

# The Possibility of Teaching American Sign Language as a Foreign Language in Japanese Universities

Toshikazu KIKUCHI

*If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.  
If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.*

--- Nelson Mandela

## Introduction

There were three significant events in June and July 2010 that contributed to raising awareness of sign languages in Japan and the U.S.

First, Tracy Caldwell Dyson, a NASA astronaut living in orbit, sent a six-minute message to people on earth on July 26, 2010 from the International Space Station for the first time in American Sign Language (ASL). Her message was about what life as an astronaut was like and she also discussed what inspired her, as a hearing person, to learn ASL. Her message encouraged deaf students to study science and technology and to pursue the possibility of becoming a part of NASA.

Second, almost around the same date above, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) in the U.S. sent a letter to the 21st International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (21st Congress), which was held in Vancouver, requesting that they grant official recognition of the use of sign language

as a civil, human and linguistic right, particularly in educational settings. In the letter, Dr. Bobbie Beth Scoggins, president of the NAD, specifically requested that the 21st Congress formally reject resolutions passed at the 2nd International Congress on Education of the Deaf (2nd Congress) in Milan, Italy, commonly known as the 1880 Milan Conference, where sign language in educational settings was strongly prohibited.

And third, in Japan, too, an important development was made to further promote the social status of Japanese Sign Language (JSL). The 58th National Conference for the Deaf was held in June 2010 in Shimane Prefecture, Japan, sponsored by the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD). About 2,000 deaf people and concerned people participated in the conference across the country. The conference organized a national campaign to get the Japanese government involved in making a policy on deaf education, especially on the use of sign language.

Although it has become common in Japan today to see Japanese sign language interpreters in conferences and on television, the Japanese Ministry of Education still does not recognize sign language as a valid form of educational communication in schools for deaf people in Japan.

The purpose of this article is to develop a foundation of future research toward the recognition of signed language as a language in Japan. A particular focus will be put on the recognition of ASL as a foreign language equivalent in Japan in order to integrate ASL into a language teaching curriculum for hearing Japanese university students learning English in the same way as other foreign languages such as Spanish, French, German, Chinese, and so on. The 2010 Boston University Intensive Summer ASL Course will be described in Chapter 4.

## 1. The Recognition of ASL as a Language

It is reasonable to assume that humans have used facial expressions, body posture, and visual gestures to convey meaning from the beginning of time. Corballis (2002), referring to the views of French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, as well as Charles Darwin, Wilhelm Wundt, MacDonald Critchley, Gordon W. Hewes, and William C. Stokoe, lays the foundation for his view that human language evolved from gestures of the hands and face, rather than from primate vocalization.

In regard to the original language of humanity, an interesting argument is found in Peet (1853). Peet, introducing his idea that the question of the original language of humanity was a question of the language spoken by Adam and Eve, concludes that sign language, while not in fact the original language, is closer to it than any spoken language in use in the modern world. Although the question of what language Adam and Eve spoke in Eden is debatable, Baynton (1993) also claims, “If Adam and Eve spoke spontaneously without instruction, sign language must have been that original language.”

The field of sign language teaching is quite old, but accepting ASL for foreign (modern) language credits in American colleges and universities is a relatively new issue. The origin of ASL is reported as beginning in 1817 when an American from Connecticut, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, returned from Paris accompanied by a Frenchman, a deaf teacher named Laurent Clerc. Pfeiffer (2003) notes that there is no record of sign language research prior to the 1950s. It was not until 1960 that Dr. William C. Stokoe first indicated that ASL was a distinct language in his monumental work, *Sign Language Structure*. Dr. Stokoe was a hearing professor of English and served as chairman of the English department at Gallaudet University, the only four-year liberal arts college in the world for the deaf, from 1955 to

1971. According to Eastman (1980), Dr. Stokoe was the first researcher to use the term *American Sign Language*.

Dr. Stokoe's work was crucial in changing the perception of ASL from that of a simplified version of English, to that of a complex natural language in its own right, with an independent syntax and grammar. His studies, however, were mostly ignored or dismissed until 1970. Initially, he was ridiculed by his colleagues, even those at Gallaudet (Gannon, 1981). Recognition and study of the language by the professionals who taught deaf students were the first steps to deaf pride. Belka (2000) states that just as blackness became a source of pride and identity in the civil rights movement, ASL, the natural language of deaf Americans, became a source of pride for the deaf.

Pinker (1994), taking the case of Ildefonso in Schaller (1991) as a sensational example of the magnificence of teaching ASL, stresses that ASL is a language. Ildefonso, a languageless man, was a 27 year-old deaf Mexican who had not learned any language, nor could conceive of language. Schaller met him while working as a sign language interpreter in Los Angeles. Ildefonso did not know there was sound in this world and never knew there was hearing and deafness. Despite these limitations, he became able to convey to Schaller parts of his life story in ASL after a period of practice.

## **2. Influential Acts on Language Policy in the U.S.**

Postero (1995) contends that a new era of national language policy began in 1964 in the U.S. with the passage of the Civil Rights Act. The federal government, since that time, has become involved in the formation, regulation, and enforcement of national language policy.

