

The Impact of Teaching ASL to Japanese Hearing Students and Their Attitude Change toward Deaf People

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A curriculum is more than a plan of learning, more than a pedagogical theory; it is a philosophical commitment to a language and its people.

What is our commitment?

Robert M. Ingram, 1982

Introduction

In May 2007, the United Nations General Assembly, recognizing that languages are essential to the identity of groups and individuals and to their peaceful coexistence, proclaimed 2008 the International Year of Languages. In a message of celebration of the occasion, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, director-general of UNESCO, said that languages constitute a strategic factor for progress toward sustainable development and contribute to a harmonious relationship between the global and the local context.

In reflection of the concept of the International Year of Languages, light was also shed on sign languages for deaf people. The State of Georgia in the U.S. identified the status of American Sign Language (ASL) in June 2007 as a language appropriate for a college preparatory diploma, consequently, Georgia joined 45 other states in accepting ASL for inclusion in foreign/modern language programs.¹ In Japan, Her Imperial Highness Princess

Akishinonomiya Kiko, sister-in-law of the Crown Prince, gave a speech at the opening ceremony of the 26th National High School Signed Speech Contest held in Tokyo in August 2009 in Japanese Sign Language, calling for better understanding of deaf people and their language.

Just two years before the International Year of Languages, a committee was organized under the Nakanishi Educational Foundation to set up a new department launching in April 2008 at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS). The primary purpose of the new department was to develop students to become English language teachers in Japanese junior and senior high schools and the department was later named the *Department of English Language Teaching* (DELT).

In response to my proposal of integrating ASL into the university curriculum, the Nakanishi Educational Foundation and the set-up committee members accepted both plans for a NUFs ASL program and an intensive summer program at Boston University in the U.S. for the new department. 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 the departments of English language teaching at Japanese universities (Kikuchi, 2009).

Soon after the ASL course started at NUFs in 2008, our students became interested in linguistic differences between spoken English and ASL. Furthermore, my colleagues as well as students learned that a simple sign like “Thank you” could make a deaf person happy and smile and they began to greet each other in sign on campus. In the practicum course held at Boston University in 2008, our hearing students developed rapport with an American deaf teacher and learned that a teacher could change his

students with passionate teaching. A deaf teacher, hired at NUFS in 2009 for the first time since its foundation in 1988, also inspired us to see him as a teacher, not a deaf person. It was exactly this empowerment of our hearing students that lay at the heart of the implementation of ASL into a hearing curriculum.

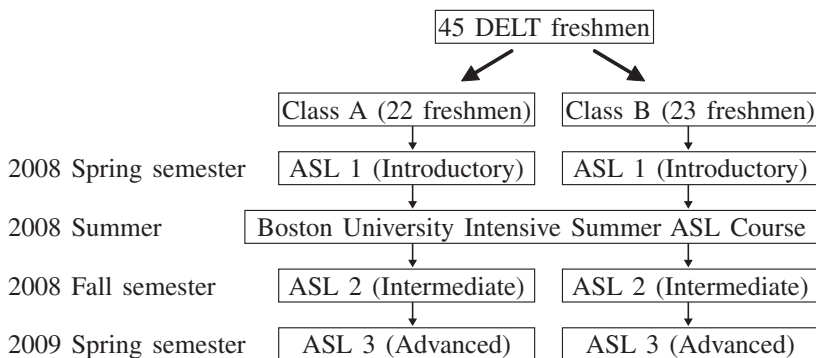
Besides our department, the ASL program became open to other departments in 2009 and was expanded to a group of potential flight attendants consequently, 120 NUFS students are currently learning ASL. In the first two chapters in this article, focus will be put on how our hearing students have changed their attitude toward deaf people since they were exposed to ASL. Several issues on ASL curriculum development for Japanese hearing students will be discussed in the third and fourth chapters. The word *hearing* is used in this article as opposed to deaf, i.e. hearing students are students who have normal physical conditions without medical problems with their ears.

1. The Case of the 2008 DELT Students

1.1 Flow of the 2008 ASL program

The school year in Japan begins in April and ends the following March. NUFS follows a two-semester system with a spring and a fall semester. In the academic year of 2008, 47 freshmen entered our department. Of the 47, 45 students registered for ASL 1 (Introductory) and were divided into two groups consisting of 22 and 23 respectively. Figure 1 shows the flow of the 2008 ASL program for the students.

