

Implications of Teaching ASL to Japanese Hearing Students

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One Westerville student's experience told me more than all the academic debates over sign language that I have heard. While she was working as a checkout clerk in the supermarket one day, two customers approached the counter with groceries: a deaf woman in her 30s accompanied by a deaf and blind woman in her 70s. The student, excited to be able to converse with them, signed to the deaf customer and, taking the arm of the deaf and blind woman, signed into her hand. The older woman burst into tears. Had the student said something wrong? No, the woman replied. She was moved to tears because this was the first time in her long life that she had ever been treated as a regular customer. No foreigner ever felt so foreign as this woman did in her own country.

Lennard J, Davis, 1998 *1

Introduction

Exactly 120 years after Helen Keller and her teacher Anne Sullivan moved to the Perkins Institution in South Boston, a group of 19 Japanese hearing freshmen of the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS) arrived in Boston on July 15th, 2008 to participate in an intensive ASL/EFL program at Boston University. This program was developed in cooperation with the Center for

English and Orientation Programs (CELOP)*² and the Boston University School of Education. The program is unique in that an American Sign Language (ASL) course is integrated into a regular English Language course, which is a first among the departments of English language teaching at Japanese universities. Between October 2006 and the time of departure for the program, 270 e-mails were exchanged between Boston University and myself while 12 set-up committee meetings and 57 working group meetings were held on our side to make the Boston program a reality.

1. ASL and Early Efforts at Boston University

In this article, issues on ASL will be the focus in the first chapter in order to share background knowledge of ASL. The ASL courses in both NUFS and the Boston program will be described in the second chapter. Future perspectives for ASL at NUFS will be proposed in the third chapter.

1.1. My encounter with ASL

My encounter with ASL dates back to 1999. While having lunch at a food court in Boston, I saw two deaf workers mopping the floor a few feet away from my table. I just signed “Thank you,” to them which was one of the few signs I knew at the time. One of them came closer to me smiling and began to mop the floor around me. I signed “Thank you,” twice this time. He cleaned my table politely, cleaner than any other table. He looked like he wanted to have more conversation with me. No further conversation was made between us due to my limited sign vocabulary, however, I learned a simple sign like “Thank you” could make a deaf person happy and smile.

From March 1999 through January 2000 I studied at the Boston University School of Education as a visiting researcher sponsored by the Japanese

Ministry of Education. My research goal was to examine the efficacy of keyword captions in movies on the improvement of EFL students' listening comprehension, which was the basis for my Ph.D. dissertation. Originally, captioned movies were developed in the 1950s for deaf and hard-of-hearing people. My concern was the educational use of English captioned Hollywood movies for Japanese hearing students learning English.

Dr. Hoffmeister, the supervisor of my research project, kindly offered a room at his house for my stay. A couple of months later after I started my life with his family, a four-year deaf girl joined the family. Dr. Hoffmeister and his wife would read her a picture book every night in sign language until she fell asleep. On the last morning of my stay with the family, the little girl came to my room on the third floor and led me down to the entrance holding my hand gently in her soft little hand. This was the most emotional moment of my stay. Not only because I had to leave Boston, but also because I was ashamed of myself for having been an "outsider" for half a year without knowing her language.

1.2. A brief history of ASL

ASL is the language created by Deaf^{f*3} people and used in the U.S. and most of Canada. Cokely and Baker (1988) regard the meeting of Thomas H. Gallaudet and Alice Cogswell in the early 1810s as the beginning of the American Deaf Community. Gallaudet, a graduate of Yale University, was studying to become a minister in Hartford, Connecticut. His neighbor Alice was a deaf girl. One day Alice's father, a well-known doctor in Hartford, was impressed with Gallaudet's work to teach his daughter a few words and raised enough money to send Gallaudet to Europe to learn about deaf education for deaf children in America.

According to Scouten (1984), the 28-year-old Gallaudet traveled to

England and Scotland after disembarking at Liverpool in 1815 to study sign language, but the young man began to lose his interest in the British method which was based on oral communication rather than sign language. Furthermore, British teachers' reluctance to freely share their instructional procedures discouraged Gallaudet. While in London, Gallaudet happened to meet two deaf teachers from France and was attracted by the uniqueness of the French method with its fascinating system of gesture, which encouraged him to go to Paris to study the French method. He persuaded one of the deaf teachers, Laurent Clerc, to go to Hartford with him to establish a school for American deaf students. Scouten (1984) describes, "The young deaf Frenchman sensed potentialities and opportunities which lay ahead, and prepared himself to take full advantage of them, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of all the deaf people in America who were awaiting him."

