

Standardization Beyond Form:
Ideologies, Institutions, and the Semiotics of Nepali Sign Language

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Anthropology)
in The University of Michigan
2008

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals and institutions that contributed in vital ways to the production of this work. First, I thank the Fulbright Institution of International Education/Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal and the U.S. Department of Education's Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship Program for funding my dissertation research.

I also thank my committee members, Judith Irvine, Barbra Meek, Tom Fricke, and Susan Gelman for their support and advice throughout this process. In particular, I thank Judith Irvine for her deeply thoughtful comments and continued attention during a particularly busy moment in her career and Barbra Meek for her unerring support as I have moved through the program. I must also thank my undergraduate advisor, Peter Bertocci, without whom I would not have entered graduate school in anthropology in the first place and Laurie Marx, without whom I could not have finished.

There are many people in Nepal to whom I am deeply grateful, but must not name individually in order to protect their privacy. I thank all of the members of the Kathmandu Association of the Deaf, the National Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Lumbini Association of the Deaf, and the Kirtipur Deaf Development Club for their friendship over many years, their willingness to allow me to participate in their social networks, their hospitality in inviting me to their homes, and their patience in answering my many questions.

I also thank the faculty and staff of the Cornell Nepal Study Program in Kirtipur for allowing me to base my fieldwork from their program house. My Cornell connections began with the language training I received from Banu and Shambu Oja and led to the academic advice and friendly companionship of Kathryn March, David Holmburg, and Dambar Chemjong. I thank both Dambar Chemjong and Manisha Adhikhari for their assistance in creating English translations of Nepali documents produced by members of Kathmandu's deaf associations and I thank Janak Rai for translating some of my research materials from English to Nepali. Finally, I thank the School for International Training in Nepal, as it was through this program that I first began the research project that has led to this dissertation.

I have Judy Shepard-Kegl and James Kegl to thank for my introduction to both SignStream and Sutton SignWriting in the summer of 2003. Since then, Valerie Sutton and the other participants on the SignWriting listserv have been of great help to me in constructing the transcripts that have been vital to my analysis.

This dissertation has benefited in many ways from the comments and suggestions of my colleagues. First, I thank the members of my dissertation writing group, Britt Halvorson, Karen Smid, Henrike Florusbosch, Vanessa Will, and Sonia Das for providing a forum in which to share drafts and to discuss the process of creating this work. I thank the members of the Semiotics reading group, particularly Josh Reno, Cecilia Tomori, and Britt Halvorson, for their comments. I am also grateful to them for organizing the workshop that brought Rick Parmentier to Michigan, and thank him for his comments. In addition, my research and writing have benefited from my participation in the University of Michigan's Linguistic Anthropology Laboratory and the University of

Michigan-University of Chicago's yearly Michicagoan Graduate Student Conference in Linguistic Anthropology.

Finally, I thank my husband Aaron for supporting my research and writing by living with me in Nepal and helping to take care of our son. I thank that son, Leo, for being such a good baby. I thank my mother-in-law Ann for providing vital childcare services during this time. Above all, I thank my mother Randi, for, providing financial, intellectual, and emotional support in all my projects and serving as this dissertation's editor.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the first Nepali school for the deaf in 1966, Nepali Sign Language (NSL) has been emerging from the communicative practice of deaf¹ individuals brought together in an increasing number of social institutions for the deaf. Since the late 1980s, leaders of these institutions have embarked on a project to standardize NSL. Through an examination of this process, in this dissertation I explore the relationship between the formal and ideological aspects of language standardization. I note that while the formal and ideological elements of any language standardization project influence one another, the nature of their relationships in any given case is not inherent or fixed. Therefore, the primary argument of this dissertation is that it is necessary to attend to the ways in which language standardization projects attempt to reduce variation not only in the formal properties of language but also in the wider semiotic interpretations of these forms.

Standardization and other language ideologies

While I take the position that language standardization is more an ideological process than something that is necessarily realized in any given speaker's (or signer's) output, this process can have important effects on the formal properties of the linguistic

¹ While I am familiar with the convention of writing Deaf (with a capital D) to indicate a culturally Deaf orientation, and using a lower case d for individuals medically but not culturally Deaf, I have not employed it in this dissertation. This is because this convention is not widely used among culturally Deaf Nepalis. I am cognizant of this important distinction however, and hope that this is clear throughout the dissertation.

practice of speakers (or signers) of a standard language. Attention to the manner in which language ideologies mediate between linguistic forms and social structures is important in understanding how these effects occur. Recent years have seen a great diversity of work on this topic (see especially collections on the topic edited by Scheffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998 and Kroskrity 2000) and a wide range of definitions of the term “language ideologies,” each highlighting different emphases of the concept’s application, have been proposed. In this dissertation, I move away from definitions such as that proposed by Alan Rumsey² (1990), which imply that ideologies of language within a given social group can be treated as homogeneous. Rather, I primarily adopt Kit Woolard’s framing of the term as, “representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (Woolard 1998:3), as this definition highlights the multiplicity of ideological positions in any context and allows for the fact that these representations can be more or less subject to conscious awareness.

I apply this focus to my discussion of ideologies of standard language. James and Lesley Milroy (1999) suggest that standardization has the formal goal of “promoting invariance or uniformity in language structure” (Milroy and Milroy 1999:531). The historical process of standardization involves the selection of a particular language variety, its codification, the elaboration of its use across sociolinguistic domains, and public acceptance of its claim to “correctness” (Milroy and Milroy 1999; Haugen 1966). However, while the ultimate goal of this process is generally the reduction of variation in linguistic practice, I consider the actual reduction of such variation less important than

² “Shared bodies of commonsense notions of the nature of language in the world” (Rumsey 1990: 346).

the ideological positions that motivate the process and provide frameworks for the interpretation of its results.

I use the plural here because while the literature often refers to a “standard language ideology”, the ideological positions that motivate and sustain standardization projects vary. For example, the Milroys identify differences between both the formal and ideological thrusts of attempts to standardize English in the United States and Britain. While Standard English in the U.S. is centered around lexical and morphosyntactic structures associated with a “mainstream, “non-ethnic” middle class and works to obscure class-based distinctions, Standard English in the U.K. is based more on phonological features associated with a highly educated aristocracy and erases ethnic differentiation. Milroy also notes that in addition to ideological and formal variation across standardization projects, there can be varying positions within any given project concerning whether a given form is or is not standard (Milroy 2000).

It is also important to consider how ideologies of standard language interact with other related ideologies about the nature of language in a given social context. Which linguistic features are deemed important in such a project can be determined by other ambient language ideologies. For example, languages are sometimes thought of as no more than a collection of words, an ideological perspective that can encourage the focus on lexical items in some standardizing projects. Such ideological positions can also be affected by the formal properties of language. For example, as Michael Silverstein (1981) has argued, the formal properties of some aspects of language make them more available to conscious awareness and therefore more subject to meta-linguistic commentary such as that involved in standardization projects. In particular, he suggests that segmentable

features such as words are most available to speakers' awareness. This is borne out in the case of Nepali Sign Language, as the standardization project focuses only on lexical items, through the production of sign language dictionaries.

Objectification, writing, and standardization

The production of dictionaries is an important step in most standardization projects, but only one of several means by which the objectification of a language in print is involved in standardization. In spoken language contexts, the further implementation and maintenance of a standard language ideology generally require that the language in question have (or develop) a written form. Writing a language is an important means by which to extend the arenas in which a standardizing language can function and compete with other linguistic varieties. In addition, writing is a primary site for a language's codification, and subsequently the written form becomes a source of authority for prescription. The role of writing in standardization is in fact so pervasive as to merit its inclusion in most definitions of the process (e.g. Bloomfield 1927; Bourdieu 1982:46; Milroy and Milroy 1985:22).

Like other sign languages however, NSL does not have a widely used written form – its dictionaries are limited to pictorial representations of individual lexical items. The fact that sign languages are generally unwritten (and have sometimes even been considered un-writable) is itself the result of pervasive ideologies about the nature of writing and of language more broadly. I argue, however, that while lacking a written form does not preclude a standardization project, it can have important effects on its formal and ideological thrusts. For example, the fact that there is no ready means to objectify the grammatical forms of NSL signing practice in print contributes to the

aforementioned focus on lexical items (which are easier to represent pictorially) in standardizing efforts. In turn, this exclusive focus on words affects the manner in which the standardization project affects the formal properties of NSL linguistic practice more broadly, allowing different deaf institutions to promote grammatically distinct forms of signing while still adhering to the same standardization project. This narrow formal focus limits the gate-keeping potential of the standardizing project, by allowing a wide range of signing practice to count as standard.

Institutions and deaf “recruitment” culture

Standardization projects are always mediated through institutions of social control, such as schools, courts, and religious institutions, as these are given the authority to set and exemplify linguistic norms. The project to standardize NSL involves various institutions of different scales, including the local schools, the Nepali state, international NGOs, and local and extra-national deaf associations. As Susan Gal notes, the concept of language ideologies provides a framework for considering “links, contestations, and contradictions” in how such disparate institutions enact understandings of “cultural principles about the relation of language to social life” (Gal 1998:319).

Understanding the mediating role of such institutions is especially important in considering the standardization of sign languages, as institutions such as schools and associations are the primary sites of deaf social (re)production. Deaf culture has been described as a “recruitment” or “convert” culture (Wrigley 1996; Bechter in press) because most deaf individuals are born to hearing parents and must encounter both other deaf people and sign language later in life. The situation in Nepal bears this out: most Nepali deaf signers first encounter other deaf individuals and sign language sometime in

mid-childhood or even post-adolescence. These individuals generally only become a part of deaf social life when they encounter deaf institutions, often the only venues in which they are able to communicate in an accessible language.

In fact, the sustained social interaction with other deaf people available in these institutions allows not only the emergence of deafness as a social category but is generally the locus for the emergence of sign languages themselves. Scholars have noted that many sign languages have had their genesis from the intensive manual communication of deaf children in schooling contexts, whether this practice is actively suppressed by oralist teachers and staff or not (e.g. Baynton 1996; Monaghan 1996; Kegl and Senghas 1999; Reilly and Wanner 2005). These institutions are also generally the primary sites of efforts to intervene in the formal properties of the emerging signing practice - whether by hearing educators or by deaf leaders. In Kathmandu, the two most important social institutions – the schools for the deaf and the deaf associations – have been the primary sites for the emergence of NSL (both as signing practice and as a standardizing language) and deaf social life. However, each type of institution occupies a different position in regard to both the Nepali state and various extra-national interests. While the schools and associations both employ the same standardized lexicon, each promotes grammatically distinct signing forms that both reflect and promote distinct ideologies about the nature of Nepali Sign Language.

Nepal's schools for the deaf, primarily run by hearing individuals and staffed with hearing teachers, teach a form of NSL in which the standard lexical items are signed in the same word order and following the same morphological patterns as spoken Nepali. This practice arises in response to the structural conditions imposed by Nepal's

government, which favors the use of Nepali as the national language; the deaf schools are invested in promoting the idea that NSL is the same language as Nepali, simply expressed in a different modality (much as written Nepali is considered to be the spoken language in a different modality). This perspective is also tied to broad international trends in deaf education, which stress the acquisition of the dominant spoken language as the primary goal for deaf students.

Nepal's deaf associations, on the other hand, are run by deaf leaders and promote the idea that NSL is a separate language, the “mother tongue” of the country's deaf population. This representation of the language interfaces with Nepal's broader language politics in a different fashion, suggesting that deaf Nepalis are analogous to other Nepali indigenous groups currently struggling for their linguistic rights in the face of the political power accorded to spoken Nepali. This approach also stems from Nepal's deaf associations' links with different inter- and extra- national deaf organizations, which promote a view of the deaf as a linguistic minority rather than a disabled population. As a result, the grammatical constructions taught in association-run classes employ a spatial grammar that differs greatly from the highly Nepali influenced signing in the deaf schools.

Standardization beyond form

As suggested by work on the relationship between institutional contexts and levels of awareness of particular language ideologies (Philips 2000, Silverstein 1998a), such institutions are not only a site for the production of language ideologies but sometimes also of their metalinguistic explication. In Nepal, there is a distinct difference in the degree to which the deaf schools and associations make certain beliefs about the

nature of NSL explicit. In the deaf schools, the notion that NSL is Nepali in another modality is communicated primarily through the manner in which speech, manual communication, and writing are presented in an overlapping fashion, as one code in three simultaneous channels. However, gaps in this practice – in which hearing teachers communicate far richer grammatical constructions in the spoken and written channels while simplifying the manual channel to fit the flow of speech, also evinces an implicit ideology that NSL is an impoverished version of Nepali.

