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## Deaf Bodies : Toward a Holistic Ethnography of Deaf People in Japan

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## Deaf Bodies: Toward a Holistic Ethnography of Deaf People in Japan

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### Abstract

This essay is an ethnographic exploration of deaf people in Japan, applying a holistic approach to the body. Deafness is considered as a condition that affects human behavior in terms of adaptation and coping rather than as simply a limiting deficiency/impairment. The bodily interactions of deaf people in their daily lives will be presented as the framework for this paper though Mark Johnson's philosophy of *embodied meaning* (2007). The general situation of deaf people in Japan, including academic models, social welfare policies and Deaf/deaf politics, will be organized and presented through the use of Mikhail Bakhtin's *architectonics* (1990). The language use of Japanese deaf people, especially their preferred language of Japanese Sign Language (JSL), will be contextualized through the use of Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox's *gestural approach to communication* (1995). This research is a culmination of extensive long-term participant-observation, language study and data gathering through questionnaires, interviews and photography. How do deaf people in Japan deal with limits – or challenges – of communication with hearing people and among themselves? The paper concludes that for deaf people, the body is a media they use to create text and discourse through the performance of sign language, ultimately displaying a perceived notion of Deaf identity.

**Keywords:** Deaf-deaf, Japanese Sign Language, Signed Japanese, holistic, ethnography

### Prologue: The Experience of Walking the Dog as Data

*I woke up this morning and it felt good to stretch my limbs after a nice sleep. I opened the window and saw the weather was beautiful. Just then my dog rushed up to me barking. "What do you want?" I asked. "Do you want to go for a walk?" The dog's energetic barking indicated an affirmative reply. "OK. Wait a minute." I got dressed. "Come on," I told him. "Let's go!" There was more excited barking. I told the dog to 'stay' while I put on his leash. I opened the door and we began our walk. We went on our usual course, and I exchanged greetings with my neighbors as I do every morning. All of a sudden, the dog stopped, squatted and had a bowel movement. I was annoyed that the mess was on the sidewalk and that I*

*would have to clean it up. I reached into my pocket for a plastic bag. It wasn't there. I reached into my other pocket. Oh no, I forgot it. What should I do? I looked around and saw that nobody was watching us. I decided to leave the mess and continue on our way. But just then I felt a tapping on my shoulder and turned to see a short old lady yelling up at me. I couldn't understand what she was saying. I gestured to her that I was deaf. She wildly gestured back, pointing at the dog's mess and then to me over and over again. I signed to her, "OK, I get it. I'll take care of it." I really hated getting caught by such a loud and annoying old woman.*

## Introduction: Holistic Heuristics

By its very nature, anthropology is holistic in both subject matter (anything and everything connected with humans) and methodology (one can say that the methods, perspectives and sources at our disposal in the research process are limitless). Anthropologists then use various heuristic techniques to make sense of the observations they see and the data they collect. Humans are more than the sum of their parts and have learned to adapt and cope with various so-called deficiencies. This essay explores the body in relation to the way humans communicate and live their lives as individuals and as members of societies and cultures. More specifically, this text is an ethnographic exploration of deaf people in Japan, applying a holistic approach to the body. Deafness is considered as a condition that affects human behavior in terms of adaptation and coping rather than as simply a limiting deficiency/impairment. The bodily interactions of deaf people in their daily lives will be presented as the framework for this paper though Mark Johnson's philosophy of *embodied meaning* (2007). The general situation of deaf people in Japan, including academic models, social welfare policies and Deaf/deaf politics, will be organized and presented through the use of Mikhail Bakhtin's *architectonics* (1990). The language use of Japanese deaf people, especially their preferred language of Japanese Sign Language (JSL), will be contextualized through the use of Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox's *gestural approach* to communication (1995). How do deaf people in Japan deal with limits – or challenges – of communication with hearing people and among themselves? The paper concludes that for deaf people, the body is a media they use to create text and discourse through the performance of sign language, ultimately displaying a perceived notion of Deaf identity.