On April 15th, 1817 Gallaudet and Clerc opened their school, which today is called the American School for the Deaf, in Hartford with seven pupils. This first public school for the deaf was the launch of American education for the deaf. According to Cokely and Baker (1988), signs used in the U.S. prior to 1817 were combined with old French signs brought by Clerc and this combination became Old ASL, which later evolved into what is now called Modern ASL. Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan (1996) state that the language of the Deaf-world in the U.S. would probably be more related to British Sign Language rather than French Sign Language were the British teachers not so disrespectful in their treatment of Gallaudet.

According to Mitchell et al. (2006) and other statistics available from the Internet^{*4}, it is reasonably possible to estimate that ASL is the third most used non-English language in the U.S. after Spanish and French and that the number of current ASL users ranges from 500,000 to 2,000,000

people. In the 1996 statement of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), the LSA considers ASL as the vehicle for a distinguished Deaf culture and affirms for ASL all the rights and privileges attendant to any spoken language, including the right to satisfy a student's academic foreign language requirement. As of September 2006, forty U.S. states identify the status of ASL as a foreign language. Since Deaf people in other countries have often learned ASL as a second language, ASL is used as a lingua franca at many international Deaf events. Major universities such as Stanford, Yale, Brown, MIT, Purdue, University of Chicago, University of Michigan, University of Texas, University of Virginia, University of Washington, University of Pennsylvania, University of New Mexico, University of California, University of Arizona, University of Colorado, University of Kansas, University of Massachusetts, Indiana, Ohio State, and many others accept ASL for their foreign language requirements.

1.3. Literature review

Although hardly anything has been studied about the academic use of ASL with normally developing Japanese hearing students, it seems possible to generalize from the following studies that sign language, be it ASL or Italian Sign Language (LIS) or British Sign Language (BSL), offers positive effects on hearing children.

Daniels (1996) overviews 14 past studies in the field and concludes that adding sign language instruction to school curriculums increased hearing children's English vocabulary and offered a positive contribution to expressive language development. In addition, teachers involved found that signing had a positive effect on children's attitudes.

In the Capirci et al. (1998) study, LIS was taught for two years to 14 Italian hearing children starting from the first-year at two different

elementary schools. Their results indicate that hearing children who learned sign language as a second language in their early school years improved more rapidly on tests of visual-spatial cognition and spatial memory than their schoolmates not attending a sign language course. They suggest that it would be extremely useful to offer sign language as a second language to hearing children for linguistic as well as cognitive reasons.

Robinson (1997) introduced a pilot project in the United Kingdom that integrated six Deaf children and 19 hearing children in a hearing classroom with a Deaf teacher who taught the national curriculum to the children for one afternoon a week throughout the fourteen-month-long project. The BSL teacher was always in the classroom during these afternoons and conducted the majority of the lessons for all of the children in BSL. The teacher of the hearing students reported that BSL provided a number of academic advantages for her hearing students, especially for the hearing students who had trouble concentrating. Furthermore, the hearing students' mathematic skills improved due to this project. Daniels (2001) asserts that the experience of the hearing students in the U.K. program supports Stokoe's premise that sign language may be more useful than spoken language in teaching or learning mathematics.

Regarding our students learning ASL in Japan, however, they are not children in kindergarten or elementary school as in the studies referred to above. They are university students aged 18 or 19, born in Japan and raised by hearing parents, whose first language is Japanese and who are learning English as a foreign language. No research in this situation has ever been presented in the three premier journals in the U.S.: *The American Annals of the Deaf*, the *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, and *Sign Language Studies*. It should be pointed out that research needs to be carried out on the effect of ASL for Japanese learners of English.