Figure 1: Flow of ASL program for 2008 DELT students



1.2 Outline for the 2008 ASL program

Mr. Danny Gong's ASL 1 and ASL 2 were conducted based on the following schedule below.² Grades were based on students' weekly homework, class work, quizzes and a final examination. Handouts were distributed in class in place of a textbook. Mr. Emilio Insolera was the instructor for ASL 3 beginning in 2009.³

ASL 1: Mr. Danny Gong

- W1. Course Guidance, American Sign Language Alphabet and Greetings.
- W2. Unit 1: Greetings
- W3. Unit 2: Colors and Color sentences
- W4. Unit 3: Farewells
- W5. Unit 4: Review and Quiz
- W6. Unit 5: Family and Family sentences
- W7. Unit 6: People and People sentences
- W8. Unit 7: Numbers and Number sentences
- W9. Unit 8: Personal Pronouns
- W10. Unit 9: Review and Midterm
- W11. Unit 10: Days of the week and sentences
- W12. Unit 11: Months and Temperature sentences
- W13. Unit 12: Who, what, where, when, why and how
- W14. Unit 13: Sentences and review
- W15. Unit 14: Final Examination

ASL 2: Mr. Danny Gong

- W1. Guidance on Course Registration. Students will use American Sign Language to introduce themselves. Also they will talk about their hobbies, likes and dislikes and goals.
- W2. Unit 1: Review of Basic ASL Vocabulary and Sentences.
- W3. Unit 2: Office and Department sentences
- W4. Unit 3: Professional workers and sentences
- W5. Unit 4: Body Parts and sentences
- W6. Unit 5: Review and Quiz
- W7. Unit 6: Home and sentences
- W8. Unit 7: Vehicles and sentences
- W9. Unit 8: Animals and sentences
- W10. Unit 9: Food and sentences
- W11. Unit 10: Review and Midterm
- W12. Unit 11: ASL videos and sentences
- W13. Unit 12: ASL videos and sentences
- W14. Unit 13: ASL videos and sentences
- W15. Unit 14: Final Examination

ASL 3: Mr. Emilio Insolera

Outline: This course aims to develop students' fundamental ASL's daily communication skills. In addition to developing communication skills, we will bring up topics related to Deaf Culture and Deaf Studies. Students will learn to make group discussions via American Sign Language. The development of ASL communication skills from topics that range from daily life to Deaf culture and Deaf studies will help them prepare for better social and professional integration in the heart of the Sign Language community.

Schedule:

1. Guidance on Course Registration (class 1)
2. Topic 1 (class 2-3)
It focuses on the review of the previous ASL course. Its purpose is to help them remember some signs and clean up minor phonological & morphological errors. It focuses also on the introduction of some fundamental signs not clearly introduced in the previous class (pronominal pronouns, possessive pronouns, daily verbs).
3. Topic 2 (class 4-5)
It focuses on encouraging students to be able to identify similarities between signs and explain their difference via American Sign Language. It focuses also on the introduction of basic ASL compounds, ASL adverbs & prepositions. Students are also encouraged to make proper ASL sentences regarding their daily life.
4. Topic 3 (class 6-7)
Introduction of elementary topics related to Deaf culture. Open questions and group discussions. New daily Signs (from nouns to verbs).

5. Topic 4 (class 8-9)

Expansion of elementary discussions related to Deaf in the media and Visual Access. Global comparisons (Japan & USA). Students are encouraged to develop ASL communication skills using correct sentences and appropriate verbs, nouns, compounds, pronouns, adverbs and prepositions.

6. Topic 5 (class 10-11)

Review of new Signs learned from class 2 to 9.

7. Topic 6 (class 12-13)

Final examination

Assessment: 1. Attendance and participation (20%) 2. Writing assignments (50%)
3. Writing test (30%)

Textbook: (Instead of text books we provid ASL videos)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Claf_2B2lJc

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjweU2jCKfw>

2008 Boston University Intensive Summer ASL Course: Mr. Bruce Bucci

This course introduces students to American Sign Language (ASL) and deaf culture, focusing on frequently used signs, basic rules of grammar, non-manual aspects of ASL, introductory finger spelling, and some cultural features of the Deaf community. Students concentrate on the development of basic expressive and receptive skills in ASL. Students completing this course demonstrate the following abilities: 1) Ability to use ASL in conversations with proper parameters and distinguish linguistic concepts. 2) Awareness of cultural behaviors and issues important to the Deaf community.

1.3 ASL 3 teacher Mr. Emilio Insolera's comments

Several questions were asked to the ASL 3 teacher Mr. Emilio Insolera regarding his students' achievement after the course was completed in July 2009. Here are his comments.

Q1: Do you think your students had a good enough knowledge of ASL to follow your signing? If no, what do you think the students should have learned in the introductory and intermediate courses?