This study goes back to my earliest experiences with deaf people in Bali, Indonesia (Fedorowicz 1996: 4-7) and the days of my PhD dissertation research in Japan (Fedorowicz

2002) and continues to this day (Fedorowicz 2019). My usual *modus operandi* has been called street-level ethnography, a mosaic of narratives, voices and autoethnographic vignettes gathered through intensive participant-observation. Learning sign language has been another important method. I began my studies of JSL through interactions with deaf people because there were few classes and books (and no DVDs) available at the time. In addition, I have completed surveys through questionnaires and conducted extensive interviews. The use of photography and video recording has been crucial in these efforts. My primary research site has been a sign language circle (or club) in Osaka, Japan. I began as the ultimate outsider—a foreign hearing person—and evolved into a paying member, later a representative of their executive committee and ultimately the vice president of the group. Through these various experiences, my relationships, perspectives and understanding has been constantly changing and growing. And so now I take up this huge amount of data and endeavor to make sense of it all and explain it through various heuristic techniques. I have benefited greatly from the assistance of many deaf people through the years, for which I am grateful. However, any errors of interpretation in this summary of complex subjects are mine alone.

## Deaf Bodily Interactions through Embodied Meaning

Mark Johnson, in his *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (2007), is interested in the relationships between language and meaning. Influenced by Dewey, Merleau-Ponty and others, Johnson espouses a “non-dualistic, embodied view of meaning, concepts, mind, thought, language, and values” (2007: 264). Meanings and values are created through various and simultaneous ecological experiences, processes of interaction between organisms and environments. “The meaning of something is its relations, actual and potential, to other qualities, things, events, and experiences” (Johnson 2007: 265). Johnson also believes that language is grounded in bodily interactions – speech, writing and all social interactions. While language has a great potential for human communication and philosophical growth, it is also limiting in that it fails to share the qualities of experience. Language can be viewed as an exercise in abstraction, reducing the qualities of the experience behind the communication. For example, I often tell my students about the exploits of my cat or my young daughter. When I tell such stories (that I feel are more or less related to the lecture theme) I often get goose bumps because I am in a sense reliving the experience in words and feelings. It is my hope that sharing such experiences with my students can help them better

understand whatever it is we are really studying. Some students if they have experiences with cats or small children might come close to getting it and smile/laugh in response. Other students roll their eyes indicating their impatience – “Oh no, not another cat/kid story ...” Lacking common experiences is similar to reducing the media humans have at their disposal to communicate. We have all had that professor who drones on and on without any vocal inflection, gesture or facial expression. What do we really learn from such a lecture style (other than gaining a shared experience)? Another example: Text messaging is very popular in Japan on cell phones and smart phones. But the text alone is seen as limiting. Various emoticons and symbols, a vast and growing “vocabulary” of which are universal to all service providers, are added to the text to try to add meaning and nuance to the abstract text. My Japanese students often tell me that a text message without emoticons/symbols is *sabishii* (lonely).

In the more expansive and comprehensive sense of meaning that I have been developing, meaning includes qualities, emotions, percepts, concepts, images, image schemas, metaphors, metonymies, and various other imaginative structures. Learning the meaning of something would thus include a growing sense of all the qualities, percepts, distinctions, recollections of what has gone before, and anticipations of possible future experience that follow from it. No isolated thing, percept, or quality has any meaning in itself. Things, qualities, events, and symbols have meaning for us because of how they connect with other aspects of our actual or possible experience. (Johnson 2007: 267-268)

Johnson goes beyond defining the body as a thing. Rather, the body is a manifestation of embodied meaning on five levels: 1) the biological organism (flesh and blood), 2) the ecological body (continuous whole process of interaction with the environment), 3) the phenomenological body (living, moving, feeling, pulsing), 4) the social body (social interactions) and 5) the cultural body (artifacts, practices, institutions, rituals, modes of interaction, identity, movement) (Johnson 2007: 275-277). Meaning is created, experienced and lived through in each one of these manifestations not in isolation but simultaneously for Deaf people.

The Deaf individual is a whole living organism comprised of flesh, blood, bones and muscles with a coordinating brain and nervous system. Body parts connect and combine in terms of producing shapes, spaces, movements, and directionalities to discern and express

qualities. These are the building blocks of gestural communication and sign language.

The Deaf individual defines her reality through interaction with the environment. Received, repeated and responded visual images (what you see is what you get) are especially important. Deaf people often refer to their perceived heightened sense of vision. This is an indicator of the importance and value of a primarily visual modality.

The Deaf individual is not limited to a sense of vision as a result of her deafness, in fact any residual hearing and/or understanding of sounds as vibrations, felt or seen, combines with smelling, tasting and touching, creating sensations, perceptions and experiences. The resulting feelings are expressed in facial expressions and body postures. These phenomenological aspects indicate an embodied and gestural approach to language. They are also the building blocks of worldview.