1.4. Significance of teaching ASL to hearing students

The ultimate goal of teaching ASL to hearing students is to develop Deaf awareness and a positive attitude toward Deaf people. As Cokely and Baker (1988) claim, one very clear way to show respect for and support for Deaf people and the Deaf Community is to know and use their language. Mr. Gong, the NUFS ASL teacher, expresses the significance of teaching ASL to hearing students as follows: “With Sign Language, a person can understand and produce sentences a lot quicker than spoken languages due to the fact that there isn’t vocal pronunciation. One of the challenges of learning a spoken language is understanding and reproducing its pronunciation. With its quick learning curve, visual clarity and lack of ambiguous auditory pronunciation, Sign Language remains one of the most efficient languages in the world. Learning ASL can be another communication tool to help Japanese people learn English. My Japanese improved via learning Japanese Sign Language (JSL), and I believe that ASL students wishing to become English language teachers will have an advantage from learning ASL.”

In addition to the above practical viewpoint of Mr. Gong, ASL is potentially useful to hearing students for further study in language policy, bilingualism, language acquisition, acculturation, motivation, developmental psychology, teaching-material development, curriculum design, among other areas.

Especially for hearing university students wishing to become language teachers, as is the case with our students, it is necessary to see a language from the perspective of language policy. It is clear from historical evidence that there are times when hearing educators and reformers have been quite hostile to sign language. They have opposed the use of ASL and tried to eradicate it time after time. Oral education for Deaf children was introduced

into the U.S. shortly after the American Civil War and was quickly adopted at many schools. Baynton (1996) explains that the creation of national unity and social order through homogeneity in language and culture was the focus at the time. The push for the oral method expanded after the 1880 Milan Conference. The foundation of the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf in 1890 by Alexander Graham Bell led to the exclusion of the use of sign language, banning the use of ASL in residential schools (Delane et al., 2007; Lane et al. 1996). From another perspective of language policy, Mitchell et al. (2006) point out that deafness in the U.S. has been treated predominantly as a matter of public health and social welfare policy, not primarily as a social and linguistic phenomenon within the general population. As a consequence, it is surprising to see that data on ASL, used as a language in American homes, was not included in the national census by the U.S. Census Bureau in the initial data-processing phase from 1830 to 1930. This indicates that ASL was not seen even as a minority language. We should also be reminded that as recently as 1980s, S. I. Hayakawa, a U.S. senator from California, proposed a law requiring that English be the primary language of instruction in the U.S.

Regarding bilingual education, little has been investigated concerning the impact of ASL/English bilingual education on hearing students, whereas social and academic aspects of mainstreaming from the perspective of deaf students have been studied. Delana et al. (2007), referring to Jim Cummins's theories on basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), identified a statistically significant correlation between years of ASL usage and reading comprehension achievement of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. That study pointed out that study interest should also be extended to find out how ASL and English affect each other on hearing students.

Daniels (1996) cites Bonvillian and Floven's (1993) study to present a modality preference favoring sign language production with young children. Basic motor control of the hands occurs in the brain before the auditory cortex matures at birth. This critical biological differential demonstrates how easily babies acquire signs. It is worth studying the process of how sign language is acquired, be it a second or foreign language, in relation to biological issues during the critical period for language acquisition proclaimed by J. D. Moore and E. H. Lenneberg.

According to Larson and Smally (1972), there are four stages of acculturation that second language learners go through while entering a new culture: a sense of euphoria and excitement, culture shock, gradual recovery, and full recovery. Kemp (1998) states that transferring the use of ears and voice to eyes and hands for communication can be traumatic for some people, and that Deaf culture can be very foreign to hearing people. It is worthy of studying about how hearing students try to enter the Deaf culture.

In relation to acculturation, interest is extended to the effect of motivation. It is useful to study about how the two types of motivation, instrumental and integrative, affect ASL learning. According to Kemp (1998), those who are integratively motivated seek out opportunities to interact with Deaf people and maintain high levels of signing and cultural contact compared to those who are instrumentally motivated but are unlikely to continue learning ASL once the goal is attained.

In terms of psychological development for children, it is worth examining Piaget's theory that sign language provides a more natural code for children's exchange of ideas. In this respect it is also meaningful to study the role of sign language as a facilitator in the area of "Zone of Proximal Development" proposed by Vygotsky in 1978.