Some students were able to follow my signing only if expressed slowly and clearly. Some other students weren't. It was somehow difficult for me as a professor to manage both groups with different ASL competency. Based on my observations,

I believe they were a bit overwhelmed with several new signs introduced in the introductory class. Since I started my first lessons, I realized that the students could not understand basic signs like “Can”, “Cannot”, “Know”, “Don’t know”, “Study”, basic pronouns (difference between personal pronouns and possessive pronouns), and adverbs “A lot”, “Very” etc. I believe the professor from the introductory class is excellent. It is just that the students are not really prepared to absorb lot of signs at once. They actually need to undergo more practical exercises over the same signs and to have more space with ASL expression.

Q2: What do you think was the most difficult items for the students to learn in your advanced ASL class?

My class is exclusively visual. There is “no-sound” in the class since I never speak with voice. I just use ASL and lot of writing on the blackboard. I recognize some students’ effort in “listening” just with the eyes with no audio stimulation.

Q3: Did you notice any change in students’ attitude toward you as class proceeded?

Yes, lot of them were starting to work harder and take it seriously, because ASL was actually the only medium of communication between us. It is not like I am “playing” to be the Deaf character - I am the real one, so, there are no moments when they can give up and start speaking with me. They end up working harder with their ASL expression and in the meantime I see their ASL skill improving.

Q4: What do you think is the significance of teaching ASL to Japanese hearing students?

I believe it will benefit students for several reasons - what I have in mind right now are the following:

1 - Learning ASL will help them have a broader perspective about the concept of the language itself.

2 - ASL is now an universal language as well as it is English speaking.

3 - Career opportunities. One example: interpreting. How many hearing native Japanese speakers can translate directly from ASL to Japanese speaking?

1.4 Results of a questionnaire for 2008 DELT freshmen

A questionnaire was given in Japanese to 35 DELT students who completed ASL3 in July 2009 to find out what impact the ASL program had on the students. These students were the first students who completed our department ASL program from ASL 1 to ASL 3. Nineteen out of the 35 DELT students were participants in the 2008 Boston University intensive

summer ASL course.

Q1: Was the NUFs ASL program the first time for you to communicate with a native ASL signer?

Yes 35 (100.0%) No 0 (0.0%)

Q2: What image did you have of ASL and deaf people before taking the ASL program at NUFs?

- *ASL is a simplified version of English.*
- *ASL is easier to learn than English.*
- *Half a year is enough to learn ASL perfectly.*
- *Deaf people all over the world use the same sign language.*
- *ASL is a language translated directly from spoken English.*
- *ASL is most related to England.*
- *Every English word must be signed in ASL.*
- *Even students with lower level of English can learn ASL easily.*
- *Learning ASL needs less energy for students than learning spoken English.*
- *Deaf people cannot write or read.*
- *Deaf people use only their hands to communicate with other people.*
- *There is no deaf teacher at the university level in Japan.*
- *Deaf people cannot use a telephone.*
- *Deaf parents cannot teach their hearing children.*
- *Deaf people have their own groups.*
- *Deaf children have deaf parents.*
- *Deaf people are disabled.*
- *It is hard for deaf people to find a job.*
- *There are few schools in Japan for deaf students.*
- *Deaf students stay at home all day without attending school.*
- *Captions on films were developed for hearing people, not for deaf people.*

Q3: Do you feel you have come to develop a positive attitude toward deaf people as the ASL program at NUFs proceeded?

Yes 29 (82.9%) No 2 (5.7%) Hard to decide 4 (11.4%)

Q4: Do you feel you have changed your image of ASL and deaf people after taking the ASL program at NUFs?

Yes 30 (85.7%) No 2 (5.7%) Hard to decide 3 (8.6%)

Q5: Did you compare the difference between spoken English and ASL?

Yes 28 (80.0%) No 7 (20.0%)

Q6: Do you think it is meaningful for Japanese hearing students to learn ASL?

Yes 34 (97.1%) No 1 (2.9%)

Q7: Did you come to have an interest in Japanese Sign Language?

Yes 29 (82.9%) No 6 (17.1%)

Q8: Do you want to teach ASL to Japanese deaf students learning English?

Yes 32 (91.4%) No 3 (8.6%)

Q9: Do you think it is beneficial to NUFFS students if NUFFS ASL teachers are full-time teachers?

Yes 25 (71.4%) No 2 (5.7%) Hard to decide 8 (22.9%)

Q10: Did you use ASL outside of class?

Yes 23 (65.7%) No 12 (34.3%)

Q11: What was beneficial to you in learning ASL?