While the deaf associations do not suggest that NSL is Nepali, they do seek to link the language with Nepali nationalism through very explicit metalinguistic and metasemiotic commentary. Classes in the deaf associations stress the visual iconicity of the standard lexical items in attempting to ensure that deaf members read these forms as semiotically linked to the Hindu cultural orientation favored by the Nepali state. In this respect, the NSL standardization project (as practiced in the associations) focuses on connotation as much as denotation.

That such efforts are necessary points to the fact that it cannot be assumed that individuals will notice the same kinds of indexical connections between linguistic forms and social structures or rationalize and justify them in the same ways; the interpretations of linguistic forms drawn upon to construct these indexes and other sign relationships are not fixed or inherent. Rather, there is an unending chain of possible semiotic relationships between signs, objects, and interpretants (Peirce 1931-1959) - individual members of the deaf institutions have their own perspectives on the language that are influenced by institutional instruction but not fully determined by it.

In exploring these connections I emphasize the multi-functionality of language while adopting Irvine and Gal's (2000) semiotic orientation in approaching the manner in which language ideologies link the formal and the social. These authors note that, "speakers (and hearers) often notice, rationalize, and justify linguistic indices, thereby creating linguistic ideologies that purport to explain the source and meaning of the linguistic differences" (Irvine and Gal 2000:37). They identify similarities in the ways ideologies "recognize (or misrecognize) linguistic differences: how they locate, interpret, and rationalize sociolinguistic complexity" (Irvine and Gal 2000: 36). These processes include iconization (or rhematization), fractal recursivity, and erasure.

While Irvine and Gal were most concerned with the effects of such ideologies, including the manner in which they contribute to language change and their consequences for both politics and scholarship, in this dissertation I focus on how such ideologies themselves can be products of and subject to standardization projects. Individuals can make and rationalize indexical connections in vastly different ways and, as a result, the semiotic processes Gal and Irvine have identified can themselves "become the object of attention, debate, and ideological contestation." Therefore, to understand standardization projects more completely, in this dissertation I attend to the manner in which "some representations of language are made to 'stick'" in attempts, successful or not, to "exclude or debase alternative images" (Gal 1998:329).

The particular nature of Nepal's deaf institutions' members, who have diverse backgrounds, not only in terms of ethnicity, religion, class, or regional background, but also in terms of their access to the spoken discourses that circulate among their hearing families and in broader society, makes the Nepali deaf institutions a rich context for the

exploration of this question, highlighting the manner in which people's particular histories and experiences come to bear on the way that they interdiscursively interpret the social indexicality of linguistic signs. On the one hand, the case of homesigners (deaf individuals isolated from an accessible language until post-adolescence) is particularly revealing when considering the relative roles of different communicative modalities in this process. On the other, the life trajectory of those individuals who entered deaf social life while young enough to enter the deaf schools and who have subsequently become members of the deaf associations has resulted in their exposure to a wide range of signing forms and to different ways of ideologizing the nature of NSL. As a result, such individuals often notice and promote semiotic interpretations of the standard sign forms that multivalently index both the deaf school's and associations' means of relating NSL to the broader Nepali national context. Thus, while Kathryn Woolard (1998) has demonstrated through her discussion of bivalency that particular linguistic forms need not be attributed to a single code, but can participate simultaneously in different linguistic and cultural systems, I detail the manner in which particular interpretations of these forms can simultaneously participate in different ideological frameworks.

In conclusion, I follow Susan Gal in considering the need to understand the “semiotic processes by which chunks of linguistic material are linked to, or representative of, socially recognized categories of people and activities” to be a central task in the study of language ideologies (Gal 1998: 326). While language ideologies, such as those involved in standardization projects, mediate between linguistic form and social structures, both the linguistic forms that will be considered relevant (including the question of what forms count as linguistic and which do not) and the manner in which

they will be linked to the social can be highly variable and can themselves be subject to institutional standardization. This dissertation, then, contributes to work on language standardization and language ideologies more generally, by exploring this process.

Historical background

Some historical grounding is necessary to understand the different ideological thrusts in the project to standardize NSL, particularly the motivations to link the language with spoken Nepali and/or with Hindu cultural markers. While Nepal's population has always been highly diverse in ethnic and religious terms, the leaders of the country have, since before its unification, been Hindus who traced their origin to India. Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Hindu leader of the hill Kingdom of Gorkha, unified Nepal in 1816. In 1846, Jang Bahadur Rana overthrew the Shah rulers in the Kot Massacre, and declared himself the prime minister, maintaining the Shah line as powerless figureheads. In 1854, in order to fully incorporate his varied subjects into the Hindu cosmology favored by the ruling class, Jang Bahadur created a document called the Muluki Ain (or Chief Law).

Enumerating and ranking Nepal's social groups in terms of their relative purity by Hindu standards, this legislation was an attempt to both codify and reify the various, relatively fluid, practices concerning caste and ethnic group relationships extant in Nepal (Guneratne 1998). In creating this legislation, Rana was responding to Nepal's precarious geo-political position (between Tibet/China to the north and British India to the south) by projecting the notion that the Nepali nation state mapped onto a culturally unified and discrete population, the defining symbols of which were drawn from the culture of the dominant Hindu groups, the Brahmins and Chetris (Burghart 1984, Anderson 1991). In

addition, the Ranas closed the country's borders, keeping the population as isolated as possible from foreign influence.

This policy had vastly different implications for the lived experiences of Nepalis, as being rated as relatively impure in the Muluki Ain had serious material consequences. These consequences included legal justification of a wide range of discriminatory practices against such groups, such as sanctioned slavery. In addition, the document carried the threat of legal punishment should rules concerning intermarriage and commensality between castes be broken. As these notions gained currency throughout the country they provided an idiom through which status was manipulated in both Hindu and non-Hindu groups.³

After India gained independence from Britain in 1947, expatriate Nepalis living in India worked with the Indian Congress party to oppose the Rana rule. This Nepali nationalistic project focused on reinstating the Shah king, King Tribhuvan, who they hoped would preside over a democratic Nepali state. In 1950 the King escaped from the Ranas and fled to India and soon thereafter, with the support of the Indian state, the Ranas were overthrown and the Shah line was reinstated. King Tribhuvan did not hold elections for a constituent assembly, as had been promised, though his successor, King Mahendra, did so in 1959. However, fearing that he would be reduced to a ceremonial role, in 1960 Mahendra arrested the Congress and set up a system of direct rule. This system included a Panchayat body, in which local five-man councils sent representatives to district heads that in turn sent representatives to a national Panchayat. While the

³ I note however, that the Hindu/non-Hindu distinction is a false dichotomy in many cases – it's not at all clear how to classify the religious practices of many Nepalis.

Panchayat itself had no real power to resist or overrule the King, this era is typically referred to as the Panchayat era or regime.

While the Muluki Ain's use of caste as a governmentally sanctioned method of structuring social relations was banned by the Panchayat government in 1963, the state continued to locate its authority in Hindu cultural symbols, including the continued framing of the Shah kings as incarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu. The state also drew on a Hindu cultural framework in defining its notions of citizenship, attempting to unite its polity by encouraging all citizens to adopt upper caste Hindu practices. The emerging education system was a focal point for these efforts, as all educational materials were written in Nepali, the official language (spoken primarily in the Hindu middle-hill region of the country), and promoted Hindu cultural perspectives (Skinner and Holland 1996).

The Panchayat banned political parties and denied human rights until 1990 when the Jana Andolan (People's Movement), a mass uprising in Kathmandu, was successful in forcing then King Birendra to institute constitutional reforms and allow the formation of a multiparty parliament. However, much of the promise of this movement was unrealized, as the political parties proved largely corrupt and incompetent. While there was some revision of the cultural framing of the Nepali nation state at this time, this reframing too was limited. For example, after the People's Movement a new constitution was drafted which changed the definition of Nepal as "an independent, indivisible and sovereign monarchical Hindu Kingdom" to "a multi-ethnic, multilingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign Hindu and Constitutional Monarchical Kingdom." While this definition was more expansive, Nepal remained a Hindu state.

However, with the restoration of multi-party democracy came increased political mobilization on the part of many of the country's ethnic groups, who protested the manner in which the state's framing of Nepali patriotism was grounded in high-caste Hindu symbols and practices. Among their particular goals were the reframing of Nepal as secular and the promotion of languages other than Nepali and Sanskrit in schools. In addition, from 1996, a Maoist political party began its efforts to replace the parliamentary monarchy with a democratic republic. This movement expanded into a violent People's War. The monarchy was further weakened after 2001 when, according to the official account, the Crown Prince Dipendra assassinated the King and Queen (along with other members of the family) before shooting himself. Many Nepalis do not accept this version of events and suspect that the assassinated King's brother Gyanendra, who inherited the throne, was in fact behind the killings. In 2005 Gyanendra dismissed the government and assumed direct rule. This repressive move finally led to a second Jana Andolan, in April 2006, where through massive strikes and protests the King was forced to reinstate parliament, after which point the monarchy was stripped of much of its power.

As briefly outlined above, the history of Nepal has entailed attempts to Hinduize (or sanskritize) the Nepali population, though this process has been incomplete and contested. As I will show throughout this dissertation, the dominance of Hindu notions of purity and pollution has greatly affected the construction of deafness in Nepal, as have the varying ways of constructing Nepali citizenship (either through a caste framework or a means of constructing Nepali nationalism around upper caste symbols).

Standard language and political recognition in Nepal

I also want to briefly outline the role of language in Nepal's political history as, to understand Nepal's deaf institutions' standardizing project, it is necessary to briefly review the manner in which language and politics are linked in South Asia. In both India and Nepal, the census is a major means by which languages acquire sociolinguistic recognition: a code is considered a language (with the accompanying political clout), only if it can muster enough people claiming to speak it as a "mother tongue"- otherwise it may be treated as a dialect with accompanying devaluation of the social group associated with it. Hence, while it is often said that a language is a dialect with an army and a navy, suggesting that it is social status and economic and political power that determines the evaluation of language status, it is also the case in many contexts that social status is pursued through manipulation of linguistic status (whether successfully or unsuccessfully).

The model for this particular method of linking and evaluating social and linguistic groups was developed in colonial India, and deployed most famously by Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India. Indeed much of the typology of Indian languages and information about their distribution currently in use throughout India (a scheme with important political consequences) has stemmed from Grierson's methods for formatting and conducting his surveys. Language has been an important part of the regimenting governmental power of both colonial British India and the Indian or Nepali governments since (Washbrook 1991; Burghart 1993, Cohn 1987).

However, speakers' reports about the codes they speak collected in census surveys and field research, must be interpreted as information about sociolinguistic attitudes rather than as an unmediated window into code use. The relationship between

formal cohesion and the designation of the title of a given language is not simple. On the one hand the relevant differences between codes may be more salient to social actors or political interests than to formal linguistic inquiry. Hindi and Urdu, which have great social significance as distinct languages but are very similar in formal terms, are a well-known example of this phenomenon. It is also possible that two formally distinct forms of speech can be given the same language label: John Gumperz describes a case wherein Punjabi speakers living in Delhi spoke a variety of Punjabi that was interpreted to be “bad Hindi” by speakers from the Punjab. The Delhites, however, did not interpret their code as anything other than Punjabi, the preservation of a few key phonetic features being seen as “sufficient to preserve the label of Punjabi for speech that had come to more closely resemble Hindi in many other properties (Gumperz 1964a: 217). This example also points to the fact that these kinds of designations may be contentious.

Similarly, the relationship between the formal properties of a language and its political recognition in Nepal can be rather loose. For example, Arjun Guneratne reports that the Tharus of southern Nepal have based their struggle to obtain recognition as a politically significant ethnic group around claims of a common language or “mother tongue” as the political structure of Nepal demands. An actually manifest common language is not immediately necessary, as entering Tharu Bhaasa (Tharu language) on the census form was sufficient in this regard (Guneratne 2002). Indeed, at the time of Guneratne’s writing, in formal terms the Tharu had no common language.

Nepali Sign Language became a language category in Nepal’s 2001 census, which recorded 5,743 “speakers” of the language (Gordon 2005). This number is sufficiently large that linguists at Tribhuvan University, who are concerned with language

endangerment within the country, consider NSL one of Nepal's "safe" languages. However, this assessment is not based on observation of any kind of actual linguistic practice – rather, anyone who is deaf is considered a "speaker" of Nepali Sign Language for the purposes of the census.