With the Equal Education Opportunities Act in 1974, education agencies must take appropriate action to overcome language barriers which might

impede equal participation by national origin language minority students in the school program. In 1975, the Education of All Handicapped Students Act expanded the definition of national origin language minority students to include special constitutional safeguards for handicapped children who were linguistically or culturally different. In 1979, the Department of Education Organization Act was passed which elevated the Department of Education to an executive agency having a secretary of cabinet rank. The Office for Civil Rights, which is currently in charge of deaf education in the U.S., was assigned to the Department of Education.

In the fall of 1990, the federal government reaffirmed the merits of bilingual education when President George Bush signed a law to encourage and support the use of Native American languages as languages of instruction. According to Lane (1999), neither the laws that provide funding for bilingual education programs, nor the laws that require those programs in schools with large numbers of children who use a minority language, have been applied to ASL-using children.

*America 2000*, a 9-year long-term national strategy in the U.S., was designed in 1990 to move Americans toward the six ambitious National Education Goals. One of the goals aims is that the percentage of all students who are competent in more than one language will substantially increase and all students will be knowledgeable about the diverse cultural heritage of America and about the world community.

In 1999 the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language declared the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century. Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities, known as “The Five Cs”, were themes of the standards. In its Statement of Philosophy, focus was put on the development of children’s first language.

On March 30, 2007, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol was formally opened at the United Nations. According to the World Federation of the Deaf, the Convention was the first international treaty ever that recognized sign languages and the linguistic human rights of deaf people. It can be presumed that the acts since the 1964 Civil Rights Act have stimulated many deaf advocacy groups and that the advocacy groups successfully petitioned the United Nations to change its language policy toward sign languages.

### **3. American Attitudes toward ASL as a Foreign Language**

#### **3.1. Objections to ASL**

Sinett (1995) claims that ASL is somewhat a paradoxical language. He argues that each year more states make policy allowing ASL to be treated as a foreign language equivalent, yet ASL is not likely to be in a foreign language department. “In the past 10 years,” Sinett states, “chairpersons, deans, and foreign language teachers responded they were more likely not to object to ASL, yet they show little interest in starting an ASL program, even though they felt it would be a benefit to the students.” Corwin and Wilcox (1985) point out that American universities are filled with misconceptions about ASL. Armstrong (1988) maintains, “There are well educated people who occupy positions of authority in American universities who do not accept the idea that ASL is a legitimate human language.” Sinett (1995) presumes that this may be because the people who run the program have normal hearing and are ethnocentric in terms of which languages they view as important.

Despite the abundance of linguistic research that established ASL as a true language, a survey conducted by Corwin and Wilcox in 1985 indicated that 81% of the American colleges and universities sampled rejected ASL as

a foreign/modern language equivalent. Some of the respondents' common questions about ASL included (1) Isn't ASL just a derivative of English? (2) If ASL is American, how can it be considered a foreign language? (3) What kind of culture is associated with ASL?, and (4) Does ASL have a body of literature?

Recognizing the growing awareness of ASL in the 1990s, Sinett (1995) replicated Corwin and Wilcox's (1985) study to determine if there had been a change of perception since 1985. Sinett randomly selected a sample of 15% of the colleges and universities listing a foreign language major or a language requirement in the College Handbook (1994). Surveys were directed to the foreign language chairperson at each institution.

Sinett found that of the colleges and universities surveyed, 50% of the 165 respondents objected to offering ASL for foreign language credit. The number one reason for objecting to ASL as a foreign or modern language equivalent was that it was not foreign. How a university defines the word *foreign* also gives an indication as to which languages might be accepted within the curriculum. When given the choice of defining *foreign* as "outside a place or country" or "unfamiliar", 80 (49%) of 165 chose the former compared to 41 (25%) for the latter. Of the remaining 44 survey responses, the most common response in definition (12.7%) was "non-native or non-English." Some other responses were, "In an American university setting, 'foreign language' means Not English.", "Pertaining to a language and culture other than the mainstream in any given country or place.", and "A language significantly different both culturally and linguistically from English."

In Pfeiffer's survey conducted in 2001 to 2002, he investigated practices in implementing and administering ASL programs offered for foreign language credit at the secondary level in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The study surveyed one person in each public school division, who were 15 administrators in 14 school divisions, focusing on the individual who administered the ASL program. Some administrators reported that there was little concern that an ASL program would take enrollment away from other foreign languages. Others stated that it was more difficult to get approval from the foreign language teachers in schools where languages were struggling because they saw ASL as a threat to their enrollment and were apprehensive about losing staff. Those respondents stressed the fear of competition to other foreign languages admitting that they have to fight for a limited pool of students for foreign languages. A major obstacle to implementing an ASL program in 62% of the responding divisions was finding a qualified teacher. Funding or resources was mentioned by 23% of the respondents and another 23% said that perceptions or misperceptions impeded implementation. One respondent said, “We had to educate people that ASL is a language and a viable option to the more traditional foreign languages.”