The Deaf individual interacts and communicates to and with others through bodily actions in family, social, educational, employment and other social realms. She is rewarded and/or punished based upon shared realities with others in society. The social person is created along with her created, expected, reinforced and/or rejected social roles and responsibilities (or lack thereof).

The Deaf individual lives within a hegemonic culture that defines practices, institutions and interactions based upon the body. A perceived deficiency by the majority escalates difference and how one is allowed to participate in society. How can she be treated, fixed or cured? What is her place in the family? What schools can she attend? What kinds of jobs can she do? And what is her reaction to this cultural body? Does she create a new cultural body, a new identity, in reaction?

Johnson, as a philosopher, in a sense asks us to step back and see a whole picture. But I wonder if the more we step back, the more limiting, the more abstract it gets. As anthropologists we are interested in the whole but confronted with the reality and dilemma of “partial truths” (Clifford 1986). Even with the best of holistic intentions ethnography is at best a piecing together of “fragments of discourse” (Tyler 1986: 125). In the next two sections I hope to present the shared experiences I have gained in over twenty years of fieldwork and research with deaf people.

## The Deaf in Japan as Viewed through Architectonics

There are an estimated 400,000 hearing-impaired people in Japan. These are people who

are registered at their local governments as disabled. They receive a “disability handbook” (*shougaisha techō*) that identifies the type of disability and a ranking of severity. This ranking in part determines the amount of social welfare assistance the individual can receive. There are various levels of hearing loss among deaf people based upon their own individual circumstances. Some people are born deaf, some become deafened later in life, some are hard of hearing and some are so-called multiple handicapped (deaf-blind, for example). These circumstances influence identity and communication styles.

Deafness entails much more than hearing loss. Academics and now Japanese Deaf people themselves present two models of deafness, a deficit model and a cultural model. The deficit model treats deaf people as disabled, handicapped and abnormal, with the need to be treated, cured or overcome. Advocates of this model work on behalf of disabled people to provide social welfare services because the deaf are seen as not being able to secure such assistance for themselves. Educational policies for deaf children fall under this model. The official Japanese educational curriculum for deaf schools was completely oral until 1993; sign language was banned in the classroom. Deaf students are trained to speech-read and pronounce spoken Japanese. As a result, they fall three or four years behind. Not all deaf children can effectively learn to speak, creating a hierarchy in which students who can speak are praised and those who cannot speak become demoralized and are seen as holding the rest of the class back. The prescription of cochlear implants also falls under this deficit model. A cochlear implant is an electronic device surgically implanted in the skull that is supposed to provide a sense of hearing. For a cochlear implant to be effective, they must be implanted in children at a young age while they are still acquiring language. Cochlear implant use in Japan, while increasing, is relatively low compared to other countries.

The cultural model of deafness treats Deaf people as a cultural group and/or linguistic minority. Nothing is necessarily lacking in these people, rather they use a form of language that is visual rather than speech. This model can be seen as a social movement. The “capital-D” in Deaf serves as an empowering device and marks these people as a cultural group similar to a capital “J” for Japanese people, a capital “B” for Blacks and a capital “Q” for Queers. To be culturally Deaf entails a sense of belonging in the Japanese Deaf World, using JSL as one’s first language, marrying another Deaf person (and ideally living in a Deaf family situation), and struggling with discrimination and prejudice from the dominant hearing society. Deaf people want schools to teach in JSL. Deaf people are opposed to cochlear implants as they are seen as a means to eradicate deafness and Deaf culture. Not all deaf

people choose to be Deaf. To be Deaf involves a conscious decision and acceptance into the Deaf community. This decision influences the language form used by the individual.

There are two forms of sign language used in Japan, JSL (*Nihon shuwa*) and Signed Japanese (*Nihon taiō shuwa*). JSL is different from spoken/written Japanese in terms of modality, grammar and worldview (details in the next section). Signed Japanese uses the same grammar as spoken/written Japanese (Japanese is either spoken or mouthed accompanied by manual gestures) and lacks key components of JSL (facial expression, condensed forms, classifiers, imagery, etc.). JSL is the language used among Deaf people. Signed Japanese is used by deaf people and hearing people. Deaf people view Signed Japanese as the same as spoken/written Japanese, the only difference being modality.

National deaf groups work to advance the rights of deaf people and propagate sign language. The Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD), founded in 1947, is the oldest deaf organization in Japan. It is highly bureaucratic and has ties with the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. It can be seen as inclusive, with deaf, Deaf and hard of hearing members.