Though actual formal unification is not necessary for a language to be recognized as an important political entity in Nepal, this is not to suggest that there cannot be a relationship between such claims and attempts to standardize formal variation in linguistic practice. In all of the Nepali cases mentioned above, when it is acknowledged that the idea of a mother tongue and its formal manifestation do not map onto one another neatly, this discrepancy is generally treated as a transitional moment in a move towards formal unification. Such groups typically deem it necessary to "correct" the state of affairs that has led to such linguistic diversity or to uncover a "lost" but still "essential" language that corresponds with their caste or ethnicity (Fisher 2001; Guneratne 2002). Therefore, as will be made clear in subsequent chapters, language politics within the Nepali state have directly influenced the project to standardize NSL.

Methodology

Field Methods

The material for this dissertation was gathered over the course of five trips to Nepal. The first, a 4 month trip in 1997, involved my introduction to deaf signers in Nepal, my initial acquisition of Nepali Sign Language, and an intensive introduction to deaf social life in several disparate centers: Kathmandu, Pokhara, Siddharthanagar (Bhairahawa), and Palpa. Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, is the country's largest urban center and the seat of government. Pokhara, the third largest city in Nepal, is located to

the north-east of Kathmandu and is the nearest urban center to the Annapurna mountain range and the Mustang region, on the Nepal-Tibet border, while Siddharthanagar/Bhairahawa is a smaller urban and industrial center that borders India in the south. Finally, Palpa is a small town in central Nepal (see the map of Nepal in Appendix A). I was also able to visit deaf individuals living in the rural areas surrounding these centers. Conducting research in each of these sites allowed me to observe deaf organizations and social life in areas that differ in relation to the political and economic center of the country (Kathmandu) and in orientation to neighboring nation states (India and China/Tibet).

In 1999 I revisited Bhairahawa and Kathmandu for a month to spend time with deaf friends. By the time of the third and fourth trips in 2002 (for 2 months) and 2004-2005 (for 7 months) respectively, the Maoist insurrection had affected the country in such a way that extensive travel outside the capital was inadvisable and therefore I refocused my attention on the Kathmandu Valley, including Patan and Bhaktapur, the other large cities located in the Valley, but with special attention to Kathmandu, Kirtipur and Chobar. The latter cities are smaller Newari settlements located on the rim of the Valley (see Appendix B for a map of the Kathmandu Valley). In addition, in 2005 I was able to conduct an informal survey of deaf residents in small villages in Mustang (in the far north, near Tibet). Finally, I conducted an additional month-long trip in 2006, working primarily in Kirtipur. I had intended to stay significantly longer but this visit coincided with the serious political unrest that ultimately led to the second Jana Andolan.

Being focused in the Kathmandu Valley during my later trips did not prevent me from interacting with deaf individuals from other areas of the country, as they are

actively recruited by the deaf institutions from their home villages and encouraged to live in urban centers where other deaf individuals have aggregated. Therefore, in addition to my exposure to signing outside the capital, while centered in the Valley I was able to observe the signing practice of those deaf individuals who have recently relocated to Kathmandu and those visiting from other areas. As mentioned above, deaf culture is often characterized as a recruitment culture, as deaf signers are typically not born into deaf social networks but encounter and join them later in life. By positioning myself in the largest such network, therefore, it was possible watch this recruitment occur, and to observe the way that the disparate signing practices and social backgrounds of recruits are incorporated into the deaf institution's standardization project.

In each region, my research focused on several important sites: deaf associations, where deaf adults gather to socialize and where adult language education classes are conducted; local schools for the deaf; and the homes of deaf individuals. In Kathmandu, in addition to the local deaf associations such as the Kathmandu Association of the Deaf (KAD) where I worked closely with 35 officers and members⁴, I was able to spend a great deal of time with 25 members of the National Federation of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NFDH), which oversees the production of NSL dictionaries and hosts meetings at which the signs to be included are determined – this organization sends researchers to collect signing forms from more far flung deaf associations, codifies them, and redistributes them in officially sanctioned material forms (the dictionaries and sign language posters). Funded primarily by Scandinavian and British deaf organization, the

⁴ While not all deaf individuals know whether they were deafened pre- or post-lingually, my interview material suggests that more than half of my total subjects were deafened pre-lingually.

NFDH claims the sole right to undertake this project (to the exclusion of more local deaf associations and schools). I was also able to focus in detail on more peripheral deaf clubs in the Kathmandu Valley, such as the Kirtipur deaf Development Club, and gauge the impact of these nearby larger institutions on their practices⁵. Finally, in Kathmandu I was able to conduct research in the Naxal School for the Deaf, a very large school for the deaf where young children are first introduced to sign language and other deaf children, and the Swedish Sewing Project, where deaf girls from throughout the country are boarded and taught sign language and tailoring skills. At each of these sites I employed a range of ethnographic methods, outlined below. At the Naxal School I worked with four hearing adults, including the principal of the school and three teachers, and twenty deaf students, in grades 1, 2, and 10, while at the Swedish Sewing Project I worked with one hearing math teacher, two deaf language teachers, and 19 deaf students, 15 of whom were homesigners experiencing their first contact with deaf social networks and sign language.

Participant observation

Participant observation has been a very important element of my research project in Nepal, as a great deal of my understanding of deaf social life has been a result of this long-term participation. In most cases, this was “complete participation” (Gold 1969; Spradley 1980 et al.) as I did not merely observe but actively interacted with other participants in the activities I was studying. The ability to do so hinged in large part on my competency in using local signing forms. Indeed, over the course of 10 years of working with deaf signers in Nepal I have become a competent signer. However, the initial period during which I lacked this competency was also useful for my research, as

⁵ The members of these clubs also belonged to the more central deaf associations listed above.

the experience of contact signing allowed me to gain insight into the strategies employed by deaf recruits, who also lack certain kinds of competency, and their interlocutors.

Moments of disfluency could provide insight in other ways as well. For example, as a researcher from the United States, I was often called upon to speak at deaf cultural events. It was very unlikely that I would be informed of this ahead of time and therefore, until I finally learned my lesson and began to habitually prepare some words in advance whenever attending a gathering of any sort of formality, I often had to deliver impromptu speeches to large crowds of both deaf and hearing Nepalis. Though these speeches were usually technically fluent (if not always in the early days), it took me some time to attune to the requirements of the genre.

In particular, there was initially some confusion about the form that my signing should take and the way in which I, as a speech-giver, should interact with the interpreter who served at such events. When a deaf person speaks at such an event, the interpreter translates their signing into spoken Nepali and, conversely, translates a hearing contributor's Nepali into sign. A hearing person who also commanded some sign was generally expected to produce both codes simultaneously, a task made simpler by the fact that such individuals tend to sign in Nepali word order. This practice corresponds with Signed English in the U.S., a code much devalued by culturally Deaf individuals who use ASL. Though I attempted not to import such value judgments, I usually (partly unconsciously) attempted to avoid signing in spoken Nepali word order, preferring to sign with the spatial grammatical constructions I'd learned through social interaction in the associations. Hence it was very difficult for me to do as the interpreter urged and speak Nepali and sign at the same time. The awkwardness that ensued on these occasions

pointed to the fact that otherwise, when the hearing and signing categories meshed the expected form of such an individual's output had the properties of a manual version of the Nepali language.

The process of acquiring competence in Nepali signing practices has provided other important insights. Because deaf signers are typically recruited into deaf social networks through the deaf institutions, my own entrance into deaf social life has followed a path that is more typical of other recruits than might have been the case in another kind of social group (in which entrance into the group may more generally take place at birth) - though it is significant that, unlike many deaf recruits, I entered with knowledge of at least one other language. For most deaf adults entering into the social life of the deaf associations in Nepal, the initial class under a deaf teacher becomes an important event marking the initial transition from outsider to insider. Indeed, one of the most common questions asked when two signing individuals meet for the first time is "Who taught you to sign?" I was very lucky to have a respected and high-ranking member in the national deaf association as my initial teacher.

While formal signing classes are an important mark of belonging, much of the acquisition of local signing practices comes through long hours spent socializing at the associations and nearby tea shops. Unlike many other types of ethnographic research, in which anthropologists have to find a way to insinuate themselves into the rhythms of their subjects' busy schedules, in this case the most time consuming daily activity for many individuals spending time at the deaf associations is "*goff soff garnu*" (to chat)⁶.

⁶ Spoken Nepali is written using the Devanagari script, but can also be written in Romanized form (as above). I will generally use the Romanized transcription system

Most unemployed deaf signers spend their days in this activity and those who have jobs spend their morning and evening hours there as well. The reason for this focus on socialization is in part because conversation in an accessible language is not something that most deaf people have access to when they are not spending time at the associations. Pleasantly for me, this made complete participation observation quite easy, allowing me to spend each day chatting at the deaf associations and in so doing to become fluent in the local signing practice and immersed in local deaf social life.

There were occasions, however, when it was important not to be a complete participant, but to act as bystander. An example deals with my research in Mustang. On the one hand I was there acting as an agent of the deaf institutions to survey the region to gauge the numbers of the local deaf population in order determine the feasibility of holding sign language classes in the area. I also provided the parents of young children with information about the deaf schools in Pokhara, the closest urban center. But I was also there to look at the formal properties of manual communication in an area uninfluenced by NSL. However, it soon became clear that in order to do so it was important that I not engage in manual communication myself, as home signing individuals (those who have not had exposure to an accessible language, spoken or manual) often mirror back the gestures of their interlocutors (this phenomenon will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5). Therefore I had to attempt to indirectly elicit manual communication from deaf individuals and their families or wait to observe them occurring naturally, so as not to introduce novel forms.

when writing Nepali words in this dissertation, except for occasions when the form of the Devanagari word is relevant to the discussion.

Collection and analysis of naturally occurring conversation

The experiences listed above provide a backdrop to my discussion of deaf social life. In addition, since the 2004-2005 trip when I began to video-record linguistic data, I have been able to obtain approximately 40 hours of footage of natural conversation from a wide variety of the speech events, all of which has informed my work and much of which I have submitted to close analysis. These data are central to my arguments, as they have allowed me to evaluate the manner in which the formal properties of signed communication vary when produced by different actors, in different contexts, and with different interlocutors.

In gathering these data, I took care to include not only a variety of speech events, but also interactions between signers of different backgrounds –considering factors such as age of acquisition of sign language, signing proficiency, adherence to the standard forms, age group, gender, caste background, place of origin, and hearing status, as these categories affect the status of signers in deaf social life. Whenever possible I also arranged to view the videos with the participants in order to construct annotated transcripts. During these sessions I created initial rough translations with their input and the assistance of bilingual English/NSL deaf signers

Semi-structured interviews

In addition, I videotaped around 15 hours of semi-structured interviews, based on the life history narratives that are a common story-telling genre in the deaf institutions. These narratives primarily consist of what, following Narayan, I call “emplacement stories”: a strategy of coming to belong somewhere and a discursive “orientation of the self within multiple frameworks of meaning” (Narayan 2002: 425). These include

commentary about becoming deaf, the birth family's reaction to their deafness, their subsequent relationship with hearing family, entrance into deaf social life through schools or associations, marriage, parenthood, and thoughts on the political upheavals Nepal has faced. I also conducted interviews with hearing family members, and major hearing players in Nepal's deaf associations and schools.

Collection and analysis of textual artifacts

Finally, I also collected a large number of material artifacts produced by the deaf associations for analysis. These include a formal written history of the establishment of the Kathmandu Association of the Deaf by Kiran Narayan (in both Nepali and English versions, the latter of which I helped produce along with Dambar Chemjong); Nepali language magazines written for and by members of the deaf associations that published them (which I translated with the help of Manisha Adhikari); drawings and paintings of deaf social life by Pratigya Shakya, a prominent deaf Nepali artist; Nepali Sign Language dictionaries, training posters, and fingerspelling guides produced by the deaf associations and schools for the deaf to promote the standard forms of NSL.

Methods of analysis

The manner in which a researcher sorts and analyzes his or her data is a site for the construction of meaning. As James Clifford has noted, the activity of including, excluding, and arranging materials is a means of exercising power and creating ethnographic authority (Clifford 1986). This certainly applies to the construction of transcripts and translations. As Elinor Ochs made clear in "Transcription as Theory", the production of transcripts is by no means theoretically neutral, and should be a focus of analytic attention in and of itself (Ochs 1979). Therefore, below (and in Chapter 2) I

discuss my methods of analysis – particularly as, working with a sign language, I have not had many successful models to follow in presenting my data to readers.

In performing my first phase of analysis I have used the SignStream program. This program allows its user to synchronize lines of transcription with video feed of the visual elements being transcribed. As many fields of description as the transcriber wishes can be synchronized in this manner - for example, in addition to coding manual movements, non-manual grammatical markers such as head tilt or eye gaze can also be included. This software is extremely useful for recording and analyzing a wide range of communicative behaviors, and need not be restricted to recording deaf signing.