### **3.2. Support for ASL**

The question about the status of ASL as a foreign language option continues to be discussed as schools and universities struggle to place ASL in the context of academic foreign language programs. On the national scene in the U.S., however, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) Executive Council passed motions in April 1990 that recognized that ASL was a complete system of communication that offered a separate cultural experience with its own literary tradition. More specifically, ASL was recognized to have grammatical, structural, and linguistic elements different from those of any spoken language, including American English (Wallinger, 2000).



Dr. Eve Sweetser, former President of the International Cognitive Linguistics Association, wrote in Hamm (1999), “There is no doubt in the mind of any linguist who has actually looked at signed languages that they are full and complete human languages. It’s just not a debate any more. The disagreement is only between people who know something about signed languages and those who have no knowledge about them, and imagine them to be ‘primitive’ and possibly universal gesture systems. Since I work on gesture as well, I’m fairly well situated to judge that ASL is not ‘just gesture’ but a complex language, which is conducted in the visual-gestural modality.”

Fromkin (1988) sees that the basic grammars of signed languages are as grammatical and systematic as are spoken languages. According to Fromkin, deaf children often sign themselves to sleep just as hearing children talk themselves to sleep; deaf children report that they dream in signed languages as American children dream in English. Deaf children sign to their dolls and stuffed animals; slips of the hand occur and are similar to slips of the tongue; finger fumblers amuse signers as do tongue twisters amuse speakers.

Reagan (2000) recalls, “In my twenty-plus years as a foreign language educator, no one has ever asked me whether Russian is a language. Nor have I been asked about French, German, Spanish, or a host of other common and less-common languages. And yet, for the past fifteen years, ever since I first set foot on the campus of Gallaudet University as a new faculty member, I have often been asked that question about signing: Is sign a language? Does it really count as a language?” His answer was always simple, “Yes, of course, it’s a language.” Reagan points out that the ignorance involved in the question involves at least three levels of confusion: 1) confusion about the nature of signed languages in general; 2)

confusion about the purposes of studying languages other than one's own in general; and 3) confusion about decision making involving the selection and evaluation of both curricula and instructors for sign languages.

Hoffmeister (1990) also claims that ASL is a language that has been misunderstood, misused, and misrepresented over the past 100 years. He summarizes the nature of natural sign languages as follows: "The structure of ASL is based on visual/manual properties, in contrast to the auditory/spoken properties of English. ASL is able to convey the same meanings, information, and complexities as English. The underlying principles of ASL are based on the same principles found in all languages. ASL is able to identify and codify agents, actions, objects, tense, and modality, just as English does. ASL is therefore capable of stating all the information expressed in English and of doing this within the same conceptual frame."

Armstrong (1988) argues that those who would promote ASL as a foreign language for purposes of higher education instruction and the satisfaction of curriculum requirements must take account of the several ways in which it is *foreign* to the hearing people who will be asked to make decisions about its status. Armstrong claims that ASL is foreign in the same way as spoken languages with which hearing people are unfamiliar, namely, as an unknown language. He sees ASL even more foreign in that it employs a communication channel separate from that used by spoken languages.

Belka (2000) maintains that if the purpose of foreign language requirements in public schools and universities is to encourage students to learn a second language and culture that is foreign to them, ASL meets that need as well as French, German, or Spanish. He stresses that ASL be offered through foreign language or ESL programs because the process of language acquisition is similar, whether the language is visual or spoken.

Davis (1998) points out that proponents of *real* foreign languages advocate

travel to other countries to learn about other cultures and to broaden their horizons. He wonders why travel must be across oceans or borders to expand the mind, noting that students of classical Latin, Greek, or Hebrew simply travel back in time and in imagination to study their foreign languages, not to existing countries where the language is used. He further argues, “American Indian languages are acknowledged foreign languages at some universities, yet they are spoken right here in America. Just as there are ‘lands’ where these languages are or were used, so, too, is there the “land of the Deaf.”

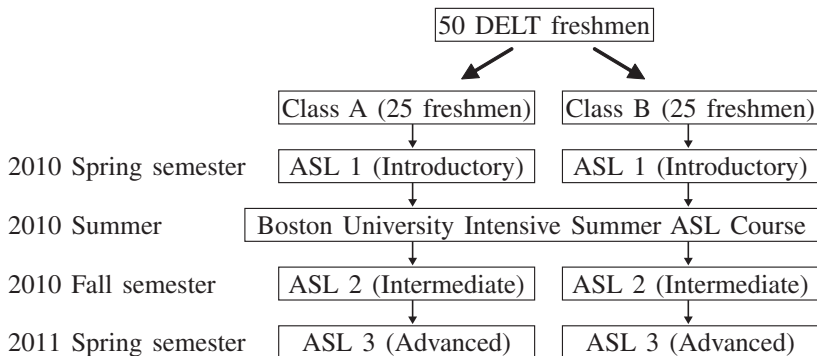
#### **4. The Flow of the 2010 NUFSS ASL Program**

##### **4.1. Case of the 2010 DELT Students**

The school year in Japan begins in April and ends the following March. Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS) follows a two-semester system with a spring and a fall semester. In the academic year of 2008, when the ASL program first started in the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) at NUFS, 45 out of 47 enrolled freshmen (95.7%) registered for ASL 1 (Introductory) and 39 out of 43 enrolled freshmen (90.7%) in the academic year of 2009. In the academic year of 2010, 50 freshmen were enrolled in our department. They showed a strong interest in ASL, being influenced and attracted by my reports on the impact of learning ASL and of the Boston University intensive summer program. As a result, although the course was one of many elective courses for them, all of the 50 freshmen registered for ASL 1 and were divided into two groups consisting of 25 respectively. Figure 1 shows the flow of the 2010 ASL program for the students. At the time of writing, the students are ready to take ASL 2 (Intermediate) to be started in September 2010.

