

Introduction

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1. Introduction

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1.1. About *Minpaku Sign Language Studies*: Background

This is the first volume of the *Minpaku Sign Language Studies* series, which is launched with the aim of disseminating research results in sign language linguistics at the National Museum of Ethnology, commonly known as “Minpaku”, an abbreviation of its Japanese name. It is also intended to provide a place for people to publish preliminary and/or seeds of sign language research, to encourage the development of the field in Japan and beyond. Prospective contributors include not only resident and visiting scholars at Minpaku, but also those who presented at and participated in symposia and conferences hosted by the Institute. Papers are sent to at least two anonymous reviewers prior to their publication.

Minpaku’s endeavor for the promotion of sign language linguistics goes back to the hosting of the 20th International Conference on Historical Linguistics (ICHL20). Kikusawa, the chair of the organizing committee of the conference and then the president of the International Society for Historical Linguistics, was determined to include a presentation on the historical study of sign languages at the conference, which was not commonly recognized in the field of historical linguistics, and invited Ted SUPALLA, a Deaf professor then at the University of Rochester, as one of the keynote speakers. Supalla then contacted OSUGI Yutaka, one of his former students from Japan, and encouraged him to participate in the conference. Osugi coordinated a small panel session for ICHL20 entitled “Developing historical linguistics corpus of sign languages” around Supalla’s talk. Unfortunately, Supalla could not make it to Japan and his lecture was presented through Skype and discussion was carried out by the same method. Five panelists including Supalla and Osugi and over 100 participants attended the session. To the best of our knowledge, this was the very first occasion when a conference session was carried out via Internet and also the very first presentation given by a Deaf scholar at Minpaku.

That this workshop was hosted at an inter-university center such as Minpaku stimulated the interest of both Japanese and international scholars for the establishment of a research hub for sign language research in Japan. Eventually, with the financial support of the Nippon Foundation, a project “Reaching-out activities for the promotion of sign language linguistics, delivering lectures and hosting of symposia and seminars” (PI: KIKUSAWA Ritsuko, April

2013 to March 2016) started, which was followed up by another project “Promotion of Sign Language Linguistics and related academic fields through the establishment of Sign Language Linguistics Research Section (SiLLR) at Minpaku” (PI: KIKUSAWA Ritsuko, April 2016 to March 2020), also with the support of the Nippon Foundation. With this support, a Sign Language Linguistics Research Section (SiLLR) was established at Minpaku. The research section consists of three additional research positions, and has been run with four supporting clerical staff members and two Japanese visiting scholars. Three of our staff members (at the time of the publication of this volume) are Deaf, who all have had training in sign language linguistics abroad. An overseas visiting scholar occasionally is hosted by SiLLR. This scholar conducts research on Japanese Sign Language at Minpaku and visits other institutes for lectures and workshops. It may be worth noting here that various related projects have been conducted along with these two major projects, such as “Toward a new view of human language based on comparison of signed and spoken languages” (A National Museum of Ethnology Core Research Project, PI: KIKUSAWA Ritsuko, April 2013 to March 2016), and “A pilot study toward internet dissemination and the development of a system for e-learning sign linguistics” (PI: KIKUSAWA Ritsuko, April 2012 to March 2015), funded by various institutions including Minpaku, the National Institutes for Humanities (NIHU), and the Center for the Promotion of Integrated Sciences (CPIS), The Graduate University for Advanced Studies.

Among various activities hosted by SiLLR, the major and most commonly known event is the annual meeting of Signed and Spoken Language Linguistics (SSLL). This started as a follow up meeting of the workshop during the ICHL meeting. This was in the form of a symposium for the first three years, inviting various participants from all over the world. The goal was to provide opportunities for both Deaf and hearing audiences in Japan to listen to the results of research taking place in the field of sign language linguistics all over the world. Then, in 2015, the way the meeting was organized was shifted to a conference style. This meant that papers for presentation would be solicited, reviewed and selected. It is now established that 14 stage presentations and a few poster presentations are selected every year, with the acceptance rate ranging from 49% to 86%.