D-PRO, founded in 1993, is another major group and specifically works to eradicate Signed Japanese and promote Deaf culture. It can be seen as exclusive, with Deaf members only and being greatly influenced by Deaf activists in the United States and other countries. D-PRO and the JFD are often at odds with one another. They have different philosophies of deafness and sign language. Two recent books published by each organization can illustrate these differences. The JFD published *We Love Communication* in 2010 with sign language being presented as a form of communication rather than as a language. D-PRO members Norie Oka and Hitomi Akahori published *Nihon Shuwa no Shikumi* ("The System of Japanese Sign Language") in 2011. This book describes JSL as a real language and as the most important aspect of Deaf culture. Deaf (with a capital-D) people applauded *Nihon Shuwa no Shikumi* and were deeply distressed and disappointed with *We Love Communication*.

Ideally a Deaf person rejects the deficit model, uses only JSL and espouses the philosophies of D-PRO exclusively. But Deaf people live in a hegemonic hearing world and have to interact with hearing and deaf people. A Deaf person might not want to think of herself as disabled and might not want to receive social welfare assistance, but in reality her livelihood might depend upon social welfare and other disability benefits. One study shows that the income of deaf people is far less than that of hearing people (Fedorowicz 2002). Job restrictions due to outdated laws and discrimination limit choices in occupation

and sometimes require changing jobs, in contrast to a hearing person who more likely has a stable job with income increasing annually.

Deficit and cultural models, deaf and Deaf, Signed Japanese and JSL and the inclusive JFD and exclusive D-PRO are often portrayed as binary opposites. But reality is not so simple. Deaf and deaf people use and bounce against these models, languages and organizations in their daily lives. These ideal binary pairs do not work as “either/or” situations but rather as simultaneous “also/and” situations along the lines of Bakhtin’s architectonics (1990). Michael Holquist describes architectonics as the “general studies of how entities relate to each other” (in Bakhtin 1990: x) - it is intended to describe a process, an activity, rather than a static event. The building construction notion of architecture is at work here, however architecture implies the “creation of static structures” whereas Bakhtin is more interested in the “dynamic tensions” involved between entities (Holquist in Bakhtin 1990: xxiii). It is as if one was building a house on a fault line that is hard to define/locate because it is constantly moving, shifting and changing. One must deal with tectonic plates being calm, sometimes gently rubbing and/or violently colliding and smashing against each other. Deaf people live through the presented models, languages and groups simultaneously, shifting through combinations as their immediate concerns necessitate, resulting in multiple identities, alliances and language forms. Bakhtin’s approach can be seen as holistic in that he, not unlike Johnson, is not so much interested in the binary pairs themselves alone as in the logic of the constructed exchanges and resulting dialogues. The architectonics of deaf people result in ever-changing relationships, conflicts and debates dealing with family, friends, education, work and other social domains.

This architectonical phenomenon can be illustrated with two recent examples. In 2013, Tottori Prefecture enacted ordinances that acknowledge JSL as a real language and as Japanese cultural heritage and provided funding to promote JSL study. In 2014, Ishikari-shi and Shintoku-cho, both in Hokkaido Prefecture, enacted similar measures. These ordinances were passed due to the efforts of the JFD, seemingly to defy the thesis of *We Love Communication*. On the other hand, D-PRO has mellowed and becomes less militantly exclusive. During a presentation at its annual “Autumn School” conference in 2011, a D-PRO lecturer acknowledged that JSL and Signed Japanese are often mixed and blended during real communication events. The presentation discussed code blending and mixing of JSL, Japanese and even some limited English and American Sign Language (ASL). It was acknowledged that there are situations when Deaf people have to use Signed Japanese. I

have observed and noted these real-life communication events quite often and for some time during research among Deaf people.

Another architectural development might be how Deaf people have started to refer to themselves as bicultural and bilingual. They are Deaf and Japanese. They use JSL and Japanese (in spoken, written and/or signed form). Meisei Gakkuen, the only deaf school in Japan that uses JSL as its language of instruction (with both Deaf and hearing teachers), has a bilingual and bicultural curriculum with classes on JSL and Japanese and Deaf and (hearing) Japanese cultures. For Deaf adults there are many workshops, presentations and discussions exploring Deaf culture and (hearing) Japanese culture throughout Japan. At the above-mentioned 2011 D-PRO Autumn School, one workshop divided participants into two groups, Deaf and hearing. Each group was asked to prepare a poster about what they didn't understand or even found offensive about the other group. The groups presented the posters to each other and sought explanations for cultural misunderstandings and offenses. Deaf people have moved beyond only trying to explain their language and culture to hearing people. Now they also interact with hearing people to explore Japanese language and hearing practices they do not fully understand.