Mr. Danny Gong, director of Deaf Japan Language School, recommended

**Figure 1 Flow of ASL program for 2010 DELT students**



by the Japanese ASL Signers Society in Tokyo, teaches ASL 1 and ASL 2. He is a hearing Chinese-American and a distinguished and renowned sign language teacher born and raised in New York City by his Deaf parents. Mr. Emilio Insolera teaches ASL 3. He is a graduate of Gallaudet University, born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He directed a movie titled *Sign Gene*, which was featured on NHK Educational TV program in 2009. NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai), whose official name is Japan Broadcasting Corporation, is Japan's sole public broadcaster.

#### **4.2. The 2010 Boston University Intensive Summer ASL Course**

The 3rd intensive summer program was held at Boston University from July 26 through August 22 in 2010. Twenty out of the 50 freshmen who took ASL 1 in the first semester participated in this intensive program. This overseas program was developed in cooperation with the Boston University Center for English and Orientation Programs (CELOP) and the Boston University School of Education. The program is unique in that an ASL course is integrated into a regular English language course, which is a

first among Japanese universities (Kikuchi, 2009). Based on results from a student satisfaction survey, the average score was 4.6 out of 5.0 points which indicates that the program ended with as much success as the previous programs held in 2008 and 2009.

Professor Bruce Bucci from the Boston University School of Education was the teacher of the ASL course. None of the participants had ever experienced communicating with a deaf native ASL signer. The class was based on the textbook, *Signing Naturally* Level 1, published by Dawn Sign Press. According to Rosen (2010), most of the teachers surveyed (83%) in the U.S. in his study use this textbook, followed by *A Basic Course in American Sign Language* (49%) and the *Green Books* (30%). The three-level *Vista American Sign Language: Signing Naturally* curriculum, which is informally called *Vista*, consists of a teacher's curriculum, as well as student videotapes and workbooks. *Vista* follows the functional-notional approach (Smith, 1988) and its focus is not grammar but communicative skills.

Professor Bucci always encouraged the students to communicate as naturally as possible while extending their range of ASL vocabulary through pair-work activities. He often took the students outside the classroom, for example, to a convenience store, a bank, a fast food restaurant, a cafeteria, a bookstore, Fenway Park, a subway station, a library, etc., while teaching signs related to objects they saw around them in real-life situations. He showed them deaf people are, first and foremost, people who live ordinary lives and have a need to communicate in a variety of situations. He greeted everyone he met on the street, from students and tourists to construction workers and police officers. What was impressive was they all greeted him back with a smile, although few knew ASL.

Professor Bucci often encouraged the students to use as many facial expressions and body movements as possible when they signed. These

were crucial factors especially to hearing Japanese students who did not always use such means of communication in their daily lives. Belka (2000) points out that signing ASL without the proper facial expressions and body movements corresponds to a foreign language student's applying English pronunciation and intonation to French, thus making it nearly incomprehensible to a Frenchman.

One of the most impressive classes during the course was a presentation at Harvard University. The students were required to make a presentation in both English and ASL. As for English, the students were assigned to choose one historic place such as Massachusetts Hall, the Statue of John Harvard, the Science Center, Memorial Hall, Memorial Church, or Widener Library to explain its history in front of the place they had chosen. As for ASL, the students prepared a short story about their greatest memories in Boston and at Boston University making use of sign vocabulary they learned during the course.

On the day of their presentation, while participating in a guided tour on campus at Harvard, the students saw Professor Bucci talking with a hearing person with the help of sign interpreters. He introduced the person to us, who later turned out to be a politician working at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. After the guided tour, the students walked to a restaurant near Harvard Square. On the way Professor Bucci happened to find a man signing to another person and invited him to our group. The man was a deaf teacher from Haiti who lost his house and some friends in the huge earthquake that struck in January 2010. The deaf Haitian teacher slowly talked about the earthquake in sign in front of us, expressing appreciation to all the people and organizations for their humanitarian aid to Haitian people in need. This was the moment when the students learned that a sign language was more than just a language.

In the ASL presentation which took place at a restaurant near Harvard Square, the students talked in sign about their greatest memories in Boston and at Boston University. Some students talked about the pizza party with Boston University Deaf Studies students, shopping at Quincy Market, and a baseball game at Fenway Park. Others talked about whale watching, trips to Salem and Plymouth, events with their host families, and so on. Customers and waiters at the restaurant gathered around our tables and curiously observed the presentations. The students were not just practicing ASL, but they were in part of a community at that time.

