Why American Sign Language is Important to the University

Richard Ladner
University of Washington

Outline

• History
• ASL and Linguistics
• ASL Instruction
• ASL at the University of Washington
• Oppression of ASL
• Technology and ASL
• Growing ASL for Science
• Challenges

American Sign Language (ASL)

• ASL is the preferred language for approximately 500,000 Deaf people in the U.S. and most of Canada.
• ASL is not a code for English
• There are hundreds of sign languages around the world.
• Signs are composed of location, orientation, hand shape, movement, facial expressions, body position.
• How many signs are there?

American Sign Language (ASL)

• 1800s - Martha’s Vineyard
• 1815 - Gallaudet and Clerc
• 1817 - American School in Hartford Conn.
• 1820 – 1900 - Proliferation of residential schools for the deaf
• 1865 – Gallaudet University
• Deaf clubs
• Professions

History of ASL

History

Martha’s Vineyard Deaf Community

Gallaudet and Clerc

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet
Laurent Clerc
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ASL and Linguistics

- William Stokoe
  - Sign Language Structure (1960)

- Klima and Bellugi
  - The Signs of Language (1979)

ASL Research

- Sign Language Studies
  - 1972-1997
  - 2000 – present
  - Gallaudet Press

- Sign Language & Linguistics
  - 1998 – present
  - John Benjamins

Origins of Language

- Could sign language have been the first human language?

Conclusions

- Signed languages are natural languages just like spoken languages
- There are universals
  - grammatical structure
- There are differences
  - Use of space
  - Classifiers in action
Sign Language Research at UW

- Catherine Ketrick, Ph.D.
  - Cerebral lateralization for ASL and English in deaf and hearing native and non-native signers (1985)
- Karen Petronio, Ph.D.
  - Clause structure in American Sign Language (1993)
- Lorna Rozelle, Ph.D.
  - The structure of sign language lexicons: inventory and distribution of handshape and location (2003)

Anthropology Research at UW

- Theresa Smith, Ph.D.
  - Deaf people in context (1996)
- Heather Clark, M.S.

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ASL Instruction

- 1964 – Ball State University Workshop
  - Founding of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)
  - Impetus to start interpreter training programs at community colleges

Milestones

- 1980 Baker-Shenk, Cokely
  - Incorporated linguistics principles into the teaching ASL
- 1988 Ella Mae Lentz, Ken Mikos, and Cheri Smith
  - Extensive use of video

Growth of ASL Instruction

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<td>606,286</td>
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<td>1,602</td>
<td>4,304</td>
<td>11,420</td>
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432% ASL enrollment growth between 1998 and 2002

Foreign Language Enrollments in US Institution of Higher Education, Fall 2002
Growth of ASL Instruction

Number of Programs

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<tr>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2002</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>2,166</td>
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<tr>
<td>French</td>
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<td>German</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
<td>531</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>116</td>
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</table>

476% ASL program growth between 1998 and 2002

Notable ASL Programs

- University of Minnesota – 31 sections
- University of Texas – 10 sections
- UC San Diego – 13 sections
- University of Iowa – 12 sections
- University of Arizona – 7 sections

Foreign Language Enrollments in US Institution of Higher Education, Fall 2002
Modern Language Association Survey, ADPL Bulletin 2004

Sign Language Instructors

- More than 50% are deaf (my estimate)
- Few have Ph.D.s
- Professional Society

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ASL at UW

- 1970-80s – Deaf Education Program
  - Signed English Classes (Larry Petersen)
- ~ 1984 – Applicant asks for ASL for admission, but is turned down.
- ~ 1993 – Petition to President Gerberding by students and community led by SPHS student Susan Wampler
- 2001 – Resolution by Student Senate

ASL at UW

- Spring 2005 – Professor Sharon Hargus and I presented a proposal for an ASL program within Linguistics to the Dean of Arts and Sciences
- Fall 2005 – solicited 36 support letters
  - Academic leaders at UW
  - Faculty at UW
  - Staff at UW
  - Student Leaders
  - Deaf Community
- Fall 2006 – received temporary funding for three years to hire one instructor
- Spring 2007 – interviewed candidates
- Fall 2007 – two sections of ASL 101
ASL Lecturer
• Lance Forshay
  – Deaf from a deaf family
  – Gallaudet Alumnus
  – Taught ASL at Pierce College, Puyallup HS
  – President of Washington State ASLTA

Goals for ASL at UW
• Permanent Funding
• Expand to a two year program
• Increase size of program to meet student demand

Rationale
• Requirements
• Demand
• Scholarship
• Diversity
• Competitiveness
• Community Outreach

Requirements
• American Sign Language (ASL) counts for admission, foreign language, and Visual, Literary, and Performing Arts (VLPA) requirements in exactly the same ways as any other language.