1.5. Early efforts at Boston University

The Boston University Deaf Studies Program, directed by Dr. Hoffmeister, has undoubtedly been one of the few best institutions in the U.S. It is worthy to note that in 1980 at Boston University, Dr. Hoffmeister created the first university major and specialization in Deaf Studies in the U.S. He devoted his life to the development and diffusion of ASL for more than 40 years and has led his program to what it is today, affording his students genuine appreciation for Deaf people in the U.S. His program, having increased from 100 students in one year to almost 400, is the only undergraduate program in the U.S. that requires ASL as the language of instruction and conversation. The program currently offers four courses in ASL as a second language focused on teaching ASL and two additional courses focused on cultural and historical aspects of the Deaf Community.

Early efforts, especially since 1991, have been made by Dr. Hoffmeister and his staff to achieve recognition of ASL as a language satisfying the foreign language requirement within the university. They have fought with the administration for more than 20 years. In 1991 an outrageous article was posted in *Boston University Today* by the dean of the College of Liberal Arts. He neglected students who wanted to learn sign language pointing out that ASL was another way of speaking American English. Since then both faculty and students have repeatedly petitioned the Boston University administration to change its policies toward ASL. Countless letters in support of the efforts arrived from both within and outside Boston University, urging the administration to recognize that Boston University had been well-known for its long-established and distinguished programs in Deaf Studies in the U.S. Debates and discussions by students, faculty, and administration continued until recently and Dr. Hoffmeister finally won in March 2005. As a consequence, graduates as well as undergraduate

students in the Boston University College of Arts and Sciences now can fulfill their foreign language requirement by studying ASL offered in the Deaf Studies Program.

2. The Road to Boston

2.1. From midnight to dawn

2.1.1. Years 2000 — 2004

When I came back to Japan from Boston in February 2000, I was an associate professor of the Department of Liberal Arts and Sciences at a national college of technology. A proposal was submitted soon to the administration requesting that an intensive language program at Boston University be recommended to the students. The administration was negative to the proposal because another overseas study program at Milwaukee School of Engineering in the U.S. was about to be adopted. Since faculty members stressing the importance of English for specific purposes for engineering-major students were dominant in the college, it seemed to me that there was no climate of open and frank debate among faculty members for the acceptance of any overseas program for general English, let alone ASL.

2.1.2. Years 2005 — 2006

In April 2005 I moved to the Department of British and American Studies at NUFS. This department was very large with the total number of students enrolled during that year comprising almost 50 percent of all NUFS students. The department had already offered four overseas programs in England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Feeling unnatural for a department titled “American” and not send its students to the U.S., I made a proposal to the influential persons of the department concerning a language program

with ASL at Boston University. The proposal was rejected because they needed convincing information on why Japanese hearing students were required to learn ASL in an overseas program. They were also concerned about the security problem in the U.S. after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Their rejection indicated that it would be almost impossible to move the plan forward in that department. As was the same with my previous college, there was still no climate for accepting a study trip to the U.S.

2.1.3. Years 2006 — 2008

In October 2006 I was appointed in the university as one of three faculty members of a committee to set up a new department launching in April 2008. Adding to the three faculty members, the set-up committee consisted of the vice president, the chair of the Department of British and American Studies, and some other influential staff members of the administration. 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, later being named the *Department of English Language Teaching*.

A proposal was made at the first set-up committee meeting on November 22nd, 2006 requesting that ASL be integrated into the department curriculum and that students learning ASL be sent to Boston University to obtain an in-depth understanding of deaf culture as well as ASL itself. I stressed that teaching only spoken English to would-be teachers was not sufficient enough to have good English language teachers with broad multi-cultural views, believing firmly that ASL was more than just a language and that ASL could expand the horizons of our students in the same way as foreign languages such as French, Italian, German, Spanish, and Chinese. At the second set-up committee meeting on December 20th 2006, the commit-

tee members accepted both proposals for a NUFS ASL program and an overseas ASL/EFL program at Boston University for the new department. The NUFS ASL program planned to offer an introductory, an intermediate, an advanced, and a practicum course.

2.2. Preparation for the NUFS ASL course and the Boston program

There were three things to confirm: 1) Who would teach ASL at NUFS? 2) Would CELOP (Center for English Language and Orientation Programs) offer a unique program of ASL/EFL? 3) Would the Boston University Deaf Studies Program offer an intensive ASL course to our students? From the next day after the December 20th 2006 set-up committee meeting, I hurriedly began working out these details.