Professor Bucci provided his detailed comments with a great sense of humor to each of the 20 students and praised them individually for every little improvement they made with his both arms raised up to express his satisfaction. Four hearing American teachers from Boston University and two hearing Japanese teachers from NUFS at the scene learned that a teacher could change his students. It was true that the students had developed rapport with Professor Bucci while developing a positive attitude toward him through classroom interaction. It is not an exaggeration to say that we appreciate Professor Bucci's passion which inspired us and brought great success to the 2010 Boston University intensive summer program, like in the previous two years of the program.

At the completion ceremony, Professor Bucci stressed that hearing people and deaf people were equal. Furthermore, he did not forget to turn our attention to Japanese Sign Language and Japanese deaf people. Professor Bucci signed to us with respect as a closing remark, "You learned ASL in Boston and made friends with deaf Americans at the pizza party, but when you go back to Japan, please make friends with Japanese deaf people and learn their language so that you can help them. That is your important job. I hope things you learned in Boston this summer will grow like a big

beautiful flower in Japan.”

### 4.3. Evaluation on Professor Bucci’s ASL Course

The following questions were asked in Japanese to the participants in Professor Bucci’s ASL course on the last day of the course.

**Q1: Did NUFS ASL 1 help you to communicate with Professor Bucci?**

**Q2: Did the Boston University Intensive Summer ASL Course encourage you to study ASL more in the fall semester at NUFS?**

**Q3: Do you feel you have developed a positive attitude toward deaf people after taking the Boston University Intensive Summer ASL Course?**

**Q4: Do you feel you came to have an interest in Japanese Sign Language after taking the Boston University Intensive Summer ASL Course?**

**Table 1** Number of students who responded to the item

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1	17 (85%)	3 (15%)			
Q2	18 (90%)	1 (5%)		1 (5%)	
Q3	19 (95%)	1 (5%)			
Q4	8 (40%)	9 (45%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	

**Q5: What was the most important lesson you learned from Professor Bucci?**

- *People are equal. Hearing people should not look down on deaf people.*
- *Deaf people can do anything hearing people can do.*
- *Hearing people should not see deaf people as disabled.*
- *ASL is really a means of communication for deaf people.*
- *We (Hearing people) should not create a psychological border in our minds between hearing and deaf because of our prejudice toward deaf people.*



- *Welcoming people with a smile is very important to start a conversation.*
- *Japanese students should practice expressing facial expressions more.*
- *People should respect others even if they are in a minority group.*
- *Hearing people can communicate with deaf people as long as hearing people have a desire to communicate with deaf people.*
- *ASL has more power than I had expected.*
- *Being a good teacher is having a sense of humor.*
- *Professor Bucci never neglected us even if our signing level was low.*
- *Sign interpreter's work is amazingly professional.*
- *Family is the most important unit in the world.*

#### **4.4. Discussion**

As explained in 4.1., all of the participants in the intensive summer course at Boston University had taken Mr. Gong's ASL 1 course (Introductory) at NUFS. As is clear from Table 1, Mr. Gong's ASL 1 course greatly helped the students communicate with Professor Bucci.

Regarding Q2, one of the 20 students responded negatively to the question. It was revealed later that the host parents of this student in Boston had a different attitude toward hearing people learning ASL. "I was shocked to hear American hearing people say learning ASL is not useful. The parents even told me to stop learning ASL. They suggested to me that I learn only English", the student said. It can be presumed that the comments made by the host parents discouraged the student to continue to learn ASL.

Regarding Q3, it can be summed up that the 2010 Boston University Intensive Summer ASL Course was successful in that all of the students agreed that they developed a positive attitude toward deaf people after taking Professor Bucci's ASL course.

Regarding Q4, it was found that 85% of the students came to have an interest in Japanese Sign Language after taking Professor Bucci's ASL course. As Professor Bucci pleaded with us in his speech at the completion ceremony, turning our attention to Japanese deaf people and their language

is also an important task and will be our next step to explore.

On our way back from the U.S. in August 2010, I saw some students, sitting at the both ends of their rows on the international flight, signing to each other in ASL. They were asking simple questions such as how they were feeling, what movie they were watching, what music they were listening to, what they were going to eat for dinner, and so on. ASL was used when distance or noise made it almost impossible to communicate with each other. Four students saw their birthdays come round in Boston during the intensive summer course. They will never forget the happy birthday song sung in ASL at the completion ceremony. It is worthy to note that our students became able to construct two realities through the intensive ASL course at Boston University and have them running in parallel with an open and inquiring mind toward deaf people.

## **5. Teaching ASL as a Foreign Language**

### **5.1. In the case of the U.S.**

Battison and Carter (1981) state that in 1980, no college and university in the U.S. had yet to make ASL a permanent part of their foreign language curricula. However, since then, surveys conducted by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) have indicated that ASL has the fastest and largest percentage increase in foreign language enrollments in U.S. institutions of higher education. According to Clary (2004), enrollments in ASL courses more than quintupled with a 532.8% change from 1998 to 2002. In a recent report from the MLA (Myers and Fernandes, 2010), enrollments in ASL courses rose nearly 30% from 2002, making it the fourth most studied language on college campuses (See Appendix).