- *I became interested in deaf education in Japan.*
- *I developed a positive attitude toward deaf people.*
- *I learned a new means of communication.*
- *I learned the real meaning of communication in talking with Mr. Insolera in ASL.*
- *I learned hearing people could understand deaf people.*
- *I became confident in communicating with deaf people.*
- *Mr. Insolera's encouragement motivated me to study other subjects.*
- *I learned Mr. Insolera knew lots of things that I didn't know.*
- *I learned deaf people could teach hearing people.*
- *I noticed how little I really knew about deaf world.*
- *Mr. Insolera's video about his younger days touched me.*
- *Mr. Insolera's way of thinking as a deaf person moved my heart.*
- *I learned English words through ASL.*
- *My long held prejudice against deaf people has disappeared.*
- *I learned communication could be made without sound.*
- *I learned being a deaf is not a bad thing.*
- *Hearing people should stop seeing deaf people as disabled.*
- *Whether or not deafness is a disability differs from country to country.*
- *It was amazing to know hands could convey such a huge amount of information.*
- *I didn't know that ASL is a language.*

- *I came to pay attention to the differences of languages: Japanese, Japanese Sign Language, spoken English, and American Sign Language.*
- *It is fun to learn a new language.*
- *I got a glimpse of deaf culture and became interested in their social lives.*
- *It was good to learn the difference between JSL and ASL.*
- *Learning ASL made my eyes open to another new world.*
- *In communication it is important to have a strong desire to talk with one's partner. Mr. Insolera made me have a strong desire to talk with him, which was unusual in other English classes.*
- *Knowing I could talk with deaf people in sign made me confident.*
- *There is much redundancy in spoken English.*
- *Learning ASL expanded my horizon seeing things with multi-cultural views.*
- *I came to see spoken English from a different viewpoint.*
- *I want to choose ASL as one of the topics for my graduation thesis.*
- *An encounter with a deaf teacher could change a student's life.*
- *I learned any minority group had its own culture and pride.*
- *I came to use more facial expressions and gestures in speaking English.*
- *Encountering three ASL teachers, Mr. Gong, Mr. Insolera, and Mr. Bucci enriched my life.*
- *I acquired one more means of communication in addition to Japanese and English.*
- *Learning ASL made my English study fun.*
- *Each sign language has its own cultural difference.*
- *In some English classes, learning English means memorizing as many English words as possible. Language practices in these classes are "dead". In ASL classes, on the contrary, we could make a difference in real life by using ASL words and expressions.*
- *It may be hearing people's arrogance toward deaf people that we are sorry for them.*

1.5 Discussion

It should be noted that students in our department living in this modern age still had the same prejudice toward ASL as Helmer Myklebust, an expert on deaf education in the middle of 1950s had. Myklebust (1957) thought that the manual language used by deaf people lacked precision, subtlety, and flexibility in comparison with spoken languages and concluded that manual sign language must be viewed as inferior to verbal language.

Another surprising result revealed by the questionnaire was that a very negative picture had been portrayed of deaf people among our department

students. Our students had created a psychological border in their minds without clear evidence; that is, they tended to see the world around them only from two limited viewpoints, “good or bad”, “hearing or deaf”, and “able or disable”. Hoffmeister (2008) claims that the creation of a border is to create demarcations, designations, separations, or examples of differences and that these border issues create the greatest conflict.

After taking the ASL program, 29 out of 35 students (82.9% of the total number of students) considered themselves to have developed a positive attitude toward deaf people. Furthermore, 30 out of 35 students (85.7% of the total number of students) changed their image of ASL and deaf people. It can be presumed that the ASL program had a tremendous positive impact on the hearing students by the fact that 97.1% of the students who completed the ASL program admitted the significance of learning ASL.

Without the ASL program, a glimpse of deaf people and their language would not have been caught by our students and they would graduate from the university with a negative attitude and prejudice toward deaf people, leaving what Hoffmeister calls the greatest conflict unsolved. What is important is that our students are would-be teachers. The significance of integrating ASL into a hearing students’ curriculum lies right here in empowering hearing students, especially would-be teachers, to pursue new lines of thinking and new perspectives for people who might be viewed as different.

What is more, 91.4% of the students came to pay attention to deaf education in Japan and 82.9% of them became interested in Japanese Sign Language. Without being exposed to ASL, this result could not have been expected of the students. What I stressed at the set-up committee meetings for the new department was teaching only spoken English was not sufficient enough to develop good English language teachers. In Japan almost all of

the hearing English language teachers spend their time teaching English only to hearing students. Hearing Japanese English language teachers, in my opinion, should share the pleasure and enjoyment of learning English with deaf students in the same way hearing teachers do with their hearing students. In this regard, the NUFS ASL program was successful in that potential teachers' attention was also turned to Japanese Sign Language and deaf education in Japan. It is highly expected that Japanese hearing ASL students wishing to become English language teachers in Japan will contribute to English teaching in both hearing and deaf schools with their multi-cultural views when they become teachers.

Careful analysis of Questions 3 and 4 provides that participants in the 2008 Boston program tend to consider themselves to have changed a lot. Two encounters with deaf teachers during the ASL program, namely, Professor Bucci and Mr. Emilio, must have influenced the students' way of thinking. It turned out from the analysis of Q11 that these students also tend to think of deaf people and their culture more deeply and profoundly than those who did not participate in the Boston program.