2.2.1. ASL instructor at NUFS

While working at the national college of technology, I was acquainted with a Japanese hearing teacher of English with a knowledge of ASL working at Toyota National College of Technology. He introduced an American hearing teacher of English working at Chukyo University in Nagoya who could teach both JSL and ASL. She provided me with contact information about two teachers: a Japanese deaf teacher who learned ASL at the University of California-Northridge and an American hearing teacher of English who learned ASL at Gallaudet University in the U.S.

My information-seeking for a NUFS ASL teacher was also carried out by contacting the Japanese ASL Signers Society in Tokyo. Mr. Yutaka Osugi, standing director and also an associate professor of Tsukuba University of Technology and Ms. Kumiko Takakusa, a head staff member of the society began helping me to find an ASL teacher living around Nagoya. At the

end of ten months of information-seeking, light was shed on Mr. Danny Gong living in Osaka. While exchanging e-mails with him, I found that Mr. Gong was interested in teaching ASL to Japanese hearing university students and he was cooperative from the beginning. I was convinced at his interview that he would encourage our students to learn ASL with his enthusiasm and good sense of humor. He received a unanimous vote at the set-up committee meeting on December 7th, 2007 to work at NUFSS as a part-time ASL teacher.

2.2.2. ASL/EFL program at CELOP

CELOP offers four general English courses in the category of English Language and Culture, ranging from four weeks to twelve weeks, during the summer season. As with all CELOP core classes, these programs strive to improve overall abilities in both spoken and written English, as well as students' understanding of U.S. culture. Generally, CELOP does not offer standard programs of less than four weeks. In terms of duration, a four-week program titled EN005 was the only one available for us. I had to ask CELOP, however, to reduce the duration from four weeks to three weeks because of the overall program cost.

In response to the request, CELOP submitted a proposal for two different programs for the 2008 summer. One was for four weeks, the other for three. The main difference between the two programs was that in the four-week program the students would be fully integrated into the EN005 program. They would have their English instruction for 20 hours per week with students from around the world. They would be placed at different levels depending on their English proficiency. Additionally, they would come together for an ASL class in the afternoons. On the other hand, the three-week program proposal was a customized course only for us. The

students would be together for their English instruction for 16 hours per week and would have an ASL class for an additional 4 hours per week. They would have contact with other CELOP students through social activities, but not in their classes.

Although the set-up committee members considered these two programs' attributes as significant advantages for our students, there remained an issue about the starting date of the program. The two programs CELOP offered were both to start on July 16th, 2008, requiring us to leave Nagoya for Boston at latest one day prior to the starting day. Since the first semester of the 2008 NUFS school year was to end on July 22nd, participants would be forced to skip their last eight days of the first semester. This issue became the biggest obstacle in preparation for the program. I will refer to it later.

In response to my question asking if we could join the four-week program for the last two or three weeks in order to prevent unnecessary academic problems at the end of the first semester on my side, CELOP sincerely replied in March 2007 that it would be very difficult to integrate students into a program that had already begun and that a language program of only two weeks is not considered long enough for students to benefit from instruction and therefore not worth the significant expense for the student.

There were only two solutions left for us: acceptance of the CELOP proposal or a change in the NUFS academic calendar to end the first semester eight days earlier. We may have abandoned the plan to take our students to Boston for the worst. While negotiating with the set-up committee members on this matter, conversation with CELOP was discontinued for two months. It was on April 25th, 2007 that the set-up committee reached an agreement that participants in the Boston program may skip their classes for the last

eight days of the first semester, giving them extra assignment to make up for their absences. Conversation with CELOP was resumed in May 2007 and a first draft for a three-week course with ASL was beginning to be formed. I flew to Boston in August to meet with Dr. Rindler, Ms. Duclos, and Dr. Hoffmeister to talk about the original plan in detail. By the end of March 2008, the first draft had been developed to a better plan choosing attractive events from the four-week general course.

2.2.3. Programs in Deaf Studies

As of December 2006, I had already received a positive answer from Dr. Hoffmeister of the Programs in Deaf Studies to my request for an intensive ASL course for our students. In February 2007, his message arrived informing that he would be happy to offer an intensive ASL course conducted by a Deaf instructor in his programs in the summer of 2008, with a confidential statement that NUFS students would receive the best experience his programs could offer.