Demand
• 375 students signed up on the waiting list for ASL 101
  – “I am planning on being an ASL interpreter. I need this class.”
  – “I am beginning my junior year at the UW and am pursuing a career in nursing. I feel that in my career path it is important to be able to communicate with all people which is why I want to learn sign language.”
  – “I am an Early Childhood and Families major. I also work at the Experimental Education Unit, where sign language is in frequent use to communicate with non-verbal children with disabilities.”
• More
  – “I have waited a long time for this opportunity. I am a Speech and Hearing major.”
  – “I am a disability studies minor and this class would be very applicable to what I am studying and have interest in. I have been waiting for this class to be started at UW, and I am excited to take it!”
  – “The only thing I didn’t like about UW when applying was that they didn’t offer ASL. Thank you for adding it!”
  – “Pretty please!”
Scholarship

• Professional Need
  – Speech and Hearing Sciences
  – Special Education
  – Social Work
  – Nursing
  – Medicine
  – Dentistry

Diversity

• Part of the UW Mission statement.
  – “As an integral part of a large and diverse community, the University seeks broad representation of and encourages sustained participation in that community by its students, its faculty, and its staff.”
• Understanding the deaf perspective will help students become better citizens and decision makers.

Competitiveness

• Most UW peers already have ASL.
• Some of our best students desire ASL.

Community Outreach

• The deaf community has until now been virtually left out of UW.
• Times are changing
  – Carol Padden is Walker-Ames Lecturer
  – Bernard Bragg performs at UW Kane Hall
  – Lance Forshay teaches ASL and deaf studies
  – Howie Seago teaches drama

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Oppression of ASL

• Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf, Milan, Italy, 1880.
  – A declaration was made that oral education was better than manual (sign) education. A resolution was passed banning sign language in deaf education.

• Eugenics Movement
  – “Those who believe as I do, that the production of a defective race of human beings would be a great calamity to the world, will examine carefully the causes that lead to the intermarriage of the deaf with the object of applying a remedy.”
  Alexander Graham Bell, 1884.

Oppression of ASL

• Public Law 94-142 (1975), Now called Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
  – “…to assure that all handicapped children have available to them … a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs…”

• Hearing technology including smart hearing aids and cochlear implants.

Signing for Hearing Infants


The Irony of It

• Hearing parents are encouraged to sign with their hearing infants.
• Hearing parents are often discouraged to sign with their deaf children.
Singing for Everyone

- There is a fierce natural drive to communicate in a language spoken or signed.
- Most people in the world are multilingual*.
- ASL and English, why not both?


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Influence of Technology on ASL

- Video Phone

Vlogs

Social Networking
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ASL–STEM
Social Networking for a Purpose

• Enable ASL to grow into Science.
• Empower more deaf students to go into advanced science fields.
• Leverages the interest in the video enabled web.

Enabling ASL to Grow in STEM
Jeff Bigham, Anna Cavender
Daniel Otero, Jessica DeWitt

ASL-STEM Video Forum

Terms are organized by the community in a hierarchy for easy navigation.

The most highly ranked signs are displayed at the top, enabling the site to act as a reference for those looking for the sign for a term.

Signs are rated by the community. These ratings are used to rank the signs.

Users can discuss each term in both English and ASL.

Challenges

• For linguists
  – How is ASL changing because of video enabled phones and web?
• For social scientists
  – How do video enabled phones and web bring the deaf community together?
• For the University
  – Will ASL become permanently funded?
Thank You

Povost’s Town Hall Meeting

• 3:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 14,
• 102 Johnson Hall
• All members of the UW community are invited and encouraged to attend.