It might have been possible to rely solely on this program to furnish my dissertation with accessible transcripts. This would have been useful because it would sidestep the need to transform the signed communication being studied into another medium, and in so doing might avoid the common practice of reducing sign to speech. However, this approach also poses the important question of privacy. While most of my subjects have given their permission for me to use and publish their images on video, in many cases I am uncomfortable with doing so. Simply put, the group of people with whom I have conducted my research is quite small and given individuals could be readily identified by any interested parties. The subjects of conversation are not generally of an extremely private nature, though they do often touch on very personal things, such as the way deafness has impacted familial relationships, (sometimes controversial) marriage choice, or political stances. It is difficult to predict the possible impact of a larger audience's ability to link these conversations with the signers in question.

Finding a satisfying manner in which to render signed communication in two-dimensional transcripts, however, has been challenging. Most publications about sign languages include representations of single lexical items in isolation, rather than larger units of signing like sentences or dialogues or, when describing larger units of signing, transform sign language into spoken language through a variety of conventions. Unwilling to do likewise but equally unwilling to rely only on video images I have chosen to use Sutton SignWriting to produce transcripts for this dissertation⁷. Chapter 2 includes an extensive discussion of this script, to which I refer my readers.

The Organization of this Dissertation

The chapters of this dissertation have been organized as follows. In Chapter 2, “Standardization and ‘Un-writable’ Languages”, I examine the relationship between standardization and writing. While most definitions of standardization cite written language as a vital element in a standard language project, in this chapter I will consider the extent to which this is a necessary connection. This is an important question in considering efforts to standardize sign languages, as to date no sign language has a widely used written form – and indeed, many scholars have claimed that sign languages are inherently un-writable. I argue that this state of affairs is produced not by the formal properties of sign languages but by pervasive ideologies about both the nature of writing

⁷ I want to acknowledge that by choosing to use Sutton Signwriting for my transcripts, I am putting concerns about the nature of the language being transcribed and the theoretical and political benefits of choosing this sort of script over concerns about readability. Though I do not want my transcripts to be opaque to my readers, I understand that this will be an unfamiliar transcription style to most readers. I have attempted to address this problem in the following ways: I include in Appendix A a list of SSW conventions so that the interested reader can teach themselves to read the transcripts. For the reader without the time or inclination to do so, I have also included English glosses.

and of language more broadly, supporting this claim through a comparison of two major attempts to develop scripts for sign language notation.

The leaders of the Nepali deaf institutions attempt to standardize the lexical items of their sign languages through the production of sign language dictionaries. Though such efforts are not grounded in a written form per se, they meet what I argue are the important elements of a standardization project. First, through pictorial representations of lexical items they attempt to reduce formal variation at some level of the language. This is largely a quantitative rather than qualitative difference between signed and spoken standard languages, as no written language captures all formal aspects of a given language and all scripts treat some aspects of language as important enough to record in a script and others not. Second, as in spoken language contexts, the standard forms enshrined in sign language dictionaries derive their authority through their social indexicality with high status speakers and not simply because of their appearance⁸.

I argue that while lacking a written form does not preclude a standardization project, it can have certain effects on its formal and ideological thrusts. In the case of sign languages, the fact that their standardization projects are effectively limited to the level of the lexicon by the absence of a written form can limit the gate-keeping potential of a standardizing project, as this narrow focus may allow a wide range of signing practice to count as standard. The inclusion of a wide range of grammatical variation is significant in deaf communities, where signing style and competencies vary widely according to factors such as signers' age at first exposure to an accessible language and the extent to which their signing practice has been influenced by spoken languages through formal schooling.

⁸ This is not to suggest that printed works are not an important source of authority.

At the same time, unwritten sign languages cannot extend into all the same domains as written standard languages, a fact that contributes to their relatively low-status position (and that of their users) in most sociolinguistic contexts. I conclude this chapter by reversing the question with which I opened - can there be writing without standardization? - arguing that writing need not automatically lead to a standardization project without the ideological motivation to do so.

In Chapter 3, “Deaf or Dumb? Ideological Multiplicity in Nepali Models of Deafness”, I briefly provide the historical, social, and political background necessary to understand the different coexisting and/or competing perspectives about the nature of deafness and sign language in Nepal that underpin the ideological variation in the project to standardize NSL. In particular, I outline three major models of deafness – religious, medical, and linguistic/ethnic – at play in Nepal. Using Arthur Kleinman’s explanatory models framework, I highlight the historical and cultural contingency of ideas about the nature and consequences of deafness, and examine how these different models can interface with one another. In many cases, deaf individuals’ life trajectories involve exposure to all of these frameworks – as their families, the deaf schools, and the deaf associations typically ascribe to different models. While the religious and medical models are often seen as diametrically opposed (though this depends on the definition of medical in any given case), I demonstrate how the religious and linguistic models work together in Nepal to construct the deaf as belonging to their own caste with implications for deaf intermarriage and employment.

I also show how the tensions between the different models can be actively exploited, as seen in the use of the deaf as multivalent symbols by a popular Nepali

restaurant chain. In the case of the deaf institutions, however, this tension remains relatively covert, allowing for the coexistence of different ideological positions and grammatical forms within the overarching standardization project. In each case these perspectives are supported through the institution's ties to inter- (and extra) national deaf institutions that themselves promote different models of deafness.

In Chapter 4, "Formal and Ideological Variation across Institutional Contexts", I present data from classroom interactions in several of Kathmandu's main deaf institutions to demonstrate one of the important effects of the standardization project's restriction to lexical items – that each institution promotes different grammatical constructions while still adhering to the overarching standardization effort. I analyze and compare these grammatical differences, with special attention to the manner in which spoken, written, and signed language interact in classroom contexts.

Sign language instruction in the deaf institutions works both to socialize students to use certain forms, and has the potential to socialize them through these forms to adopt different perspectives about the nature of NSL. However, I demonstrate that while the teachers in the schools and associations can expose their students to particular kinds of signing practice, they cannot in so doing fully dictate the kinds of linguistic forms the students will be exposed to and produce. Rather, the student bodies in each of these institutions –older individuals (often homesigners) in the associations and young children in the schools – contribute in different ways to the dialogical process of language socialization. On the one hand, homesigners in the deaf association run classes are often unable to acquire the visual grammatical constructions introduced by their instructors. On the other hand, deaf children in the schools, through their interactions with one another,

produce grammatical constructions quite distinct from those used by their hearing instructors. I argue that these unplanned outcomes introduce additional formal, and potentially ideological, variation into these institutional contexts.

In Chapter 5, “Here in Nepal There Are No Old Deaf People”: Homesigners, Mirroring, and the Dialogic Construction of *Bahiro*”, I consider the relationship between form and semiotic ideologies through an examination of the role of homesigners, deaf individuals who reached and passed the critical age for language acquisition without being exposed to an accessible language, in a deaf social life that revolves around the use of NSL. The wide range of signing practices that are considered NSL allows for a similarly wide range of individuals to derive the social benefit of being considered *bahiro* (culturally Deaf) producers of standard NSL, including homesigners who are highly constrained in their ability to acquire new grammatical forms, so long as they control the standard lexical items. I argue that in this respect the standard language ideology surrounding NSL varies somewhat from most standard language ideologies in that it works less as a gate-keeping project than as a means of collecting a wide range of signing styles under one linguistic label and, by adding to the numbers of *bahiro* users of NSL, bolstering the political clout of the deaf as a social grouping in Nepal.

However, homesigners vary widely in the degree to which they are able to acquire new forms and many are in fact unable to independently produce even the standard lexical items. In this chapter I show that despite these constraints such individuals can produce the standard signs in dialogue with more competent signers by copying or, in some cases, mirroring, the forms they supply. Though this practice clearly marks homesigners as such, it also creates the possibility for full signers to manipulate

the formal properties of NSL, in some cases by even reversing the orientation of their own signs, to allow homesigners to successfully produce the standard forms.

Whether the production of sign forms in this fashion allows such homesigners to count as *bahiro* users of the standard hinges on local semiotic ideologies concerning what counts as signs and who/what can produce them (Keane 2003). The fact that deaf social life in Nepal is characterized by the emergence of both individual competency and NSL itself from social interaction within deaf institutional contexts, contributes to a local semiotic ideology that allows for the distribution of the competence to author signs across participants in dialogic interactions. As a result, homesigners' manual output can be considered production of standard NSL signs even when this can only be accomplished through the support of full signers, in turn allowing such individuals to be considered *bahiro*.

In Chapter 6, "Standardization Beyond Form", I explore how the infinite multiplicity of semiotic meanings that can be derived from sign forms relates to the standardization project in Kathmandu's deaf associations, focusing in particular on the ways in which language socialization in these settings promotes not only the standardization of the formal properties of language but also explicitly attempts to standardize the wider semiotic interpretation of both the standard and non-standard forms. In so doing I consider the role of interdiscursivity in reducing the indeterminacy of semiosis. In this case, it is particularly important to consider the role of different modalities of semiosis in interdiscursive continuity. For example, many gestures are widely shared in Nepal and create links across contexts which create/reinforce certain meanings – however, without access to spoken discourse on the part of deaf (or to sign

language on the part of hearing) these alone do not necessarily structure shared interpretations or pragmatic uses of them. As a result, while deaf institutional efforts to create and enforce a standardized NSL draw on shared cultural forms, including but not limited to the quotable gestures, certain kinds of discursive instructions on the part of the deaf associations are required in the attempt to standardize semiotic interpretations of them. I describe how such instructions are conveyed in the associations.

I also note that interdiscursivity is not a process that is free of social positioning; certain actors are better positioned than others to make and promote particular connections across contexts. Sign language teachers are generally seen as authoritative figures who can validate certain such semiotic connections over others. However, certain kinds of linkages are given space for consideration, even if offered by a non-authority, because of their ideological resonance. In particular, multivalent indexical connections that can be read as supporting both the deaf school's and deaf association's framing of NSL are preferred. In this respect, just as the project to standardize NSL can accommodate a range of formal variation, efforts to standardize these wider semiotic interpretations allow for the coexistence of the distinct ideological positions adopted by each institution.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I conclude by reviewing the preceding chapters' contributions to a linguistic anthropological understanding of both language standardization in particular and language ideologies more generally, while outlining future research projects suggested by this work.

CHAPTER 2: STANDARDIZATION AND “UN-WRITABLE” LANGUAGES

Introduction

While most definitions of standardization cite written language as a vital element in a standard language project, in this chapter I will consider the extent to which this is a necessary connection. Can a language without a written form be a standard? How might such a standardization project differ from those that can objectify linguistic forms through and derive authority from writing? These are important questions in considering efforts to standardize sign languages, as to date no sign language has a widely used written form. This state of affairs has had important implications for their status (and that of their users) in contexts dominated by standard spoken languages that can locate their authority in written texts. For this reason, as in the Nepali case, many deaf institutions worldwide attempt to standardize the lexical items of their sign languages through the production of dictionaries that include pictorial representations of signed lexical items.

Though such efforts are not grounded in a written form per se, they meet what I argue are the important elements of a standardization project. First, through these pictorial representations they attempt reduce formal variation at some level of the language. This is largely a quantitative rather than qualitative difference between signed and spoken standard languages, as no written language captures all formal aspects of a given language, necessarily treating some aspects of language as important enough to record in a script and other not. A writing system affects what formal properties of a

written language are most available to standardization efforts, just as the constraints on representing signed language affects their standardization. Second, as in spoken language contexts, the standard forms enshrined in sign language dictionaries derive their authority through their social indexicality with high status speakers and not simply because of their appearance in print.⁹

As the differences between sign and spoken language standardization projects stem in large part from the fact that sign languages are not written, it is important to understand why this is the case. While many scholars have claimed that sign languages are inherently un-writable, I argue that this state of affairs is produced not by the formal properties of sign languages but by pervasive ideologies about both the nature of writing and of language more broadly. Below I support this claim through a comparison of two attempts to develop scripts for sign language notation. I demonstrate that attempts to write sign languages that are grounded in formal linguistic theory and which privilege alphabetic writing, such as Stokoe Notation, have been unsuccessful in capturing the visual grammatical constructions that characterize sign languages, while such structures can be written in Sutton Signwriting, a script that was originally developed to record dance choreography (and did not draw on ideas about language or writing in its development).

Finally, I argue that while lacking a written form does not preclude a standardization project, it can have certain effects on its formal and ideological thrusts. In the case of sign languages, the fact that their standardization projects are effectively

⁹ This is not to say that high status speakers themselves must necessarily use the standard forms, but that while a standard variety becomes most highly ranking in a linguistic system of value, these forms are linked (accurately or inaccurately) with social ranking.

limited to the level of the lexicon by the absence of a written form can limit the gate-keeping potential of a standardizing project, as this may allow a wide range of signing practice to count as standard. The inclusion of a wider range of signing practice is significant in deaf communities, where signing style and competencies vary widely according to factors such as signers' age at first exposure to an accessible language and the extent to which their signing practice has been influenced by spoken languages through formal schooling. At the same time, unwritten sign languages cannot extend into all the same domains as written standard languages, a fact that contributes to their relatively low-status position (and that of their users) in most sociolinguistic contexts¹⁰.