The growth of ASL as a foreign language in U.S. secondary schools has been witnessed particularly in the last two decades. Rosen (2008), indicating

the studies by Welles (2002) and Wilcox (2006), hopes that the history and information from the survey will aid school administrators and educators in becoming aware of the situation of ASL as a foreign language and in implementing ASL classes in schools.

According to Welles (2002), student enrollment in ASL classes grew from 1,602 students in 1990; 4,308 students in 1995; and 11,420 students in 1998; to 60,849 in 2002. The growth rates were 3,698% from 1990 to 2002, and 432% from 1998 to 2002. The number of U.S. colleges and universities that accepted ASL as one of the foreign languages that meet the requirement for undergraduate admission grew from 48 in 1991 to 148 in 2006. The growth rate was 208%. Rosen (2008) notes that this growth of ASL as a foreign language in schools is part of a general trend in educational institutions in adopting ASL for admission and graduation purposes.

Wallinger (2000) suggests, “Clearly, the debate of whether or not ASL is a foreign language will continue in the years to come. However, for institutions where the decision has already been made, it is time to move beyond discussing of whether or not to include ASL as a foreign language, and to devote that time and energy to developing ways in which the best practices in foreign language teaching can be applied to the subject.”

## **5.2. Suggestions to Japanese Universities**

As of September 2010, there are 778 four-year universities in Japan including seven universities of foreign studies. Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS), one of the seven universities of foreign studies, offered an ASL program in the context of a hearing curriculum in 2008, which was a first among the departments of English language teaching at Japanese universities. The ASL program successfully expanded from our student

population in the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) to include a group of potential flight attendants, so consequently, 120 students learned ASL at NUFS in the school year of 2009. Although we are now in the third year of a successful ASL program, the ASL program is still placed under the category of special education in the department curriculum, so there might be confusion among hearing students about ASL because they tend to associate ASL as a handicap condition of deaf people and not as a language of its own. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the ASL program be placed under the category of foreign languages.

In order to achieve nationwide recognition of ASL as a foreign language satisfying the foreign language requirement within the university system in Japan, first, NUFS needs to start with a grassroots movement as the forerunner. In this respect, there are several things to consider: (1) All of the three ASL courses in the program should be required courses rather than elective ones for the students of the Department of English Language Teaching, (2) The ASL program should also be open to the other six departments in the undergraduate course to raise awareness toward sign language, (3) A course for sign language studies should be implemented in the graduate program, (4) A deaf ASL teacher should be hired as a full-time teacher, (5) An ASL teacher should be invited to NUFS as a visiting professor from the U.S., and (6) An international joint research project should be conducted with the Boston University Deaf Studies Program, Teachers College at Columbia University, and Gallaudet University to establish an international network and learn the strategies that were successful in how ASL became recognized as a world language.

As a nationwide movement outside of NUFS, I suggest to the other six universities of foreign studies in Japan that they introduce an ASL course for their students wishing to become English language teachers. In addition,

an intensive ASL course is recommended to every new English language teacher in Japan as in-service teacher training to be taken within three years after he/she starts to work. Furthermore, I call for an establishment of an institution to develop a foundation of research that would support language policy reform to the Japanese Ministry of Education toward the recognition of ASL as a foreign language in Japan.

## **6. For Future Studies**

While establishing an ASL program at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, I found that several topics on gesture and sign language appeared in major English textbooks inspected and approved by the Japanese Ministry of Education for elementary and junior high school students. Further investigation uncovered that sign language was not a required course to become a teacher at deaf schools in Japan (Kimura, 2007). After the establishment of the ASL program in Japan, my interests turned to research that needs to be undertaken on the status of ASL along with Japanese Sign Language (JSL).

Regarding the status of JSL, the Japan Deaf Children and Parents Association filed a strong request in 2003 with the Japan Federation of Bar Associations to promote the social status of JSL. In response to repeated appeals by deaf advocacy groups, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations submitted a petition to the Japanese government in making a policy on deaf education in Japan (Saito, 2007). Their plea went unheeded at the time.

Kanda (2009) claims that despite the fact that a large budget has been allocated in Japan for medical doctors and engineers studying the development of hearing aids and cochlear implants, not a category in research project programs has been organized by the Japanese Ministry of Education for sign language studies. Consequently, Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research,

which represents Japan's most typical competitive fund program, has not been provided to sign language researchers in Japan to enable them to devote intensive efforts to advancing their research activities.

Even under the harsh circumstances above, it is particularly worthy to note that on November 25, 2009, a Japanese deaf woman in her 60s, who had her ability to use sign language impaired after being injured in a traffic accident, successfully sued the man who caused the crash and won compensation for her damage. During the hearing at the Nagoya District Court, Judge Kozo Tokunaga ruled that "sign language is a means of mutual comprehension, comparable to speaking for a non-handicapped individual." This was the first case in history in Japan that equally recognized the status of sign language and speech.

Regarding the status of ASL, it seems that the possibility of teaching ASL as a foreign language in Japanese universities is quite low at present. What steps should I take in preparing myself to discuss and debate with those outside the field about issues relevant to the teaching and learning of ASL as a foreign language for hearing Japanese university students learning English? In the U.S. the creation, implementation, and assessment of educational language policies are generally complex processes that rely on the efforts of many constituents, including: policy makers, state boards of education, federally-funded committees within the Department of Education, lobbying arms of various political, professional, and trade organizations, school boards, education lawyers, non-government organizations, contracted research groups, academic specialists, and more (Crawford, 2008; and Mallet, 2009).