In order to obtain more precise data, it is suggested that the questionnaire should have adopted a five-point Likert scaling method, including such items as *Strongly disagree*, *Disagree*, *Neither disagree nor agree*, *Agree*, and *Strongly agree*, instead of the Yes or No choices.

In addition, it will be more effective to prepare two experimental groups (a group of students who study only at NUFS and a group of students who study at both NUFS and Boston University) and one control group (a group of students who do not have any chance to learn ASL).

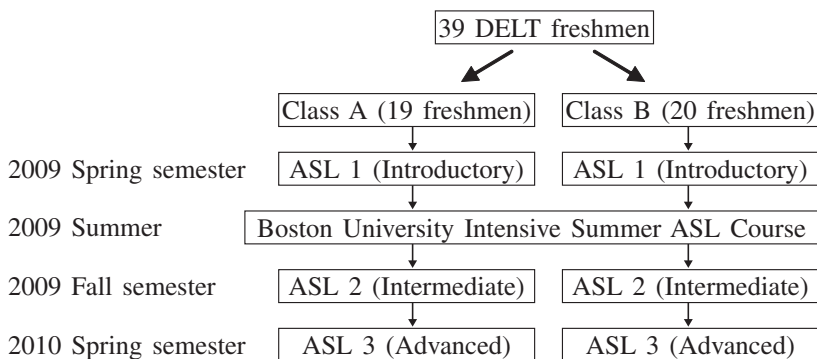
2. The Case of the 2009 DELT Students

2.1 Flow of the 2009 ASL program

In the academic year of 2009, 43 freshmen entered our department. Similar to the 2008 DELT freshmen, they showed a strong interest in ASL although the course was one of many elective courses for them. Of the 43, 39 students registered for ASL 1 (Introductory) and were divided into two groups consisting of 19 and 20 respectively.

Figure 2 indicates the flow of the ASL program for 2009 freshmen registered for ASL 1. At the time of writing, 39 freshmen completed ASL 1 and 16 of them participated in the 2009 Boston University intensive summer ASL course (Two students from other departments also participated, thus, there were 18 participants in this summer course).

Figure 2: Flow of ASL program for 2009 freshmen



2.2 Outline for ASL 1

The syllabus for ASL 1 in the academic year of 2009 was the same as ASL 1 in the previous year except assessment and textbooks. Assess-

ment was described clearly by the instructor and reference was made to recommended books in reflection of the 2008 Boston University intensive summer ASL course.

Assessment: Attendance and use of class time: 20% Homework assignments: 20% Group work: 20% Quiz: 20% Final: 20%

Textbook: Recommended Books and DVD (Purchase on the internet):

1. Signing Naturally Student Workbook: Level 1, Expanded Edition
2. The Complete Idiot's Guide to Conversational Sign Language

Recommended ASL DVD (Purchase in class):

DeafJapan Basic ASL DVD (1~5)

2.3 The 2009 Boston University intensive summer ASL course

The 2nd intensive summer program was held at Boston University from July 27 through August 14 in 2009. Based on the fact that the average point to express participants' satisfaction with the program was 4.8 out of 5.0, it can be concluded that the program ended with a great success as the previous program held in 2008.

Professor Bruce Bucci from Boston University was the teacher of the ASL course, the same as last year. 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. Professor Bucci always encouraged the students to communicate as naturally as possible while extending our 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 we saw around us in real-life situations. He showed us 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 police officers and construction workers. What was impressive was they all greeted him back with a smile, although few knew ASL.

One day Professor Bucci invited his mother to his morning class which was held at the lobby of the Boston University School of Education. Seeing him sign what he was like when he was a boy and how he was raised by his deaf parents, Professor Bucci's mother signed to me with tears in her eyes, "I'm proud of my son, and I'm also proud of you all. Thank you for coming to Boston all the way from Japan to learn ASL. I'm sure your students will become good teachers." This was Professor Bucci's first time in his life to invite his mother to his class.

One of the most impressive classes during the program was a presentation at Harvard University. The students made a presentation in English about some historic places such as Massachusetts Hall, the Statue of John Harvard, the Science Center, Memorial Hall, Memorial Church, and Widener Library. As for ASL, the students made a presentation about themselves making use of sign vocabulary learned during the course. The students observed the sign presentation sitting on the steps leading to Widener Library's main entrance. Adding to tourists from all over the world, Harvard faculty and staff curiously stopped by to see what was going on. Under this circumstance, the students kept signing one after another. As the coordinator of the Boston program, I was really proud of the students.

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.”

2.4 Results of questionnaire

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?

Yes 18 (100.0%) No 0 (0.0%)

Q2: Did the Boston University intensive summer ASL course encourage you to study ASL more in the fall semester at NUFS?