If the lack of a writing system allows standard sign languages to escape many of the dominating effects associated with spoken and written standard varieties, would the adoption of a writing system that can record and potentially codify a wider range of the formal properties of sign languages necessarily lead to increased gate keeping effects of standard sign languages? This raises an additional question – can there be writing without standardization? Citing the efforts to avoid this potentiality made by the growing group of deaf signers employing Sutton SignWriting, I suggest that this need not necessarily be the case, as the relationship between writing and standardization is mediated by standard language ideologies, rather than inherent in the technology itself.

¹⁰ Deaf individuals often have difficulty achieving high facility with the written forms of spoken languages that are dominant in their locales (Erting 1992). This limits their ability to access services, obtain and hold jobs. The sign languages in which they are fluent, in part because they do not have a written form, do not provide an alternative means of accessing as wide a range of jobs and services. As a result, deaf individuals often feel marginalized, even in contexts in which sign languages have ostensibly been given recognition as real languages.

Standardization without writing

Writing figures heavily in most discussions of standardization, as there is wide agreement among scholars that institutional hegemony through the control of literacy is required for the codification and dissemination of a standard language in both its formal and ideological aspects. For example, Bourdieu claims that, “in the absence of objectification in writing and especially the quasi-legal codification which is *inseparable* from the constitution of an official language, “languages” exist only in the practical state, i.e. in the form of so many linguistic habitus” (Bourdieu 1982:46 *Italics mine*). Similarly, Leonard Bloomfield distinguishes between linguistic norms (which he considers universal) and standard languages by virtue of the latter’s propagation by social institutions via writing (Bloomfield 1927).

In asserting that standard languages are an ideological construct, James and Lesley Milroy note that, “it is difficult to point to a fixed and invariant kind of English that can properly be called the standard language unless we consider only the written form to be relevant,” concluding that, “in the strictest sense, no *spoken* language can ever be fully standardized” (Milroy and Milroy 1985:22 *Italics mine*). This is because, they suggest, while a particular variety of a language is chosen to function as a standard, it is only in writing that relatively fixed formal properties can be maintained. The writing system, through authoritative books (such as dictionaries and grammars), then can be treated as the foremost model for correct linguistic usage (Milroy and Milroy 1985:27).

However, Rosina Lippi-Green, in her discussion of Standard English, argues that while the standard language ideology “names as its model the written language,” it is important to recall that it is “drawn primarily from the speech of the upper middle class”

(Lippi-Green 1997: 64). Which social grouping is indexed by a standard variety varies across contexts – while in the US, the standard language is linked to a “mainstream” upper-middle class, British standard language ideologies are based on the speech of the educated aristocracy (Milroy and Milroy 1999). In Nepal, as will be made clear in subsequent chapters, the standard NSL signs are linked to Brahmins and Chhetris, the upper caste Hindu groups previously constructed as the pinnacle of society and now recast by the government as culturally mainstream.

In all of these cases, while writing serves to promote the reduction of variation in form and to define and increase the status and prestige of a standard language, this source of authority for the variety is secondary to that derived from its social indexicality with particular groups of speakers (though this linkage may be assumed rather than actual, and can become reciprocal, as speakers can claim social authority by virtue of their use of the standard variety). I argue then, that standardization need not be exclusively linked to writing – rather, it only requires that certain forms be objectified and subjected to reduction in variation (which can be done in ways other than writing per se) and that these forms derive prestige from their indexical links to authoritative speakers.

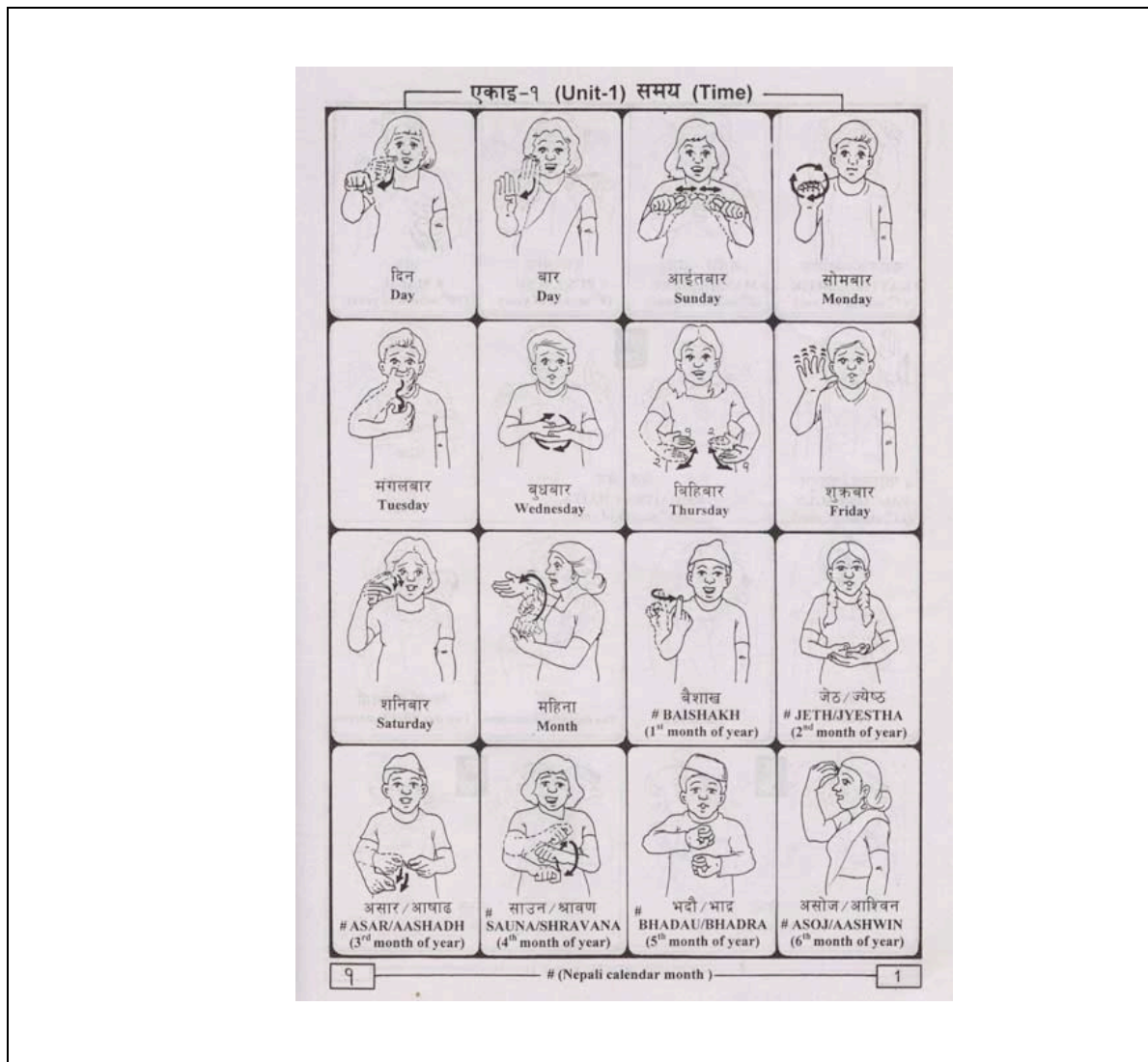
The sign language dictionary

Attempts by deaf institutions worldwide to standardize unwritten sign languages through the production of dictionaries meet these criteria: by circulating these documents within deaf social networks and through their use in deaf education, the sign language dictionaries contribute to the reduction of variation in form (at the level of the lexicon). In addition, such documents are often used to increase the status and prestige of the sign

language by selecting for inclusion those signs that are used by, or can be seen as having indexical links with, high status social groups.

While the production of dictionaries is typically a first step in efforts to standardize spoken languages as well, sign language dictionaries differ from their spoken language counterparts in several significant ways. While spoken language dictionaries link a particular word or phrase to others that describe its definition(s), spelling, uses, or etymology, sign language dictionaries uni-directionally link a given sign with a word(s) in the dominant spoken language(s) that surround the sign language in question.

Figure 1: Excerpt from the Nepali Sign Language Dictionary



In most spoken language standardization projects, this process of codifying a language in print continues in the form of creating a body of literature and expanding the functional domains in which the language can compete with other varieties. The books and documents created in this process become an important source of authority for prescription. The fact that most sign language standardization projects do not extend beyond the lexical items presented in dictionaries has two important implications. First,

by focusing efforts to reduce formal variation on the lexicon, they may allow increased variation at other levels of the language¹¹, potentially limiting the gate-keeping function of the standard. Second, because this does not allow sign languages to move into other arenas occupied by written languages, this state of affairs contributes to the relative lack of status accorded to sign languages in contexts dominated by standard spoken languages. Below, I will explore the conditions leading to and consequences of these differences.

Un-writable languages?

In exploring the differences between standardization projects for sign languages and spoken languages that have a written form, it is important to consider the reasons that sign languages are unwritten. Is there something inherent about sign languages that makes them un-writable (as some scholars have argued) and is it therefore inevitable that attempts to standardize sign languages will differ from spoken language standardization projects in terms of the forms that will be subjected to the reduction of optional variation? I argue that though there are interesting differences between spoken and sign language structure, these are not so great as to prevent sign languages from being written. Rather, that there is not a commonly used, satisfying means of writing sign languages (in either scholarly or popular use) stems from a pervasive ideology of communicative events which takes alphabetic writing to be the highest form of human communication and considers iconic representations less sophisticated (Duranti 1997; Farnell 1995), and the historical relationship between formal linguistic theory and the status accorded to sign languages.

¹¹ As will be made clear in Chapter 4, in the case of Nepali Sign Language this allows a wide range of distinct grammatical forms to co-exist within the Standard.

Below, I demonstrate this through a comparison of two major attempts to develop scripts for sign language notation/writing, Stokoe Notation (SN) and Sutton Signwriting (SSW). The former, grounded in formal linguistic theory and privileging alphabetic writing, has been ultimately unsuccessful in capturing the visual and spatial grammatical constructions that characterize sign languages, while the latter, which did not draw on theories about language or writing in its development but was originally created to record dance choreography, has been much more successful in this regard. Of course, the constraints on the development of Stokoe notation are not simply due to academic theorizing, but are also tightly intertwined with social and historical factors. To contextualize this, I will briefly point to some of the general trends in the US population's understanding of sign language that influenced, and were in turn influenced by, theories about the nature of language.

Signed languages used to be (and sometimes still are) understood through a language ideology that explicitly linked sign with a basic "pre-cultural" human nature in opposition to what was deemed the "artificiality" of spoken language (Baynton 1996:109). While this contrast was originally seen as a sign of favor for sign languages by missionaries in the nineteenth century, who forged a rhemic link between the perceived innocence or natural-ness of sign languages and their deaf users, as linguistics stressing the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign came to the fore, sign languages began to be seen as outside the province of human language, "incapable of conveying the range of thought expressed in spoken and written language" (Baynton 1996:32). This led to the highly painful suppression of sign language in deaf education in the U.S. and abroad.

Subsequently, William Stokoe's seminal work in the 1960s used linguistic theory based on the study of spoken language to analyze the structure of American Sign Language and to argue that it met the criteria for being considered a "real" language. The results of his project have been incredibly far reaching – deaf signers throughout the world cite Stokoe's research as a major factor in the social validation of their sign languages. In the course of this research, Stokoe worked to develop a means to write ASL (and potentially other sign languages). In so doing he attempted to create a script that was as like those for writing spoken language as possible. Hence, his script deliberately minimized certain semiotic aspects of the sign language while attempting to impose linearity, maintain a taxonomic approach that assumes a finite number of language units, and highlight arbitrariness¹². This was in keeping with dominant theoretical ideas about the nature of writing – for example Coulmas' insistence that the "decisive step in the development of writing is phonetization; that is, the transition from pictorial icon to phonetic symbol" (Coulmas 1989:33). Sutton Signwriting, on the other hand, was originally developed as a dance notation device. Its departure from formal linguistic theory arguably makes it more appropriate for writing sign languages because its construction was not constrained by that disciplinary perspective.

