every page, and some of them, such as misprinting "oral verbs" instead of "oral adverbs" in Bergman's paper (p. 7), can create confusion. The bibliography is, simply, a mess: J. S. Long's dictionary of ASL, The Sign Language, is misprinted as "Lang 1918;" whereas the 1918 edition, which was used in Frishberg's historical studies of ASL, is actually a second, revised edition of the original 1910 publication. The same problem occurs when citing William Tomkins's Indian Sign Language (1969), which (1931) edition. Sign researchers will acknowledge that etymological accuracy is as important with signs as with words, and this requires proper citation of sources - particularly as little is known about the historical roots of modern signs. Now comes the biggest editorial problem: neither Long nor Tomkins are cited in any of the papers so why are they in the bibliography? Numerous other references in the papers are not to be found in the bibliography. No stars for anyone here. Somehow the editors have managed to lose a whole stack of references between Carmichael and Cokely, and the bibliography omits seven references from a paper by Ladd and Edwards. The impression created by presenting major research findings in a slovenly manner is a bad one, disconcerting and embarrassing for us all.

Yet no amount of criticism of Language in Sign can detract from the achievements of the Second International Symposium on Sign Language Research or the ideas that it generated. Our expanding knowledge of signed languages is inextricably tied to an expanding knowledge of human beings, but it is a knowledge we can arrive at only through patience and care. As Anais Nin has said, although technology has taken us to the moon, it is the journey inward which is the longest, most difficult, and baffling of all.
References

Baker, Charlotte
Baker, Charlotte, & Carol Padden
Battison, Robbin, & I. King Jordan
Deuchar, Margaret
Epee, Charles Michel, l'Abbe de l'
1776  L'institution des sourds et muets par la voie des signes methodiques. Paris:
Fischer, Susan D.
1973  Two processes of reduplication in the American Sign Language, Foundations of Language 9, 469-481.
Fischer, Susan, & Bonnie Gough
Forrest, R. A. D.
Friedman, Lynn A.
Frishberg, Nancy
Hansen, Britta
1975  Varieties in Danish Sign Language and grammatical features of the original
sign language, Sign Language Studies 8, 249-256.
   Kantor, Rebecca
   Klima, Edward S., Ursula Bellugi [et al.]

Mallery, Garrick
   Newport, Elissa L.
   Rosemont, Henry, Jr.

Stokoe, William
   Supalla, Ted, & Elissa Newport
   Woll, Bencie
   Woll, Bencie, Jim Kyle, & Margaret Deuchar, eds.
   Wu, Joseph

Wundt, Wilhelm