## Japanese Sign Language as Viewed through an Alternative Gestural Approach

I view the ideas concerning language and communication in Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox's *Gesture and the Nature of Language* (1995) to be similar to Bakhtin's architectonics as well as Johnson's embodied meaning. Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox (hereafter ASW) describe their approach as employing a sort of relative, fuzzy logic influenced by Niels Bohr's principle of complementarity, the Heisenberg uncertainty principle and Kenneth L. Pike's *Language as Particle, Wave and Field* (1972 [1959]). In the realm of physics, it is known that if one looks at a particle exclusively and precisely, the action within a wave will escape detection, and vice versa. If one examines wave action, individual particles seem to disappear. Thus, we need to look at the whole picture. "Field theory states the necessity of looking at both wave and particle. Neither way of looking by itself suffices, and each requires premises and methods appropriate to itself" (ASW 1995: 1). ASW apply this orientation to language and linguistics; they advocate looking at words (which represent classes of things and actions) and sentences (which represent relationships) simultaneously. They refute more traditional approaches that apply formal, particulate categorization perspectives to language, stating

that such approaches result in “language disembodied” (ASW 1995: 3, 28). Using Bakhtinian terminology, we could say that such approaches ignore the relationships and simultaneity between components of communication. A holistic approach, examining both morphology and syntax at the same time, along with their relationships, results in “language embodied” (ASW 1995: 34).

The same logic can be applied to modalities or language delivery systems. But first, a common assumption that equates language and speech must be dismissed. Speech is a modality, a means by which language is transmitted. Other modalities include sign and writing. Language can generally be defined as intentional communication following a set system that includes syntax, semantics, symbolism and worldview. Thus, speech does not equal language. ASW state “language is based in gesture, that is bodily movement to which humans attach meaning” (1995: 3). Speech and sign can both be considered as gestures. One relationship between speech and sign is that they both entail a vocabulary of neuromuscular activity. However, ASW point out that speech gestures are different from sign gestures: speech relies primarily upon the vocal tract, respiratory system, mouth, lips and hearing, whereas sign relies upon the visual and motor systems (1995: 19). Human communication is a holistic, multi-media event. Hearing people use gestures when they speak and Deaf people use vocal sounds and mouthing when they sign. It is within this context-embodied communication and a gestural approach to language that we can describe JSL.

JSL is considered the natural and mother tongue of Deaf people in Japan. Ethnographic observations show that JSL has similar characteristics to spoken Japanese, namely dialects, gender differences, age differences, polite language, jargons and the use of *kanji*.

Different regions across Japan have different dialects of JSL. For example (these and following examples assume a right-handed signer; for a left-handed signer the roles of the hands would be opposite), the sign for “name” in Osaka is the right hand in the OK shape placed on the left part of the chest; it originates from the family crest located on a kimono. The sign for “name” in Tokyo is the right thumb pressing against the open palm of the left hand, representing a name seal. Even JSL in areas close to one another are different; JSL in Osaka, Kyoto and Nara are slightly different.

Men and women sign differently in terms of body posture, movements and use of vocabulary. Women might sign “milk” by a bent index finger under the mouth representing a baby drinking milk. Men might sign “milk” with the right hand seemingly squeezing their left breast.

People of different ages sign differently. I work primarily with Deaf adults. Sometimes I have difficulty understand young children as they tend to sign more quickly and perhaps use slang I am not familiar with.

While Deaf culture and JSL are generally straightforward and frank, there are levels of politeness in JSL. In one class several years ago, the lesson was about JSL *keigo* (honorific Japanese). The only occasion I have seen this honorific JSL was at a funeral. But I have observed more polite uses of JSL between people of lower status and higher status (for example, a student and teacher); the person of lower status will slightly collapse their shoulders in and lower their head to look up at the higher status person (this is difficult to do if the former is taller than the latter) accompanied by subdued facial expressions.

There are special jargons in JSL. For example, I have worked with Deaf people who are members of the Tenrikyo religion. Tenrikyo's Social Welfare Department has created many signs to represent and explain their belief system. A Deaf person with no knowledge of or experience with Tenrikyo would have a difficult time understanding this jargon. I have also seen workshops and classes about training deaf people and interpreters in the jargon of legal court cases, medical terminology and other specialized fields.