Yes 18 (100.0%) No 0 (0.0%)

Q3: Do you feel you have developed a positive attitude toward deaf people after taking the Boston University intensive summer ASL course?

Yes 16 (88.9%) No 1 (5.6%) Hard to decide 1 (5.6%)

Q4: 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.*
- *People should respect each other 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 had a power than I had expected.*
- *Sign interpreter’s work is amazingly professional.*
- *Family is the most important unit in the world.*

Q5: Do you feel you came to have an interest in Japanese Sign Language after taking the Boston University intensive summer ASL course?

Yes 14 (77.8%) No 2 (11.1%) Hard to decide 2 (11.1%)

2.5 Discussion

It can be summed up at this point that the 2009 Boston University intensive summer ASL course was successful in that 88.9% of the participants came to develop a positive attitude toward deaf people and that 77.8% of them came to pay attention to Japanese Sign Language. It is worthy to note that our students became able to construct two realities and have them running in parallel with an open and inquiring mind toward deaf people.

Since the students who participated in Professor Bucci's ASL course were strongly motivated to learn ASL more, they will become leaders in the NUFS ASL courses that follow and will encourage other students who did not participate in Professor Bucci's ASL course.

3. ASL Curriculum Development

In order to create a "Nagoya Model" of an ASL program for Japanese hearing students, our current ASL program needs to be reassessed and revised for better curriculum development. Due to space limitation, issues in this chapter will be covered more deeply in a future paper.

3.1 Requisite courses for an ASL program

Ingram (1982), then President of American Sign Language Associates, stating that the most fundamental goal of any ASL program should be the development of communicative competence in ASL, suggests the following courses at the bachelor's level. These courses comprise the core of the ASL curriculum and are prerequisite to more advanced elective courses.

1. ASL 101, 102	Beginning ASL	3-4 sem. hrs. each
2. ASL 202, 202	Intermediate ASL	3-4 sem. hrs. each
3. ASL 211, 212	Fingerspelling Lab	1-2 sem. hrs. each
4. ASL 301, 302	Advanced ASL	3-4 sem. hrs. each
5. ASL 321	Sign Language Structure	3 sem. hrs.
6. ASL 331	Deaf Culture	3 sem. hrs.

A full program in ASL studies, according to Wilcox and Wilcox (1997), should include courses on the linguistics of ASL, Deaf history, language contact theories, ASL literature, fingerspelling theory and prediction strategies, and sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of ASL and deafness, in addition to American Deaf culture and ASL second language instruction.

In light of these suggestions for requisite courses for an ASL program, we should reassess whether or not the three ASL courses (ASL 1, 2, and 3) in our department are enough. Since our department is not offering ASL interpreter-training programs in Japan, the ASL program we provide does not necessarily meet the ASL standards for native signers. Even so, we should aim to attain the goal of having our students reach an ASL proficiency level which they can satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements. It should also be pointed out that each of the three ASL courses our department is offering must have guidelines and benchmarks for monitoring students' ASL skills.

3.2 Course for language acquisition

Some students in our ASL program showed a keen interest in the difference in language and literacy acquisition of hearing and deaf babies, which seems quite natural to would-be language teachers, but can be considered as the most neglected area in departments responsible for developing language teachers in Japan. It is suggested that a course for language acquisition should be included in our ASL program.

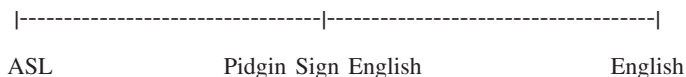
We know that interactions between parents and their children during the first three years of life build a critically important foundation in language and literacy acquisition of children. In this respect, Bailes et al. (2009) provide a promising result based on their longitudinal experiment that deaf children who have had immediate access to ASL from birth reach

developmental goals similar to those of hearing children. Morford and Mayberry (2000) also indicate that deaf children who were exposed to ASL earlier consistently outperformed deaf children who were exposed to ASL at later ages, and they claim that development of research in the field is necessary to lead us to a more adequate understanding of why early exposure is particularly critical to language acquisition by sight.

3.3 Considerations for teaching ASL 1

In terms of curriculum development for an ASL program, an introductory course (ASL 1) can be seen as the most important course because learners must get accustomed to a situation where they must use their eyes to listen. There are some important issues to be considered for ASL 1 teachers. One of them is the use of Pidgin Sign English (PSE). Many hearing people who start to learn a sign language actually use ASL signs in English word order. Those who utter English words matched to every sign are using PSE. For many hearing people, PSE is a convenient middle-ground between ASL and English since ASL's complicated grammar is ignored in favor of English structure (Zinza, 2006). Figure 3 describes the situation of three types of means of communication.