To understand these differences, I will compare the scripts in detail. Sutton Signwriting (SSW) is a visually iconic phonetic script with a feature based notation system that assigns symbols at the level of phonetic features even smaller than phonemes (Martin 2000) Like many other writing systems it is logographic in that each word is delineated from others by means of their being surrounded by a small amount of blank

¹² Of course, more recent research has questioned the extent to which linearity and arbitrariness characterize spoken languages as well.

space. It can also be described as pictographic, though it is important to note that what is pictured is the sign itself, not its referent (Martin 2000:6). It is not taxonomic, and in that it can represent any position that the hand/body can take it is not properly described as orthography, which is particular to a given language. Rather it is designed such that it can record whatever the writer sees (in this sense it has been compared to the International Phonetic Alphabet). In this respect, it deviates from other approaches that “depend on first isolating the parameters of the language, then assigning symbols for their different settings” (Martin 2000:20). It can encode facial expression, eye gaze, lip movement, body posture, and shoulder and head position (non-manual grammatical markers), all of which are necessary to convey grammatical sentences in most sign languages.

Natural signed languages, though arguably as different from one another as are distinct spoken languages (though of course, the extent to which any sort of language can be considered a discrete bounded entity can be questioned, regardless of modality), appear to share a set of features that distinguish them from spoken languages: they involve at least five parameters (movement, hand-shape, location, orientation, and non-manual grammatical markers), they cannot be fully described by taxonomic approaches (because there is not a finite number of units within any of those parameters), they are able to include more iconic images than spoken languages (though spoken languages take advantage of iconicity in a variety of ways, particularly the diagrammic), and are not as linear, in that several morphemic elements typically occur simultaneously (which is not to suggest that spoken languages are themselves as linear as was once thought¹³).

¹³ For example, see discussions of co-articulation in spoken language (Armstrong, Stokoe and Wilcox 1994; Fowler 1985; Strange 1987)

SN and SSW have attempted to deal with (or suppress) these features in different ways. A notable difference is in how hand-shape is handled: SN uses the traditional taxonomic approach by establishing a limited number of core shapes and assigning each an arbitrary symbol. These shapes were drawn from the ASL manual alphabet and number system, which is a reasonable mnemonic device for those writing ASL but makes it difficult to recruit this system for writing other signed languages (Martin 2000:13). The ASL alphabet marks it as belonging to a certain community and furthermore, some of the hand-shapes included are obscene gestures in other regions. Stokoe kept the number of symbols to 19 by conflating distinctive shapes – this limits the descriptive power and adaptability of the script by freezing into place a limited corpus of hand-shapes (Martin 2000:13).

This kind of taxonomic approach limits a script’s ability to effectively represent the kind of spatial grammar that distinguishes all recorded sign languages¹⁴. For example, in these languages pronouns are expressed with some kind of pointing movements. Depending on where the subject is (or has been grammatically “set up” to be), there are “theoretically an infinite number of places one can point to” (Martin 2000:20). Note for example, that in boxes 1 and 10 in Transcript 1 below, the pronoun “they” points directly to the dictionary entry for the group of people under discussion. However, it has been argued that this quality removes signed pronouns from the realm of language altogether—that they should be considered a gestural phenomenon distinct from language proper

¹⁴ This assertion does not include forms of manual communication such as Signed English, which are signed in the word order of the dominant spoken language. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, such codes generally do not employ spatial grammatical constructions. A pronoun in such a code would take a single fixed form and is therefore not subject to the kind of debate outlined above.

(Liddel 2000, pg. 3). It has been proposed that is through verbal dialogue that human beings constitute themselves as self and other intersubjectively (Benveniste 197:230). As "the personal pronouns 'I' and 'you' are not simply tools fabricated to label a "speaker" and "hearer" somehow existing independently of language. Therefore, to assert that signed languages are without pronouns is to separate these languages and the deaf in a fundamental (and incorrect) way from spoken languages and hearing speakers.














Transcript 1

The transcript is in two sections. The first contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals) and an English translation. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW) which reads from top to bottom, and then from left to right. Each transcript is numbered for comparison. The script is written from the receptive viewpoint and in vertical lanes that better show the use of signing space.

Context: This is the reply to a question concerning whether deaf members of the *damaai* (tailoring) *jatii* (caste) live in Kathmandu and are members of the local deaf association. The author and respondent were examining the section in the Nepali Sign Language dictionary that lists the signs for various *jatiis*. The initial and second pronoun, glossed as "they", point to the entry in the dictionary for *damaai* (tailor).



1. THEY (DEAF MEMBERS OF TAILOR *JATI*) HERE KATHMANDU NOT.
There are not any of them here in Kathmandu.
2. KATHMANDU NONE IS.
In Kathmandu there are none.
3. KATHMANDU NONE.
None in Kathmandu.
4. THEY DEAF FAR-AWAY-THERE ARE.
There are deaf ones far away from here.

Transcript 1: Sutton SignWriting

 1A. THEY	 2B. NONE	 4B. DEAF
 1B. HERE	 2C. IS	 4C. THERE
 1C. KATHMANDU	 3A. KATHMANDU	 4D. IS
 1D. NOT	 3B. NONE	
 2A. KATHMANDU	 4A. THEY	

The scripts also differ significantly in their representations of location. SN uses a number of arbitrary symbols representing different hand locations in relation to the body and to each other. These symbols are assigned arbitrary slots in the “syntax” of the representation of a given sign. In SSW, there are no separate symbols for location. Rather, in map-like fashion, SSW reproduces on small scale the physical relationships that inhere in the actual performance of the sign (Martin 2000:14) – as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The ASL sign "COFFEE" in both scripts

Stokoe Notation		Circular motion, while remaining in contact. Line over first A-hand means it is lower of two stacked hands.
Sutton SignWriting		Two fists making a circular motion. Stacked position of hands is mapped (written from the receptive viewpoint).

In addition to being a more readable way to show the makeup of a given sign, this map-like approach allows for the communication of spatial grammatical features. For example, in box 13 of Transcript 1, the distance between the body and the hand indicates the relative distance of the group of people being referred to from the signer’s location, Kathmandu. SN, on the other hand, does not have the means of representing the potentially infinite degrees of relative difference that can be meaningfully exploited by a signer. In fact, SSW has been controversial because it focuses attention on aspects of

signed language that some signers and scholars have been uncomfortable with, as they challenge conceptions of language necessarily involving a finite number of units¹⁵ (Martin 2000:20).

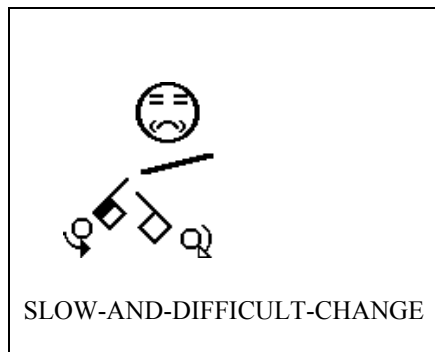
I should note that this semiotic function is not absent in spoken languages – for example in spoken Nepali, extending the vowel in the word *TaaDhaa* (far) to indicate relative distance is a well-established practice. However, this feature does not appear in the written form of the language (and is often seen as “hill” talk, backwards and rustic, not appropriate for the written form). Similarly, attempts to incorporate such prosodic forms into written English imbue the text with a distinctly non-standard feel, and encourage readers to make a variety of intended and/or unintended social judgments about the speaker. In SSW however, such features do not yet have the same social implications – as there is not a yet a body of written standard forms with which such elements can be contrasted.

Finally, it is worth commenting on the manner in which each script deals with Non-Manual Grammatical Markers – the facial expressions and body movements that mark such grammatical information as questions, relative clauses, adverbs, and reported speech in signed languages. SN in fact, does not deal with NMGs for, while Stokoe realized that they were an “integral part of the formation of a sign” he concluded that they “present many difficulties” in the development of a script (Stokoe 1978:38). So, based on a spoken language model, NMGs were treated much as prosody in spoken language – not necessary components for a script. SSW, on the other hand, can show facial expression, eye gaze, lip movement, body posture, and shoulder and head position, all of

¹⁵ Though, of course, formal linguistics stresses that these units can be combined in infinite ways.

which are necessary to convey grammatical sentences in all studied sign languages. For example, see figure 2 where the facial expression, shoulder tilt, and tension in the movement of the wrists compound the adverbial meaning “SLOW-AND-DIFFICULT” with the verb “TO-CHANGE.”

Figure 2: Non-manual grammatical marker



The limitations of SN led to Stokoe’s eventual conclusion that “theory suggests sign language cannot be written” (Stokoe 1978:18). SSW has been much more successful in representing the formal properties of sign languages in print. However, its radical nature has been a social barrier to its application. For, highlighting elements of signed languages that push the formal linguistic envelope may, to many deaf signers, seem to threaten the validation sign languages have attained through the later attentions of this discipline, and can seem a throwback to romanticized hearing conceptions of sign that stressed its difference from spoken language. Indeed, developing an orthography is as much to do with symbolically representing the social group associated with the language as representing the linguistic properties of the language itself; orthographic systems can symbolize closeness or distance between the languages they represent and their speakers. SN, though not effective in capturing the formal properties of sign languages, attempts to

imply a close relationship between sign and spoken language. In so doing however, it ultimately portrays sign languages as unwritable and therefore fundamentally different. SSW, on the other hand, seems to highlight the differences between spoken and signed languages, but in many ways underscores similarities that have recently attracted the attention of scholars (such as significant non-arbitrary features of all languages and non-linear aspects of spoken languages).

Writing, objectification, and meta-linguistic awareness

Above I have noted some of the reasons that sign languages have not been written, linking this state of affairs to pervasive ideologies about the nature of language. Below I will consider how, in turn, the fact that sign languages have not been available in written form has itself contributed to the persistence of these ideologies. To linguistic inquiry more generally, sign language studies have been recognized as offering the chance to uncover what aspects of language can be considered universal and which are dependent on modality of expression. This effort entails a broad comparison of signed and spoken languages, to see what elements survive the leap across modalities. However, while it is perhaps reasonable to make broad statements about what constitutes spoken language, as an enormous amount of descriptive linguistic work has gone into outlining and comparing different languages from around the world, the same does not apply to signed languages.

ASL has been the primary basis for understanding sign language linguistics, along with a handful of other Western sign languages. Many of the judgments about sign

languages' shared characteristics are based on these claims¹⁶. Lack of a writing system to record and analyze sign languages may help account for why there is insufficient descriptive and comparative work: it is hard to compare linguistic elements for which there is no satisfactory means of notation. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that writing systems have been crucial for the development of linguistics as we know it; consider the importance of written records for historical linguistics and the role of writing in our ability to objectify, segment, and manipulate linguistic units for analysis. Without the ability to write sign languages, a vital analytical step becomes unavailable, leaving the analysis of sign languages more open to the effects of a researcher's ideological assumptions about what it "should" look like. This situation may account in part for the broad claims about sign language in general that do not seem sufficiently supported by close analysis of a wide range of sign languages.

This is not to suggest, of course, that the analytical step of transcribing/writing somehow allows the researcher to access the language without being informed by various theoretical presuppositions; no transcription or orthographic choice is ideologically neutral (Collins 1995; Scheiffelin 1998; Kulick and Stroud 1993). Linguists as well as lay people take different ideological positions concerning what counts as language and what should be encoded in writing. As seen above, attempts to write sign languages,

¹⁶ Just because sign languages are from the same region does not mean that they are closely related. It's difficult to create the same kinds of historical relationships with signed languages as with spoken languages and many western sign languages are very structurally different despite close relationships between the spoken languages associated with the same nations. For example, ASL and BSL are much less similar than ASL and French Sign Language (Zeshan 2004). And the structural similarities that have been observed, and that I cited above when discussing SSW, seem to be present across sign languages observed in a variety of contexts. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that these claims are preliminary and not based on extensive detailed linguistic research on sign languages from many countries.

bringing ideas about language derived from linguistic theory, have been largely unsuccessful. But without having made these attempts, bringing that history of ideas to bear on languages in this modality, our attention might not have been drawn to those aspects of sign language (or spoken language) that make it difficult to write in scripts developed according to those theories. Attention to these phenomena can potentially lead to reconsideration of ideas about spoken language and thereby enrich our understanding of language more broadly.

Of course, such lack of fit may be glossed over and does not automatically overcome inappropriate assumptions about universality of language structure. Rather it is necessary that the discrepancy be noted and understood as a problem with the interpretive framework and not the language itself. For example, missionaries often imposed ideas about language derived from Latin on languages with very different structures. That the grammatical categories the linguists were familiar with did not seem to adequately describe the languages in question was more often than not seen as evidence of their poverty of the language's structure rather than a shortcoming of the theory (Duranti 1997: 125; Anderson 1985a:197; Cardona 1976:36-42). This assumption has too frequently been the explicit or implicit reaction to the distinctiveness of sign languages as well.