In a case of California, Peggy J. Selover, the originator and sponsor of California Assemble Bill which requires California high schools to give foreign language credit to ASL courses, accomplished real communica-

tion among hearing students and those deaf and hearing impaired students mainstreamed into hearing environments (Selover, 1988). In the step-by-step process through which ASL legislation became reality in California in 1987 included the following ten steps: 1) Deaf Community, 2) Research, 3) Choosing a Senator/Assemblyperson, 4) Legislative Consultants, 5) Lobbying, 6) Testimony, 7) Information Source, 8) Sustained Effort, 9) Media, and 10) Follow-Up.

It is generally true that in the U.S. many nonprofit organizations hire professional lobbyists to target key politicians or lawyers seeking landmark cases. In Japan, Nakamura (2006) claims that the parliamentary system makes courting individual politicians difficult, and the court systems have proved to be a long and very uncertain method of enacting social or legislative change. No matter how long it may take me to reach the ultimate goal, it is my intent to learn more information about the Deaf World in the U.S. to initiate steps to work with deaf people and policy makers and it is my belief that offering ASL as a foreign language in Japanese university settings will lead to further university innovation and education reform in Japan while at the same time contributing to promoting better understanding between Japan's and the U.S.'s deaf and hearing communities.

Lastly, I would like to take an episode from Groce (1985) about Martha's Vineyard Island. Martha's Vineyard, a large island five miles off the southern coast of Cape Cod, was well known throughout the U.S. for its whaling and fishing fleets, as well as for its growing reputation as a summer tourist colony. There was a time in Martha's Vineyard history when everybody spoke sign language for over two hundred years. On the island, it was natural for hearing children to learn sign language from their hearing parents to get along with deaf people in the town. I hope one day the time will come when hearing children will learn sign language from

their hearing parents, like what happened on Martha's Vineyard, on this small archipelago called Japan.

## Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Mr. Danny Gong, Mr. Emilio Insolera, and Mr. Bruce Bucci for their great contribution to our ASL program. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Harlan Lane, Distinguished University Professor at Northeastern University, and Dr. Russell S. Rosen at Teachers College, Columbia University for their warm encouragement and many valuable suggestions to creating a better ASL program in Japan for hearing students. My profound thanks go to Dr. Robert J. Hoffmeister of the Boston University Deaf Studies Program for his continuous advice and support for my work.

## References

- Armstrong, D. F. (1988). Some Notes on ASL as a "Foreign" Language. *Sign Language Studies*, 59, 231-239.
- Battison, R. and S. Carter. (1981). The Academic Status of Sign Language. In F. Cacamise, M. Garretson, and U. Belugi (eds.), *Teaching American Sign Language as a Second/Foreign Language*. Proceedings of the Third National Symposium on Sign Language Research and Teaching, Silver Spring. National Association of the Deaf.
- Baynton, D. C. (1993). *Foreigners in Their Own Land: The Cultural Origins of the Campaign Against Sign Language in Nineteenth-Century America*. Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Iowa, No. 9421103.
- Belka, R. W. (2000). Is American Sign Language a "Foreign" Language? *Northeast Conference, Review*, 48, 45-52.
- Clary, W. M. (2004). *American Sign Language as a High School Language Elective: Factors Influencing its Adoption*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Southern California, No. 3145184.
- Corballis, M. C. (2002). *From Hand to Mouth: The Origins of Language*. Princeton University Press.
- Corwin, K. and S. Wilcox. (1985). The Search for the Empty Cup Continues. *Sign*



- Language Studies*, 48, 249-267.
- Crawford, J. (2008). *Advocating for English Learners*. Multilingual Matters.
- Davis, L. J. (1998). The Linguistic Turf Battles Over American Sign Language. In Wallinger, L. M. (2000). *American Sign Language: Moving from Protest to Practice. Northeast Conference, Review*, 48, 27-36.
- Eastman, G. C. (1980). From Student to Professional: A Personal Chronicle of Sign Language. In Belka, R. W. (2000). *Is American Sign Language a "Foreign" Language? Northeast Conference, Review*, 48, 45-52.
- Fromkin, V. A. (1988). Sign Languages: Evidence for Language Universals and the Linguistic Capacity of the Human Brain. *Sign Language Studies*, 59, 115-127.
- Gannon, J. R. (1981). Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America. In Pfeiffer, D. L. (2003). *The Implementation and Administration of American Sign Language Programs for Foreign Language Credit in Public Secondary Schools* (p. 4). Doctoral Dissertation, The George Washington University, No. 3083807.
- Groce, E. N. (1985). *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*. Harvard University Press.
- Hamm, M. (1999). A Proposal before the Curriculum Committee on the Status of American Sign Language as a Foreign Language, New York University. In Clary, W. M. (2004). *American Sign Language as a High School Language Elective: Factors Influencing its Adoption* (p. 3). Doctoral Dissertation, University of Southern California, No. 3145184.
- Hoffmeister, R. J. (1990). ASL and its Implications for Education. In H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Manual Communication: Implications for Education* (pp. 81-107). Gallaudet University Press.
- Kanda, K. (2009). A Pleasure for Learning Sign Language (In Japanese). *Gengo, Taishukan*, 38(8), 8-15.
- Kikuchi, T. (2009). *Implication of Teaching ASL to Japanese Hearing Students*. Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. *Journal of School of Foreign Languages*, 36, 1-27.
- Kimura, H. (2007). *Japanese Sign Language and Deaf Culture* (In Japanese). Seikatsu Shoin.
- Lane, H. (1999). *The Mask of Benevolence*. Dawn Sign Press.
- Mallet, K. E. (2009). *Educational Language Policy and the Role of Advocacy among*