*Kanji* (Chinese characters used in written Japanese) can be represented in JSL. *Kanji* signs often resemble the actual character or the image of what the character represents. The sign for “moon” is the thumb and index finger creating an arc moving up to down resembling a crescent moon. The sign for 中 (“medium”) is the right index finger in a vertical position placed in the middle of a C shape in the left hand, looking like 中. There is also a fingerspelling (*yubimoji*) system to represent individual *hiragana* and *katakana* characters (*hiragana* is usually used to write native Japanese terms while *katakana* is usually used to write foreign loan words—there is no such differentiation in the Japanese fingerspelling system). JSL *kanji* are used to sign the family name of Japanese people; the personal name is usually expressed in the fingerspelling of *hiragana* characters. Family names usually are comprised of common *kanji* while personal names sometimes use lesser-known *kanji* or *kanji* that can be read in more than one way.

Some JSL signs combine a morpheme and fingerspelling. For example, “Toyama” (prefecture) combines the fingerspelling “TO” and the sign for mountain. “Karaoke” combines the fingerspelling “KA” plus the movement of singing into a microphone. This fingerspelling combined or even replacing an iconic morpheme is much more prevalent in American Sign Language (ASL). But more and more of these signs are being created in JSL. There is a

new sign for “peer counselor.” It is a “P” shape plus a “C” shape. The traditional sign for “peer counselor” is the sign for “friend” plus “advise.” Some Deaf people complain that these new signs disregard the relationship between image and sign. Like the incorporation of more and more foreign loan words in *katakana* coming into spoken/written Japanese and replacing older Japanese words (and *kanji*), JSL is constantly changing as well. New signs are also created to deal with new words, concepts and technology. The JFD has commissioned various committees to create new signs and publish new sign-language dictionaries. Another source of new signs is the public broadcasting network NHK’s Sign Language News. When there is a news story with content without standard signs, NHK must invent appropriate signs and explain before proceeding with the news story.

Some degree of mouthing accompanies manual signs in JSL. This should not be confused with speaking and signing at the same time. Mouthing is used for clarification and to distinguish between words that have the same or similar manual sign. The sign for “*yappari*” (“as I thought”) and “*mochiron*” (“of course”) is the same; mouthing of the words determines which is being expressed. There are also several Deaf sounds (for lack of a better term). Deaf people make the sound “*BA-BA*” while tapping their open palm on their throat to indicate they want something. “*PA*” is used with various signs to indicate that something has been finished. There are no equivalents in spoken Japanese or Japanese onomatopoeia to these Deaf sounds. These are instances when Deaf people combine manual and spoken gestures. Following ASW’s gestural approach to language, it should be no surprise that JSL has similar characteristics to spoken/written Japanese.

JSL differs from spoken (and Signed) Japanese in terms of grammar and worldview. Specifically, JSL employs rich facial expression, condensed forms, classifiers and the use of imagery in syntax and semantics. Facial expressions and classifiers are key grammatical elements. The use of Signed Japanese is controversial in the Japanese Deaf World. Most interpreters and hearing people associated with deafness use Signed Japanese. Deaf people complain about this situation and claim they cannot understand details and nuance within Signed Japanese.

Let me illustrate the differences between JSL and Signed Japanese. There is a standard sign for the verb “to eat.” The right hand extends two fingers to resemble chopsticks moving towards the mouth while the left hand forms a shape resembling a rice bowl below the mouth. This sign is rigid within Signed Japanese. No matter what is being eaten, this sign is used. For example, the predicate in the sentence “I eat a sandwich” is composed of

two separate signs: “to eat” plus “sandwich.” JSL is more flexible in this situation because of its use of imagery and condensation. Eating a sandwich is different from eating rice. So, to express the same predicate in JSL, only one sign is used—a sign that combines sandwich and the act of eating a sandwich.

Facial expression is important not only for establishing meaning, mood and nuance but also in constructing grammar. The phrases “I eat,” “I think he will eat it,” “I won’t eat,” “Eat it!” and “Will you eat?” all use the same manual sign for “eat.” Signed Japanese will include all of the words in spoken Japanese grammatical order; they will often speak the phrase at the same time. JSL signers will use only the right hand (no left-hand “rice bowl”) to express “eat” and combine it with facial expressions to differentiate the phrases. These JSL facial expressions are said to come naturally to Deaf people and they are difficult to master for deaf and hearing people whose first language is Japanese.