It had been our hope to start publishing papers on sign language linguistics from these meetings, and this volume is the first of the series. Current and former overseas visiting scholars, as well as other specialists in sign language linguistics, have anonymously helped us in various processes including review and assessment of papers submitted for the volume. After we started soliciting papers for publication, we realized that outlets for papers in the field are limited, and particularly it is difficult for graduate students and young researchers to find a venue to publish their work. We were also aware that published information on non-European sign languages is very limited. With these facts on our mind, it was decided that the volume should include not only papers from the academic meetings we host, but also students' papers recommended by instructors for publication, as well as revised theses that have been submitted for a master's degree, and the like. The volume also serves as a place to publish the research results of Minpaku's visiting scholars. While they are affiliated with Minpaku, however short their stay is, they often try to start analyzing Japanese Sign Language and/or sign languages used in Japan for the first time, applying their expertise

of the languages of their own specialization, and we very much wanted to include outcomes of their research while with SiLLR.

To make sure that all the papers are publishable, each paper has been sent for anonymous review and authors have been requested to ensure that they reflect all reviewers' comments before they submit their final version. The second and third volumes are currently on their way and it is hoped that *Minpaku Sign Language Studies* will be the first step towards a better understanding of sign languages all over the world, in particular those used in Asia and surrounding areas. We also hope that this will encourage young researchers and students to publish their work on sign languages, and also for spoken language linguists to publish their analyses on signed languages.

1.2. About the Papers in This Volume

This volume includes 10 papers, which are organized according to the following order: Data analysis (chapters 2 to 6), theoretical interpretations (chapters 7 and 8), applied fields (chapters 9–11). The following provide a brief overview and the background of each paper.

Engberg-Pedersen and Ikeda (chapter 2) provide a description of gender marking in Japanese Sign Language. Grammatical gender marking in sign languages is not widely observed and the JSL system is considered to be unique. They provide descriptions of functions that gender markers carry in the language, particularly in utterances and conversations with specific examples.

Baba and Matsuoka (chapter 3) is about *kana*-based signs. *Kana* in general refers to the syllabic scripts used to write spoken Japanese and also refers to the bases of the finger-spelling of Japanese Sign Language. In other words, *kana*-based signs are more or less borrowed forms from spoken Japanese into the language. Some are accepted by native signers as “natural,” while some are judged “non-natural” and are dismissed. Baba and Matsuoka examine the forms to identify which of the relevant characteristics are in the native-users' judgement of appropriateness.

Lin (chapter 4), Zhu (chapter 5), and Shimotani (chapter 6) all analyze non-manual markers of various sign languages. Lin's paper attempts to capture the role of mouthing in Chinese Sign Language, while Zhu analyzes non-manual markers that serve as intonational phrase markers. Shimotani observes differences found in the use of head nods in Japanese Sign Language between signers and learners. She further analyzes head nods by signers of the language and interpreters of Japanese Sign Language into spoken Japanese, the results of which are expected to provide information that may help all hearing learners.

Asada (chapter 7) and Kawasaki (chapter 8) both approach Japanese Sign Language from theoretical view-points. Asada's paper focuses on two sentence structures, copular sentences and coordinate structures in Japanese Sign Language, from a generative perspective. She questions some previously presented claims and provides evidence for her new claims. Kawasaki focuses on characteristics related to verb agreement found in various sign languages, using an Optimality theory approach.

Tsay, Myers, and Tai (chapter 9) examine age-related factors related to the speed of information transmission of signers. Their experiment was conducted applying the same

method as that employed in their earlier work where information transmission of signed and spoken languages was compared. They provide not only facts related to the languages in different modes, but also provide potential insights into human cognition related to information processing.

Sagara and Kikusawa (chapter 10) is a paper where, just like in spoken languages, signed languages show the phenomenon of contamination, a kind of paradigm leveling. Cases in Japanese and related sign languages are presented and the motivation for such change is discussed. Historical linguistics is a new field in sign language linguistics where methods for comparison and reconstruction are not well established, and this work is unique in that some phenomena observed in sign languages are generalized and related to those commonly known for spoken languages.

Finally, Chen Pichler, Koulidobrova, and Palmer (chapter 11) discuss the second language acquisition of American Sign Language by Deaf people. Previous work on language acquisition of signers focused on the second language acquisition of written spoken languages that were used in the area where signers resided. Little research has been done on the second sign language acquisition of Deaf signers. Rather than jumping to new data, the work reviews those presented in previous studies but provides a new view-point and thus brings in a new area of research in sign language studies.

Of the above authors, Engberg-Pedersen, Tsay, and Chen-Pichler have stayed at Minpaku as visiting scholars, and Ikeda, Sagara, and Kikusawa are resident researchers. We are very pleased to be able to present this volume as the first step of our endeavor and we are sure that more are to follow.