At the August 2007 meeting mentioned in the previous section, we discussed mainly how the ASL course could be integrated in the framework of the CELOP general English course, including the possibility of a short visit to a local school for deaf children and a Deaf Club.

2.3. Recruiting campaign for the Boston program

On March 18th, 2008 the Boston program was officially accepted on our side at the NUFS faculty meeting. Forty-seven freshmen entered our department on April 1st. The Boston program was introduced to them for the first time at their orientation program on April 4th with a brief demonstration of ASL as well as several slides showing fascinating pictures of Boston University and the city of Boston. Although the recruiting campaign for the

Boston program was scheduled to last for one month from April 7th through May 9th, 20 target seats for the program were occupied on the first day of the campaign and reached up to 27 on the second day. By drawing, 22 participants were chosen on April 17th and an e-mail requesting application forms for F-1 visas was sent to CELOP on that day.

Seven preliminary meetings for the participants were held before the departure with the help of a travel agent in charge of the trip to Boston. The participants must have experienced the busiest time in their student lives during the three months prior to departure dealing with visa-related paper work such as passport, I-20, a financial certificate, and some other forms required for housing, immunization, vaccination, visa interview and so on.

While managing the preliminary meetings, I had to face the task of providing the validity of the participants' absences from the last eight days of the first semester, fighting obstacles through time-consuming bureaucratic regulatory work inside the university. The fact that the last week fell on the final examinations made academic procedures more complicated. Each participant took 14 or 15 different courses a week on average and 42 teachers were involved in these courses. The total number of classes exempted went up to 330. Not every one of the 42 teachers agreed to a proposal from our department to help the participants. Furthermore, with the Japanese Ministry of Education requiring that the university offer 15 classes per course in a semester, it was understandable for the Boston program to be met with resistance from the teachers whose classes were skipped three times, including one absence for a visa interview in Osaka. It was just one week prior to departure that all things seemed to set.

2.4. First ASL course at NUFS

On April 18th, 2008, nearly 190 years after the first public school for Deaf children in Hartford in the U.S. was opened, an ASL course started at NUFS for the first time since its foundation in 1988. NUFS, one of the eight universities of foreign studies among 765 universities in Japan, consists of seven departments and a graduate school with a total number of 2500 students.

The introductory ASL course was open only to the DELT students for the academic term of 2008. Forty-five students registered for the introductory ASL course, despite the fact that the enrollment was limited to 20. Since the total number of students who entered DELT in 2008 was 47, almost all of the freshmen registered for the ASL course. In response to the students' strong interest, the administration decided to provide one more classroom for the ASL course and consequently students were divided into two groups consisting of 22 and 23 respectively. Followed by my brief introduction about Mr. Gong at the first lesson of the course, he started to sign without voicing any word. The students, who had had no previous contact with ASL, were fascinated by his hand movements from the beginning and kept looking at him. At this point in time, one and a half years had passed since my first proposal at the set-up committee meeting in 2006.

Students met once a week on Friday to attend a 90-minute ASL class for 15 weeks. On campus, it was interesting to see how the ASL students began greeting each other in sign soon after the first class.

2.5. NUFS ASL teacher Mr. Gong's report on his class

The following description by Mr. Gong about his class provides us with the process of how the students have changed since they were first exposed to ASL: "Probably, the most shocking thing for them was how

silent the class was. They were put into a situation where they had to use their eyes to listen. Some students were lost, while others quickly began to understand. The NUFSS ASL class met once a week for an hour and a half. However, within a short time period, 2 to 3 weeks, students were able to understand and produce basic ASL sentences. They knew how to: “Introduce themselves”, “The ASL alphabet”, “Colors”, “Expressing their likes and dislikes”. They could see how Sign Language was another method of communicating. After teaching students new vocabulary and sentences, I encouraged them to practice signing with each other. I would group them into small groups of 3 to 4 and have them sign a set of sentences they learned that day. Being in groups and watching each other signing showed how different signing styles could be. Another benefit was that students began giving each other peer to peer feedback and assistance. I observed each group and was able to provide individual group attention. Afterwards, I selected students to come to the front of class and have them either sign a sentence they learned or asked them questions in Sign Language. Many students have started to understand what it is like to communicate visually. They not only know how to sign basic words, but are also able to understand other signers.