Figure 3



According to Liddell (1982), using PSE as a tool or prerequisite for learning ASL should not be included in any Beginning ASL course. Alexander (1982) also warns that when students begin to produce in ASL, they must avoid mental sign searching for English words. Swanwick (2001) sees

the use of PSE by hearing people as reflection of the limitations of their signing abilities. There may be some benefits for hearing sign beginners to use PSE, but consideration should be taken to the use of PSE as a stepping stone toward mastery of ASL.

Next, for an ASL 1 teacher, it is important to know where his/her students look while comprehending what the teacher is signing. Emmorey et al. (2008), using an eye-tracking equipment, investigated where deaf native signers and hearing beginning signers look while comprehending lectures in ASL presented by a fluent signer. Results showed that hearing beginning signers fixated on or near the signer's mouth, whereas deaf native signers tended to fixate on or near the eyes. It was also found that hearing beginning signers shifted gaze away from the signer's face more frequently than deaf native signers. As Emmorey and her colleagues predicted, hearing beginning signers shifted fixation toward the hands when comprehending complex linguistic structures that were conveyed by the signer, just as readers fixate longer and backtrack over regions of difficult text.

Thirdly, regarding feedback from a teacher, Fourie (2000) studied how efficiently a normal hearing adult could learn sign language vocabulary from different media and found the subject learned it most efficiently from a teacher followed by video, CD-ROM, and then book. Based on his experiment, Fourie concluded that providing feedback from a teacher with a clear three-dimensional, close-up view of signs is crucial particularly in the first stage of learning sign language vocabulary. This is an example showing that no good material can replace a human teacher.

Lastly, focus should be put on simultaneous communication (SimCom). SimCom is the attempt to produce each word in an utterance in both spoken and sign. It is important to note that the signing performed while speaking English is not American Sign Language. Tevenal and Villanueva

(2009) studied the effects of SimCom on the message received by deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing students. When information is being spoken and signed at the same time, we tend to believe that SimCom is expressing equivalent messages both vocally and manually. The result shows, however, that 29 out of 38 deaf participants overestimated what they believed they understood when receiving a message via SimCom, as did 6 of the 8 hard of hearing participants and 16 of the 19 hearing participants. An ASL 1 teacher should be careful not to overuse SimCom.

3.4 Use of technology

According to Davila (2004), it took 38 years for radio to achieve 50 million users whereas it took the World Wide Web only 4 years to reach 50 million surfers. Looking to the future, we can predict that utilizing emerging technologies is a challenge for 21st century educators, policy makers, and governments to create better teaching and learning environments. In this regard, the possibility of online TV communication through the Internet between hearing and deaf students should be implemented into our ASL program to expand the horizons of our students in Japan in the same way as other foreign languages. Wilson and Wells (2009) also indicate, based on their experiment to evaluate the efficacy of video conferencing technology, that technology is regarded as an efficacious and cost-effective option in delivering lectures to the deaf population. In terms of e-learning, Reitsma (2008) provides a promising result on the efficacy of computer-based instruction of reading and spelling for deaf children.

Hellstrom (2006) introduces a European project called WISDOM, which is pursuing the possibility of wireless sign language communication for deaf people through mobile terminals. What is provided by the WISDOM mobile terminal is (1) real-time conversation in sign language, lipreading,

writing, and speech, and (2) video relay service, forming a convenient link between sign language users and voice telephone users by translating between sign language and spoken language. It will be a big step toward equal opportunities for communication between hearing and deaf people.

4. Future perspectives

In order to create a better ASL curriculum for Japanese hearing students, a few proposals can be made.

4.1 Qualification for ASL teachers

As requirements for ASL teachers, Gibson (2006) suggests that they should know (1) ASL linguistic structures, (2) metaphors and similes used in ASL, (3) ASL number systems, (4) ASL literature, (5) ASL assessment, (6) ASL curriculum and its framework, (7) first- and second-language acquisition and development, (8) ASL as a second/third language, (9) ASL name signs, (10) first- and second-language teaching and methodologies, and (11) Deaf ASL culture.

Regarding the evaluation of language teachers in the U.S., reference is made by Jacobowitz (2007) that there are three organizations providing national standards for ASL teachers: the National Association of the Deaf: Education Section (NAD:ES), American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA), and the Virginia Department of Education (VDE).

Since there is no national organization in Japan for the accreditation of ASL teachers, there is an urgent need to establish training centers for ASL teachers for Japanese hearing students and set standards for qualified ASL teachers.