On the other hand, the challenges of applying old or new scripts (with their attendant theoretical presuppositions) to sign languages may point to new ideas about language— as is occurring among SSW's users. The possibilities afforded by SSW have led its users to expand their metalinguistic awareness of their signing practice, as different users opt to include different features in their writing. These experiments have led to interesting, more general questions about signing. For example, on the SSW email

list, where people involved in sign writing post questions and share sign-written material, a member recently posted a sign-written version of a well-known English nursery rhyme. She asked for general feedback from the list members, and one suggested that, as the intended audience was children, the story when signed should include appropriate prosody. In particular, it was suggested that smiles be written into the establishing sentences.

This suggestion led first to a discussion of whether or not this could be considered a necessary feature or an NMG: does the intended audience necessarily affect the formal properties of the signing? If so, is it necessary to write this? Does it matter that each person's choice and expression of prosodic forms may differ? Should each person write in this more personal way or should there be a standard approach? This in turn led to a broader discussion of what sort of facial expressions various international members of the list include in their sign-writings. At the end of this informal survey, the creator of SSW noted that the facial expressions that different deaf sign-writers chose to include in their writing were not always those that linguists might have identified as necessary NMGs.

It is my intention to be similarly reflexive in creating Nepali Sign Language transcripts for this dissertation using SSW. I hope that doing so will both provide insight into the sign language in question and help expand the form and application of SSW (and in fact, discussions I've had with SSW's creator and users about the issues I've encountered in writing NSL transcripts have led to, for example, the addition of new handshapes into the ever expanding SSW corpus). Like other sign writers, I make

decisions about what linguistic elements to include and how to write them based on my particular theoretical assumptions and my intended audience.

For example, I have made an effort to include all the facial expressions and body movements performed by signers in my transcripts, because I do not want to assume that at this stage of analysis I can clearly distinguish between those that are grammatical and those which are not (or even that this is a distinction that can be made in a completely satisfying way). In addition, because my largest audience will likely be non-signers I have chosen to write my transcripts from a receptive position (rather than the more popularly used expressive viewpoint). This is because many of my readers will not be accustomed to embodying signed communication and will most likely be more comfortable reading the scripts receptively (as they might view a video).

Writing without standardization

As I have argued above, the restricted formal focus (which is closely tied to its unwritten status) of the project to standardize NSL allows more deaf signers to access the benefits of being considered users of the standard. How do I reconcile this with my efforts to write a broader range of the formal features of NSL in the transcripts that appear in this dissertation, using SSW? By employing a script that can record the formal properties of signing practice beyond the level of the lexicon, am I necessarily beginning a process that, if taken up by leaders of the deaf institutions, would ultimately lead to a less flexible and inclusive standard form of NSL? Below I consider the inverse question to that I began the chapter with, which I will explore through an examination of the

current use of SSW by an international community of deaf signers¹⁷ – can there be writing without standardization?

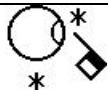
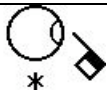
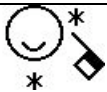
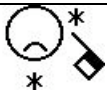

Just as literacy is almost always present in discussions of standardization, the opposite seems to hold as well. It is often claimed that, “literacy is almost never itself an isolated or absolute goal...but rather part of a process and vehicle for that process, namely nation building,” a notion perhaps most famously formulated by Benedict Anderson (Arnove and Graff 1987). A variety of scholars have noted that standard language projects are invariably associated with, and promote, social stratification (Bourdieu 1991, Milroy and Milroy 1985). However, proponents of SSW claim that it is not by design a prescriptive tool – it is neither meant to dictate which signs should be considered standard or how any sign should be written: anything within the basic framework of the system is meant to be acceptable.

I argue that the technology of writing does not lead to standardization without an ideological framework that promotes the reduction of variation. Similarly, the avoidance of standardization is not inherent in the Sutton SignWriting script, but requires the active intervention of users whose ideological motivations do not frame variation as negative. For example, on a recent discussion board, a newcomer asked for examples of words that are easy to spell in SSW vs. those that are difficult, in terms of agreement between writers about the way the sign “should look”. He suggested that the word “deaf” would be an example of an easy sign with lots of agreement. Not only is this untrue because of

¹⁷ For a discussion of why individuals choose to make the effort to write their sign languages rather than remain in a diglossic relationship with the written spoken languages that are dominant in their regions, I refer the reader to the portion of the Sutton SignWriting website that addresses this issue:
<http://www.signwriting.org/about/questions/quest0003.html>

regional variation in the way the sign is formed, but a flood of examples came in to show him the huge range of ways to write the sign that attended to wide range of contextually relevant factors, including, for example, ideological orientation of the speaker toward deafness. Some of these examples appear in figure 3 where NMGs such as facial expression and speed of movement indicate a difference (analogous to Deaf with or without a capital “D”) between D/deaf as a cultural orientation or a disability.

Figure 3: Examples of some different ways of writing the sign “DEAF” IN SSW

				
D/deaf (indicating both points of contact with emphasis on the point of contact at the ear.	D/deaf (choosing to eliminate one of the contact markers as redundant)	Deaf (as a cultural orientation signed with pride)	deaf (as a negative physical disability)	Deaf written in a particular individual’s personal style.

As seen in the previous example, when SSW is employed, for many writers there is a focus on the individual instantiation of a given lexical item, rather than on its idealized, context-free form. In this respect SSW may differ somewhat from literacies that have been described as a powerful tool for normalization because they “emancipate (their) beneficiaries from the contingency of indexical surround” (Goody and Watt 1963).¹⁸ This manner of writing also draws attention to the fact that signer output is highly variable, and highlights the fact that languages are not bounded entities.

¹⁸ Of course, all of these different kinds of factors- audience, location, affiliation with different kinds of institutions or political viewpoints, etc affect spoken language as well. Sociolinguists and lay people both know how to link formal differences in language

However, the fact that different writers, both within and across different signing communities, choose to include different elements in their sign writing could lead to higher valuation of one approach over another. For example, the online conversations mentioned above led to broader discussions that classified facial expressions according to their relationship with spoken language. One contributor noted that users of British Sign Language often mouth words along with their signs, a practice called keywording, which she notes “isn't much liked, even amongst people who habitually use it... As one of the many learners who are practicing to eradicate English lip patterns from their own BSL, I certainly wouldn't introduce it into my SignWriting¹⁹!” The response from the creator of SSW and moderator of the board was “Well, that may be one of the many differences between the two of us - smile - I do not want to eradicate anything from SL - all I want is to write what I see! “. Those running the SSW board do not dictate that writers must include elements they are uncomfortable with, nor do they agree that those elements must be excluded. In this way, they are attempting to, essentially, dictate against dictating. By the same token, however, it is also possible that SSW, when adopted by larger numbers, may lose some of its more radical implications and serve as a standardizing tool, as the ideological impetus to do so may overcome the potential to do otherwise. However, it is not clear that this *must* be the case. I am therefore opting to use SSW to write NSL in my

with these social factors. And these factors affect written language as well, though they may not make themselves as clear in this medium as they do in speech, depending on the degree to which the writer has been socialized into writing practices in institutions like schools where, generally speaking, students learn how to try to separate their prose from these aspects of the “indexical ground” (though of course they are taught to do things like take audience into consideration). For an exploration of what is involved in transposing speech to writing, see Goffman’s “The Lecture”.

¹⁹ Many individuals contributing to the SSW discussion listserv write in English or the written version of another spoken language as well as using SSW to post in their respective sign languages.

own work, hoping to be a part of the active social processes by which writing sign languages can take a positive and progressive shape.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that standardization projects, while tightly interwoven with literacy, are not fully dependent on it. After noting that unwritten sign languages can be subjected to standardization projects through the sign language dictionaries, I further argued that while lacking a written form does not preclude a standardization project, it can have certain effects on its formal and ideological thrusts. In the case of Nepali Sign Language, the fact that the standardization projects is effectively limited to the level of the lexicon by the absence of a written form may limit its potential gate-keeping effects, as this allows a wide range of signing practice to count as standard. At the same time, lacking a written form prevents standardizing sign languages from developing a body of literature and extending their functional domains. This contributes to the relatively low status accorded to sign languages and deaf signers in contexts in which they must compete with standard spoken languages that have written forms.

I also explored the extent to which this state of affairs is due to the formal properties of sign languages or to broader ideologies about the nature of language and writing. I argued that sign languages are not inherently un-writable, by demonstrating the uses of SSW, a script not grounded in formal linguistic theory. Finally in considering the potential consequences should such a script become widely used I concluded that writing does not inherently lead to standardization without the ideological motivation for it to do so.

CHAPTER 3: DEAF OR DUMB? IDEOLOGICAL MULTIPLICITY IN NEPALI MODELS OF DEAFNESS

Introduction

In Nepal, people do not generally refer to deaf individuals as *bahiro*, which translates to “deaf”. Rather, the most commonly used and easily recognized term is *latto*, which translates to “dumb” in both the literal and figurative senses. For example, when traveling through Mustang (a remote mountainous region in the north of Nepal) in search of deaf individuals, upon reaching a village or settlement I would ask the first inhabitant that I met if any deaf people were in residence. In formulating my question in Nepali, if I used the term *bahiro* I usually received a blank stare or a negative response. But if I used the term *latto* the interlocutor would immediately brighten and often reply positively, that there were “dumb” people living in the village.

This situation posed something of a problem for me – understandably, the term *latto* has become highly politicized by the deaf institutions in Kathmandu, and stands as an emblem of the larger society’s negative characterization of deafness. These groups campaign vigorously to remove the term from media accounts that focus on their activities, and using the term *bahiro* is a significant way in which an outsider can show sensitivity to their goals. Indeed, a prominent businessman who has worked with Kathmandu’s deaf organizations to provide employment for deaf members once slipped and used the term “*latto*” on a website he was developing to support the deaf associations’ activities. This mistake led to his being stringently berated by the leaders of

the deaf associations and his assistance was rejected for some time (though the breach was later forgiven).

So, in these remote villages I felt very uncomfortable using the term, even though its alternative was not locally understood. Not only could I feel the disapproval of the deaf organizations emanating from across the country, I too did not want to perpetuate the use of what is inarguably a derogatory term. However, using the word *bahiro* was getting me nowhere in my attempts to locate deaf people in Mustang. In the end, I found it necessary to use the more awkward and convoluted formulation, *kaan-na-suune manchhe* “people whose ears do not hear” supplemented occasionally with *muukh-na-bolne manchhe* “people whose mouths do not speak”. This was a relatively successful compromise.

The terms *bahiro* and *latto* are part of a complex network of conceptions of what deafness is and means in Nepal. In the following chapter, I briefly provide the historical, social, and political background necessary to understand how these coexisting and competing perspectives about the nature of deafness and sign language underpin the ideological variation in the project to standardize NSL. In particular, I outline three major models of deafness – religious, medical, and linguistic minority – at play in Nepal. While the term “model” is often used in the literature to describe different ideological positions towards deafness (c.f. Monaghan and Senghas 2002), I use the term specifically as an extrapolation of Arthur Kleinman’s (1980), concept of explanatory models; notions about illness and its treatment held by those affected and by practitioners. Kleinman developed a series of questions that doctors could ask their patients to uncover their historically and culturally grounded ways of understanding the cause(s), the timing, and processes of,

along with the desired responses to, an illness. Having elicited this information, medical practitioners can then compare patients' models with their own, in order to find culturally sensitive ways of overcoming discrepancies between the two frameworks.

I do not use Kleinman's term out of an assumption that deafness is an illness or disability, and indeed, not all of the explanatory models of deafness in Nepal identify the condition as an illness. However, Kleinman's concept is useful because it highlights the historical and cultural contingency of ideas about the nature and consequences of deafness, and is engaged with the idea that different models can interface with one another in complementary or competing ways. This is an important point to consider in Nepal, where, in many cases, deaf individuals' life trajectories involve exposure to all of these frameworks – as their families, the deaf schools, and the deaf associations typically ascribe to different models. With this in mind I will outline how these frameworks compete or coexist in different contexts. For example, while the religious and medical models are often seen as diametrically opposed (though this depends on the definition of medical in any given case), the religious and linguistic models work together in Nepal to construct the deaf as belonging to their own caste, with implications for deaf intermarriage and employment.