- English Language Professionals: An Historical and Case Study Analysis*. Doctoral Dissertation, Purdue University, No. 3378805.
- Myers, S. S. and J. K. Fernandes. (2010). Deaf Studies: A Critique of the Predominant U.S. Theoretical Direction. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 15(1), 30-49.
- Nakamura, K. (2006). *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity*. Cornell University Press.
- Peet, H. (1853). "Discussion," Proceedings of the Third Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf, Columbus. In Baynton, D. C. (1993). *Foreigners in Their Own Land: The Cultural Origins of the Campaign Against Sign Language in Nineteenth-Century America* (pp. 259-261). Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Iowa, No. 9421103.
- Pfeiffer, D. L. (2003). *The Implementation and Administration of American Sign Language Programs for Foreign Language Credit in Public Secondary Schools*. Doctoral Dissertation, The George Washington University, No. 3083807.
- Pinker, S. (1994). *The Language Instinct*. Harper Perennial
- Postero, J. P. (1995). *The Educational and Legal Issues of National Language Policy in the United States*. Doctoral Dissertation, Northern Arizona University, No. 9529990.
- Reagan, T. (2000). But Does It Count?: Reflection on "Signing" as a Foreign Language. *Northeast Conference, Review*, 48, 16-26.
- Rosen, R. S. (2008). American Sign Language as a Foreign Language in U.S. High Schools: State of the Art. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(1), 10-38.
- Rosen, R. S. (2010). American Sign Language Curriculum: A Review. *Sign Language Studies*, 10(3), 348-381.
- Saito, K. (2007). *Sign Language as a Minority Language* (In Japanese). University of Tokyo Press.
- Schaller, S. (1991). *A Man Without Words*. Summit Books.
- Selover, P. J. (1988). American Sign Language in the High School System. *Sign Language Studies*, 59, 205-212.
- Sinett, D. R. (1995). *An Investigation of How Foreign Language Departments at American Colleges and Universities View American Sign Language*. Doctoral Dissertation, Florida International University, No. 9610898.

- Smith, C. (1988). Signing Naturally: Notes on the Development of the ASL Curriculum Project at Vista College. *Sign Language Studies*, 59, 171-182.
- Wallinger, L. M. (2000). American Sign Language: Moving from Protest to Practice. *Northeast Conference, Review*, 48, 27-36.
- Welles, E. B. (2002). Foreign Language Enrollments in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education. *ADFL Bulletin*, 35(2-3), 7-26.
- Wilcox, S. (2006). Universities that Accept ASL as a Foreign Language. In Rosen, R. S. (2008). American Sign Language as a Foreign Language in U.S. High Schools: State of the Art (p.11). *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(1), 10-38.

## Appendix

Fall 1998, 2002, and 2006 Language Course Enrollments in US Institutions of Higher Education (Languages in Descending Order of 2006 Totals)

	1998	2002	% Change 1998–2002	2006	% Change 2002–06
Spanish	656,590	746,267	13.7	822,985	10.3
French	199,064	201,979	1.5	206,426	2.2
German	89,020	91,100	2.3	94,264	3.5
*American Sign Language	11,420	60,781	432.2	78,829	29.7
Italian	49,287	63,899	29.6	78,368	22.6
Japanese	43,141	52,238	21.1	66,605	27.5
Chinese	28,456	34,153	20.0	51,582	51.0
Latin	26,145	29,841	14.1	32,191	7.9
Russian	23,791	23,921	0.5	24,845	3.9
Arabic	5,505	10,584	92.3	23,974	126.5
Greek, Ancient	16,402	20,376	24.2	22,849	12.1
Hebrew, Biblical	9,099	14,183	55.9	14,140	-0.3
Portuguese	6,926	8,385	21.1	10,267	22.4
Hebrew, Modern	6,734	8,619	28.0	9,612	11.5
Korean	4,479	5,211	16.3	7,145	37.1
Other languages	17,771	25,716	44.7	33,728	31.2
Total	1,193,830	1,397,253	17.0	1,577,810	12.9

Cited from [http://www.mla.org/pdf/06enrollmentsurvey\\_final.pdf](http://www.mla.org/pdf/06enrollmentsurvey_final.pdf) (p.14)

Fall 2006, Nelly Furman, David Goldberg, and Natalia Lusin.

\*The latest MLA survey report, released on December 8, 2010, shows that ASL enrollments grew to 91,763 (up 16.4%) in 2009.