The importance of imagery can be explored with a comparison of JSL and Signed Japanese. The phrase “the ball flies” is expressed in Signed Japanese with the sign for ball and the sign for flying (both hands flapping on either side of the body like a flying bird). Does a ball have wings? JSL expresses “the ball flies” with the sign for “ball” moving from right to left in front of the body to match the reality of the phrase. “The dog walks” in Signed Japanese is the sign for “dog” plus the sign for “walk” (an upside-down peace sign with the index and middle fingers moving to indicate a human walking on two legs). Does a dog have two legs and walk upright? JSL turns the hands into dog paw shapes and conversely move each hand forward and back to mimic a dog walking.

The use of facial expression and imagery do not mean that JSL (or any sign language) is mere mimicry or pantomime. There are indeed grammatical rules in JSL. Components that appear to be pantomime, theatrics or embellishments are important for the effective performance of JSL and should be viewed, respectively, as classifiers, intonation, and description.

In *Nihon Shuwa no Shikumi* (2011), Oka and Akahori use standard linguistic terms and categories to describe JSL, namely phonetics (*onin*), vocabulary (*goi*), grammar (*bunpō*) and usage (*shiyō*). At the phonetic level there are hand shapes, placement and movement that come together along with facial expression, mouthing, and the particular Deaf sounds mentioned above that can combine to form morphemes. At the vocabulary level there are condensed forms and one-handed forms. As Deaf people repeat the same vocabulary in real-life communication events the sign becomes smaller as the conversation proceeds. Hearing

people, when they first learn JSL, tend to sign in a large, dramatic fashion. Such a style is perhaps easier to see but physically draining. Some signs that are usually two-handed can become one-handed if the other hand is busy with chopsticks or a cigarette.

The grammar level includes the differentiation between directional and non-directional verbs and the use of space. A place or person is assigned a spot in the frame of signing and moves via the verb in the appropriate direction or movement. The use of facial expression and movement of the eyes and shoulders is important in the construction of wh-questions (who, what, where, why, how) to distinguish between a statement and a question. Facial expression and eye/shoulder movement also differentiate between subject, object and verb. In the sentence “Mr Hashimoto dropped a book on the bridge,” Mr Hashimoto’s name is comprised of the *kanji* for “bridge” (*hashi*) and “book” (*moto* is one possible reading of this “book” *kanji*). It is facial expression and eye/shoulder movement that distinguish the subject name from the object and place.

Classifiers, noted as “CL” in JSL, are another part of the grammar. CL are common hand shapes that take on the meaning of an object they represent. For example, the standard sign for “book” is two hands, palms together that open like a book. But if there are books in a bookcase, the CL for book, a modified C-shape is used. This shape indicates books being placed or taken off a bookshelf. JSL classifiers are akin to counters in spoken Japanese that are used to quantify nouns depending on size and shape. CL become handshapes that substitute for standardized signs. Within this form of visual communication, signers can move and manipulate a classifier like the object it represents.

Usage in JSL takes on three communication forms: normal signing, whispering and shouting. Normal signing occurs in a plane from head to chest level vertically and from shoulder to shoulder horizontally. Someone whispering in JSL makes their signs smaller; sometimes they might place their signing below and to the side of the normal plane of signing or hide their signs with their body or other objects. Shouting entails large, fast and furious signs accompanied by the corresponding facial expression. The scariest argument I have ever seen was conducted in JSL.

The work of Oka and Akahori is important in that it analyzes JSL using the same concepts that are used to analyze other (spoken) languages, rather than creating new concepts and schema that could not be applied universally. While descriptions of JSL are possible in spoken and written forms – one can explain how the system of JSL works – it is virtually impossible to directly translate from JSL to spoken or written forms. Speech

and writing lose the quality of the visual modality of JSL; this is one reason that Deaf people might find Signed Japanese to be confusing. For JSL to be expressed in other modalities, it must be interpreted so as to include intended meaning. Using the terminology of ASW, Signed Japanese might be seen as “language disembodied” while JSL is “language embodied.”

## The Body as Medium for Performance, Communication and Deaf Identity

Lectures and workshops that endeavor to teach participants an ideal form of Deaf culture and language use have become common in Japan in recent years. Except for a few hearing people, most of the participants in these workshops are deaf; their deaf identity is based upon being raised in a hearing world subjected to oral methods of language acquisition and education at deaf schools or being mainstreamed into hearing schools. Many deaf individuals discover their deafness and sign language as adults; associating with Deaf people allows them a deeper level of communication and access to more information. One clinic I participated in 2012 focused on image training and practice in interpretation (not translation) from Japanese to JSL. We were given a Japanese text—a script (about walking a dog)—and asked to memorize it and interpret it into JSL. Our performances were videotaped so they could be re-watched, carefully examined and scrutinized.