For many of the NUFSS students, they have started to use more facial expressions and read other people’s facial expressions. During the first weeks of classes I would sign a question, but had no reaction because the students could not see that I was asking a question. After a few weeks of classes, they began to understand when I was making a statement or question. Understanding whether a speaker is saying something or asking a question is a fundamental key of communication.

It is extremely satisfying to see how the students are becoming more observant and sensitive to visual cues. Continuing to develop their visual

skill will help them learn and understand facial expressions/body language in different cultures. This is a great asset when learning another language, Signed or Spoken.”

2.6. ASL course in the Boston program

In the original plan for the new department, students who have completed three NUFS ASL courses would qualify to take the ASL course at Boston University as a practicum course, however, as it was a new department in 2008 and we only had freshman students, introductory level students were allowed to participate in the practicum course as an exception. I cannot express the excitement that I felt as we finally arrived in Boston. I wondered if this was how John Manjiro felt as the first Japanese to set foot on American soil in 1841, at the age of 14, after being rescued from his shipwrecked fishing vessel by a U.S. whaling ship. My heart literally leaped with joy on the afternoon of July 15th, 2008 to see Boston harbor from the airplane as we approached Logan International Airport. My dream for an ASL program for Japanese students was reaching a new level.

After an orientation class at CELOP for the Boston program on July 16th, the participants were divided into two roughly-equal groups, Groups A and B, based on their English proficiency levels. Each group met in two English classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. On Tuesdays and Thursdays they met for one 2 1/2 hour English class and one 2 1/2 hour ASL class.

The first ASL class was conducted on July 17th. Professor Bruce Bucci, once a basketball player representing the U.S. in the Deaflympic Games, came into the classroom smiling. None of the participants had ever experienced communicating with a deaf native ASL signer. His first question was “Why do you want to learn ASL?” The answer he expected from us

was “to have fun”. Following the question, we practiced expressing our feelings through facial expressions which made us relax and comfortable in the class. Dr. Hoffmeister also joined the class for the last 30 minutes and delivered us a welcome speech. It was my great honor to introduce him to the participants.

The class was based on a textbook, *Signing Naturally* Level 1, published by Dawn Sign Press. For the students who had already completed the introductory ASL course at NUFS, this textbook seemed appropriate for them. The rule made clear on the first day was to refrain from talking to each other during class and they were to be strictly in ASL during the class until the end of the program.

Professor Bucci often introduced a funny story at the beginning of the class and made us laugh. When we looked sleepy, he had us raise and lower our eyebrows again and again. He always encouraged us to communicate as naturally as possible while extending our range of vocabulary through pair-work activities. He paired us up with someone sitting next to us, with someone different, or with himself. He paid patient attention to every student in the classroom, and praised us for every little improvement. At the end of the class we always stood in a circle, arm in arm, voicing loudly “We did well today,” which we had never experienced in Japan with hearing teachers. As the class proceeded, the students came to realize deaf people were human beings more than anything else and they came to see Professor Bucci as a teacher, not a deaf person. It was also true that the students developed rapport with him while developing a positive attitude toward him through classroom interaction.

One day Professor Bucci took us around the Boston University campus teaching signs related to objects we saw around us in real-life situations. Several American hearing students and passers-by curiously stopped by

to see what was going on. Professor Bucci, walking a little ahead of us, looked confident in teaching ASL and looked proud of being a deaf teacher. We were also proud of being taught by him. At a pizza party with American deaf children and Boston University School of Education students majoring in ASL, not only did we get to know deaf people, but we also familiarized ourselves with various signing styles. One of the most impressive classes during the program was a presentation at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The students were required to choose one painting in advance and make a presentation in front of the painting they had chosen in both English and ASL.

Although we always voiced, “ASL is number one,” at the end of class, Professor Bucci did not forget to turn our attention to Japanese Sign Language. In our last ASL class he thanked me for making the program a reality and continued to sign to us with respect, “When you came to Boston four weeks ago, you were just babies. Now, you have grown up and have become able to crawl. You learned ASL in Boston and made friends with deaf Americans, but when you go back to Japan, make friends with Japanese deaf people and learn their language so that you can tell them about your experiences in Boston. JSL is as important as ASL to you. If you think Japanese deaf people are not treated as equal as Japanese hearing people, help them solve their problems. In the future when you become a teacher, please tell your students to be thoughtful and kind to others. Thank you for coming to Boston. You are all wonderful students.”