4.2 Inclusion for deaf students

Regarding inclusion for deaf people in Japan, Osugi, executive director of the head office of the Japanese Federation of the Deaf, argues that deaf children who are included in an education system with hearing children have no means of communication (Osugi, 2006). He stresses that the concept of inclusion is still too immature in Japan, therefore, Japanese society is not ready for it yet. Marschark et al. (2007) warn hearing educators that we should not continue to send deaf students into settings in which they are uncomfortable by virtue of helping deaf students to assimilate into hearing society. Foster et al. (2003) state that educational inclusion for deaf persons in the U.S. has historically been, and is currently, the source of great controversy.

Admitting the trend against inclusion for deaf, I suggest to the university administration to consider inclusion for deaf students. My current workplace, Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, is one of seven universities of foreign studies among 765 universities in Japan. At the time of writing, there is no deaf student in the total population of 2,500 students in the university. I wonder where deaf students wishing to become English language teachers study in Japan? Who protects their right to study foreign languages? Japanese society may still be immature in terms of inclusion, but it may be possible to change with the use of advanced technology and the help of sign interpreters. In Japan, real-time captioning for deaf students at mainstream schools is being piloted by a consortium made up of Tsukuba Institute of Technology, Softbank Mobile, Gunma University, the University of Tokyo and the non-profit organization Nagano Summarize Center. Deaf students in classes use the “Mobile Type Remote Captioning System” to access their teachers’ words by reading their mobile phone’s screen in real-time as a substitute for note-takers sitting with students.⁴ It is also worth working

on the task of inclusion in my workplace, where the first ASL program in Japan was introduced for would-be teachers.

4.3 ASL textbooks for hearing students

Mr. Gong, one of the two ASL teachers at NUFS, recommended a series of ASL textbook to our department students who registered for his ASL 1 in 2008. However, as the textbooks cost 8,600 yen (US\$ 95) for Level 1, 9,600 yen (US\$ 105) for Level 2, and 12,000 yen (US\$ 132) for Level 3, the department did not have our students purchase the textbooks. As textbooks and materials for Japanese ASL learners are quite scarce, there is an urgent need to publish ASL textbooks with appropriate syllabi and reasonable prices for Japanese ASL learners.

4.4 Employment of full-time ASL teachers

It is highly appreciated that NUFS hired a deaf ASL teacher for ASL 3 in the academic year of 2009 for the first time since its foundation. As shown in the result of the questionnaire (see page 57), 25 out of 35 students who completed ASL 3 in 2009 strongly agreed that it would be beneficial for them to have a full-time ASL teacher in the university. As the two ASL teachers were part-time teachers, the students had an opportunity to meet them only once a week on Friday. In response to students' needs for more frequent contact with an ASL teacher, the ASL teacher should be a full-time teacher so that ASL becomes an integral part of the students' language development.

4.5 Status of the ASL program

At the time of writing, Asia's first-ever Deaflympics is being held in Taiwan welcoming 5,000 athletes from 98 countries and territories. In

preparation for the Deaflympics, Taipei Municipal University of Education has held 92 sign language classes since 2008 and more than 1,200 student volunteers enrolled with no knowledge of sign language. Furthermore, the sign language learning craze has also spread to elementary school children, and consequently people in Taiwan are actively learning sign language in the hope of creating a barrier-free communication environment.

According to the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)⁵, 161,300 applicants took an examination for becoming teachers in Japanese public schools in 2007. Of these applicants, 24,850 (15.4%) passed the final examination and got jobs in elementary schools, junior and senior high schools, and special schools in 2008. Although no data is provided with regard to the number of people who got a job as an English language teacher, I have a suggestion to language policy makers in Japan that a sign language course be implemented into any department curriculum in Japan in charge of developing English language teachers. In addition, an intensive ASL course should be prepared for every new English language teacher in Japan as in-service teacher training to be taken within three years after he/she starts to work. Of course, each course in our department's ASL program should be required rather than elective. In the case of ASL 3 for the 2008 students, six students who were supposed to go on to ASL 3 after completion of ASL 1 and ASL 2 were forced to give up taking ASL 3 because another influential elective course intruded into our department curriculum. It is regrettable that these students lost a precious chance for empowerment which might have brought to them had they taken the course as a required course.

Notes

1. <http://www.councilnet.org/conf/general.htm>

2. Mr. Danny Gong, director of DeafJapan, is a hearing Chinese American who was born and raised in New York City by his Deaf parents. ASL and English are his native languages. He attended the Interpreter Training Projects La Guardia Community College and received his Certificate in American Sign Language Interpretation in 2004.
3. Mr. Emilio Insolera is a deaf person, born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. After graduating from Gallaudet University in 2003, he went on to the University of Rome and obtained a master's degree in mass communication. He has an amazing talent for languages: English, Italian, Spanish, Latin, ASL, Italian Sign Language, and Argentine Sign Language. He is currently directing a movie titled *Sign Gene*.
4. The news appeared in an article in the September 9 Yomiuri Shimbun.
5. Available from http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/senkou/1217797.htm

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