The few hearing participants were asked to go first and most of them treated the exercise as a literal translation from a written form of Japanese to a signed form; in other words, their performances were heavy with Signed Japanese. Of course, the Deaf teacher said that their efforts were incorrect. Next, deaf and Deaf people were asked to demonstrate their versions of the text. There were various degrees of success. Many deaf participants were chided for signing in a “hearing” manner (i.e., Signed Japanese) and encouraged to become “more Deaf.”

The Deaf teacher then demonstrated his version. He never used the standard sign for dog but rather condensed the noun and verb morphemes to create the predicate. The use of imagery and experience was stressed; the teacher’s rendition included details such as putting on the dog’s leash and not letting go of it during the walk. Spatial orientation was also demonstrated as places were assigned to the dog, people met along the way and the old woman in relation to the protagonist. Rather than repeating standard signs, glances in the directions of the imagined actors indicated their presence. The teacher used CL, signs unique

to JSL and Deaf sounds not found in Signed Japanese. And perhaps most importantly his rich facial expression was an important component of the grammar as well as conveying thoughts and feelings.

Again, this was training in interpretation. Other Deaf people performed and their renditions differed depending on their experiences and attitudes. For example, people have different size dogs—walking a big dog is different from walking a small dog. People have different attitudes about the behaviors of their pets—some saw the dog's defecation as a good thing (as the purpose of the walk), others saw it as a nuisance.

The text in the Prologue is my attempt to interpret into English what I saw him interpret from written Japanese to JSL rather than supplying a direct translation from Japanese to English. The text changed as each individual performed. Each performance was based upon the individual's experiences and bodily interactions. It should be noted that two emoticons were included in the original Japanese text after the first and last sentences: (\*^\_^\*) appeared to indicate the good feeling of the beautiful weather upon waking up. (:-\_\_-) appeared to indicate the embarrassment of being caught leaving the dog's mess behind.

*Performativity and Belonging*, edited by Vikki Bell (1999), examines how identities are produced, embodied and performed especially through the politics of visibility. The workshop described above is a good example with which to explore Bell's claim that visual performances can be read the same as written texts. For Deaf people, the performance of JSL is a text they can read. Deaf workshops and performances are usually videotaped (digitally recorded might be a more accurate term). This is the only way Deaf people can record and read the same text over and over again. Story telling is important and valued in Deaf culture, but like folktales, the story/performance changes in the telling and re-telling. There is no practical way to write down JSL—any attempt is a translation into another modality and another language. Thus, video cameras, DVD players, computers and iPads have increasingly become important technologies for Deaf people. Videophone technologies on cell phones and smart phones along with services like Skype are also popular among Deaf people. DVDs are produced to teach JSL, provide entertainment (showcasing Deaf culture) and disseminate important information. In response to the March 11, 2011, earthquake/tsunami/nuclear accident disaster, a local Deaf NPO in Hirakata-shi, Osaka, produced a video in 2013 that provided information about earthquake preparedness and what to do if an earthquake occurs. The DVD, featured on NHK's Sign Language News, was done in JSL and accompanied by Japanese open captions. It is these kinds of technologies, rather than cochlear implants and

hearing aids, that are valued by the Deaf and are used to enhance their bodily interactions with their environment.

## Concluding Thoughts

This paper has organized and presented ethnographic data through architectonics and gestural approaches of language to illustrate the complexity of the simultaneous manifestations of bodily interactions through shared experience and meaning. Johnson stresses that there is not one absolute truth but several human truths. Human truth “arises in the context of human inquiry, relies on embodied meaning, and is relative to our values and interests” (Johnson 2007: 280). Furthermore, this paper has endeavored to show what embodied meaning actually means to Deaf people in their everyday lives. In the numerous lectures, workshops and clinics available to Deaf people, they can explore their bodily interactions, practice their performance (art?) of JSL and establish their own identities. Johnson writes, “We are born into this world, make of it what we can while we live... The art of our lives is the art of the meaning of the body. In some people, it is beautiful art” (2007: 283). This paper has been an opportunity to consider the data collected in my research from new and differing perspectives, the art of anthropology. And while I won't claim anthropology to be beautiful, I am grateful for the numerous examples of beauty I have seen, experienced and felt among deaf people in Japan.

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