I could not hold back my tears and it was I who first began to cry in the classroom. I was emotional at that time thinking back on the long journey to Boston and of some personal things that had happened to me since 2000. Seeing me cry, one student sitting next to me also began to sob. Professor Bucci hugged me while smiling as usual. He taught us without voice in the

silent world that a teacher could change his students. Just as seeds need the sunshine and water to germinate, he provided us with sunshine and water through the lessons in order for the seeds planted in our mental soil to germinate. It is not an exaggeration to say that we appreciate Professor Bucci's passion which inspired us and brought great success to the Boston program. The students' evaluation of the ASL course also indicated that all of the participants were satisfied with his class.

3. Future perspectives for ASL at NUFS

Learning ASL is quite challenging and a lifelong process. Jacobs (1996) indicates that an average English speaker must take 1320 hours of instruction to reach an ASL proficiency level of two, which requires learners to be able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements. Since we are not offering ASL interpreter-training programs at NUFS, the four ASL courses NUFS provides do not necessarily meet the ASL standards of native signers. It is proposed that one class-hour be extended to two and a half hours if once-a-week policy continues or students meet twice a week instead of once a week to increase time to learn ASL. 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.

A few proposals could be made to enrich the Boston Program to benefit more from it. First, one of the two accompanying teachers should be a NUFS ASL teacher, such as Mr. Gong at present, as long as the Boston program includes the ASL course. I call for an immediate amendment to the university rule requiring that an accompanying teacher of any overseas program be a NUFS full-time teacher. Second, to wipe out prejudice of hearing people toward deaf people and to raise awareness of hearing teachers

and staff toward the deaf world, lectures by deaf people should be made at least once a year at NUFS. Third, adding to the hearing ASL teacher, a deaf ASL teacher should also be employed at NUFS. In this regard it is suggested that teachers of the Boston University Deaf Studies Program be invited to NUFS to teach ASL courses to strengthen the relationship between the NUFS ASL courses and the Boston program.

Quay (2005) points out that in general, teachers at deaf schools in Japan demonstrate an enthusiasm to introduce ASL into their classrooms. Our students' attention should also be turned to English education to Japanese deaf students. In this respect, joint projects can be developed with Tsukuba University of Technology, the only university for the deaf in Japan, and PEN-international, an international network that works to expand educational opportunities for deaf college students in their own countries. It is also necessary to form a productive and educational partnership with the Nippon Foundation of Japan to hold an international symposium for Deaf and hearing education in the world.

To conclude this article, I would like to make a few interesting historical links that seem connected to the fledgling NUFS relationship with Boston University and the NUFS implementation of ASL into a hearing curriculum in 2008. Although it seems like only a small step, it is my hope that this will lead to further university innovation and change in Japan while at the same time helping to improve the freedom and rights for all people.

In 1817, it was the foresight and determination of Thomas H. Gallaudet to create a school for deaf students which continues to exist today in Hartford, Connecticut as the American School for the Deaf. In addition, his educational legacy was succeeded by his son Edward M. Gallaudet who created what remains today as Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. Many years later, another significant historical figure, Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr., who was a Boston University graduate, also made history in Washington D.C. with his famous “I Have a Dream” speech on August 28th, 1963 at a campaign for equality and freedom during the civil rights movement. Coincidentally, on the same day in 2008, Senator Barack Obama accepted the Democratic party nomination for president of the United States as the first African-American in history to run for high office. The link that ties these historical events together is that innovation is possible when somebody initiates the momentum for change. Mutual respect and equality for all people, like any change, begins with somebody taking the first step.

Notes

1. Professor of English at the State University of New York, cited from <http://www.bu.edu.asllrp/fl>.
2. CELOP is accredited by the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation. Accreditation by CEA signifies that an English language program or institution has met nationally accepted standards of excellence and assures students and their sponsors that the English language instruction and related services will be of the highest quality.
3. Padden and Humphries (1988) explain that the uppercase “Deaf” is used to refer to a “particular group of deaf” who share common language and a culture, whereas the lowercase “deaf” refers to “the audiological condition of not hearing”. According to Baynton (1996), the linguist James Woodward proposed the now common practice of using the two distinctions in 1972.
4. Available from <http://www.bu.edu.asllrp/fl>.

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