I will also show how the tensions between the different models can be actively exploited, as seen in the use of the deaf as multivalent symbols by a popular Nepali restaurant chain. In the case of the deaf institutions, however, this tension remains relatively covert, allowing for the coexistence of different ideological positions and grammatical forms within the overarching standardization project. The deaf schools, primarily adhering to a medical construction of the condition, see deafness as a physical

disability that they attempt to cure socially through providing access to the dominant language of the hearing population. This perspective underpins the school's pedagogical approach of performing the standard signs in the same word order and following the same morphological patterns as the spoken language. The deaf associations, on the other hand, see the deaf as a linguistic minority. The grammatical forms promoted in the association classes are quite distinct from spoken language grammar and association activities focus on securing acknowledgement of NSL's status as a distinct language. In both cases these perspectives are supported through each institution's ties to inter- (and extra) national deaf institutions that themselves promote different models of deafness.

Co-existing and competing models of deafness

There is a great deal of research addressing the existence of different models of deafness, focusing in particular on the contrast between what is often referred to as a "cultural" model of deafness and a medical, or "pathological" model (Baker and Cokely 1980). As Monaghan and Senghas point out, this is an unfortunate terminological distinction, as the medical/pathological model is in no way less culturally specific than the so-called cultural model (Monaghan and Senghas 2002). In this chapter I have attempted to produce a more fine-grained account of the different approaches to understanding deafness current in this particular ethnographic context, demonstrating both their cultural grounding and their ties to internationally dominant models.

While I use the term "models of deafness" throughout this chapter in accordance with the literature on the topic, the explanatory models I refer to should be considered ideologies about the nature of deafness, which in turn influence language ideologies about the nature of sign language(s). By outlining the multiplicity of and interactions

between these ideologies in Nepal, this dissertation adds to a body of research within linguistic anthropology that diverges from a Bourdieu-ian approach that focuses primarily on singular “legitimate languages”. By attending to the multiple ideological perspectives within a given sociolinguistic context, such work is well positioned to examine the manner in which their co-existence leads to contention and/or accommodation, and the forms and results of these points of ideological contact (Jaffe 1999, Kroskrity 1999, Collins 1998).

While outlining the historical and political grounding of each of these ideologies of deafness, I link the relationships between these models to interactions between individuals and institutions at a variety of levels, including the contact between people within the Nepali state, the Nepali state with other nations, and various national, inter-, and extra- national institutions that concern themselves with the deaf. In this respect, my research contributes to anthropological work that attends to both the local and global dimensions of social relations (Appadurai 1991, 1996; Wolf 1982). This focus is arguably particularly important in the study of deaf social life, to which educational institutions employing various internationally transmitted pedagogical approaches are central. While interesting work taking these perspectives is beginning to appear, on the whole there are very few extended ethnographic studies of deaf social life outside of the United States and even fewer that examine the relationships between such sites (these include Bagga-Gupta and Domfors 2003; Senghas 2003). In this dissertation I aim to contribute to research that works to correct this balance.

The religious model of deafness

It's no sin that I'm disabled.

It's not a crime that you are lame and you can't blame me that I am deaf.

These two eyes of mine do the work of my ears. Two hands of mine are like my voice.

I study from my heart and I see the world through my heart.

It's not a crime if I am disabled. You can't blame me that I am deaf.

(Poem by Ramprasad Adhikari Dhading 1998. Original in Nepali, translated by Manisha Adhikari and Erika Hoffmann)

As noted in Chapter 1, through the Nepali state's interventions, Hindu concepts have provided a dominant framework for understanding the country's social groups. Within this model deafness is seen as the result of the affected individuals' bad karma (the results of negative misdeeds in a previous life) or as the result of witchcraft or a curse. These causes are not mutually exclusive – an individual can be more susceptible to being cursed if their negative karma attracts this kind of mishap. In this framework, one of the most important consequences of deafness is the ritual pollution that attends the condition. Pollution has been an important idiom for constructing the relative status of both social groups and individuals in Nepal, taking on three broad types: that incurred by death, birth, or miscarriage; that associated with contact with various objects, including cooking utensils and parts of the body; and that associated with contact with various substances, bodily and otherwise, including food and water (Cameron 1998:7). The process of living inherently involves exposure to such objects, substances, and life experiences and therefore people of all caste rankings must continually manage and mitigate these polluting effects. Because the consequences of one's involvement in purity

and impurity are borne out in terms of sin and karma (Glucklich 1984), mismanagement of incidental pollution in one life may result in rebirth as an inherently polluted and low status person.

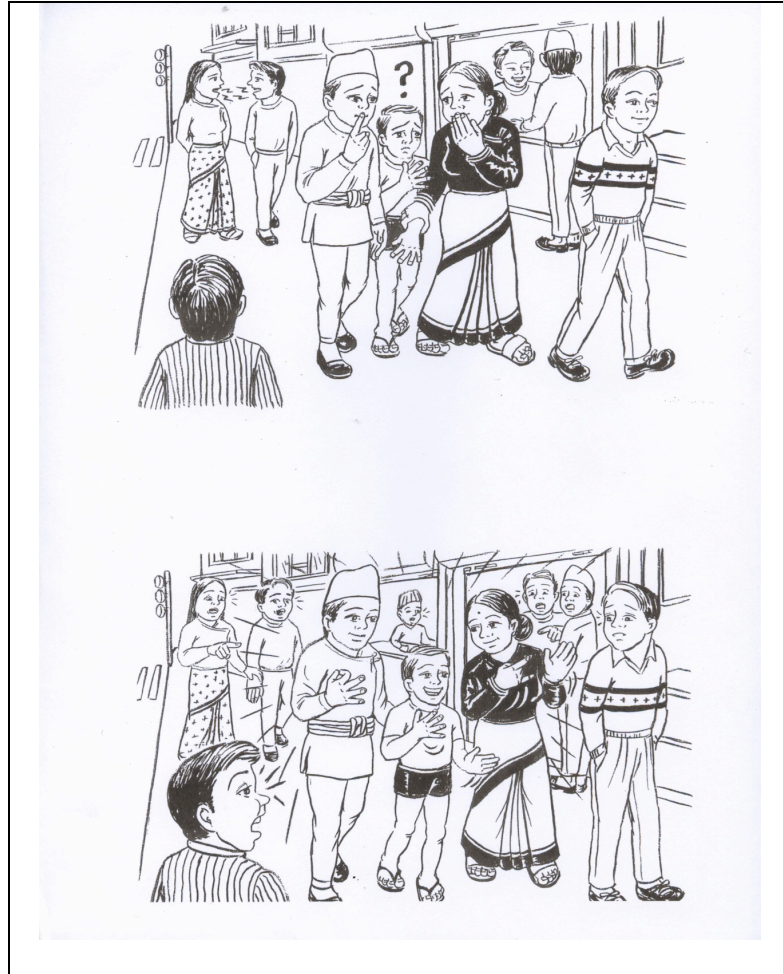
As this suggests, the concept of pollution, and its attendant stigma, also applies in a more general way to entire sets of people, such as members of lower castes and the deaf. Because of their inherent pollution, which is ascribed to moral or karmic failings, the deaf are seen as physically different, aberrant in character, and are associated with and themselves make up an undesirable social category. In this respect, deaf Nepalis experience all of the forms of stigma in Erving Goffman's typology, which describes stigma of three primary types: that based on physical disfigurement, aberrations of character and/or personality, and undesirable social category membership (Goffman 1963).

What are the consequences of this stigma? While this is by no means universal, in many cases deaf individuals in Nepal can be abused, mistreated, or neglected by their birth families and surrounding communities. In part this is because, in accordance with the porous nature of the individual in much of South Asian thought, the pollution and shame that can be associated with deafness does not apply only to the deaf family member, but is shared by the wider family group. Indeed, the hearing principal of a large deaf school in Kathmandu recalls that when she first began to work with the deaf, she was chastised and even shunned by some friends and family members who were concerned that their pollution might affect her (and by proxy, them). For this reason, families often work to hide the fact of a child's deafness. In rural areas deaf children spend much of their time herding livestock or gathering wood, tasks that purposefully

keep them out in the hills and away from the family and village center. These practices can compound the effects of their linguistic and social isolation. In other cases, deaf children are hidden within the home – though families often risk a public display of deafness by taking the afflicted member to priests or *jhankris* (often translated as shamans) in hopes that the curse might be lifted.

The deaf organizations in Nepal position themselves directly in opposition to this view of deafness. For example, Pratigya Shakya, a deaf Nepali artist, has created a manuscript of illustrations that juxtapose responses to deafness based on religious perspectives with alternative models. In the example below, the first panel depicts hearing parents and a deaf child walking in public. The parents are preventing the child from making sounds or attempting to communicate manually, so that passersby will not observe the fact of his deafness. In the second panel, the parents are depicted as both allowing the deaf child to communicate in a manner that visibly marks him as deaf and responding to him manually, risking being mistaken for deaf themselves and thereby braving the possibility that the broader community will consider them ritually polluted. Indeed, the onlookers are depicted as looking shocked and concerned, but the smiling family ignores them.

Figure 4: Illustration by Pratigya Shakya



Rejection of a religious model of deafness does not necessarily entail rejection of Hinduism however. While many other groups in Nepal that have traditionally been discriminated against based on Hindu principles (“tribal”, Tibetan, other ethnic or indigenous groups given low ranking in the Muluki Ain, for example) encourage their politically active members to reject Hinduism and to boycott its major festivals, the Nepali deaf associations have not followed this pattern. For example, many ethnic

groups who protest their oppression under a Hindu system have begun to boycott Dasain, the country's major holiday celebration, as it is connected to hegemonic Hindu myths. But while the festival has been a means of reinforcing state power throughout the country, it is also a time when Nepalis visit their families, receive blessings from elders, and reaffirm their position within their household and kin networks. As a result, the multivalency of Dasain makes it difficult for many members of such groups to keep the boycott (Hangen 2005).

For the deaf, however, reaffirming their social position within their families can be a painful proposition. I have attended many religious celebrations in the homes of deaf individuals and noted that they do not always occupy the ritual positions they otherwise might. For example, a deaf eldest son might lose his place in a holiday ritual to a younger, hearing brother. Kiran Acharya, a leader in the deaf associations further notes that, "when a deaf person receives *tikka* (a blessing) from his or her father-in-law, he or she is unable to hear the blessings that are uttered. As a result, these blessings cannot work" (Acharya n.d.). Therefore, it is interesting that politically active deaf Nepalis do not boycott the festival, as it not only reinforces a religious tradition that has portrayed them as polluted, but can also be a very difficult time for those who have been ejected from or hold a very low status within their birth families. Rather, the association's position is that if a deaf person's hearing family would both accept their condition and learn sign language, then the Dasain festival blessings could be effective. Indeed, as the use of sign language by a hearing patriarch indexes acceptance of the deaf person's condition, delivering it in a visual modality does change the condition of the blessing. I

have had the pleasure of witnessing holiday celebrations in deaf homes in which this was the case as well.

The medical model of deafness

The deaf institutions resist the religious model for deafness by linking it to “backward thoughts” and a Muluki Ain era conception of social relations. In particular, they note that adherents of this view display a lack of the development, or *bikash*, that has been heavily promoted during the post-Rana era. For example, in discussing the negative impact of the religious model on deaf life in Nepal, Acharya uses words like “traditional” and “conservative” in a critical sense to describe those who approach deafness from a religious perspective. He concludes by noting that this approach led to the deaf being “discarded” from the “productive society” that all post-Rana Nepali governments have ostensibly worked to create (Acharya n.d.).

This rhetoric of development is linked to the interface between the Nepali government and the huge international aid presence in Nepal since the fall of the Ranas in 1951. The aid pipeline is a major source of cash in the country, enriching those who can control its flow, and the Shah government (during the Panchayat era and afterwards) has been deeply involved in mediating aid projects both financially and ideologically. In fact, Queen Ratna (second wife of King Mahendra, King Birendra’s father and predecessor) was vitally involved in early internationally funded programs that established the first classes for the deaf in Nepali in 1966. This first proto-school was held in two rooms in the Bir Hospital compound in Kathmandu. As is suggested by the fact that the classes were held in a hospital, international aid organizations such as the Peace Corps had been effective in introducing a “medical model” for understanding

deafness in some circles. This shift was marked in large part by the efforts of such organizations to communicate a message, taken up by the Nepali deaf institutions, that deafness has a medical basis *not implicated* in the workings of karma.

The medical model and the religious model described above are by no means utterly discrete, though the deaf institutions often treat them as two directly opposed alternatives. In all of the life stories I have collected in my research the deaf teller makes a definite claim about the biomedical cause of their condition. These include, for example, an infection from being fed bottled milk by a family member, an infection from falling into a *chaarpi* (a pit latrine) as a toddler, falling from a tree or being crushed by a large bale of grass, typhoid, otitis media (an infection of the middle ear often called “glue ear” because of the puss it produces), and so forth. Accounts I have collected from hearing family members, on the other hand, typically attribute the cause of deafness to god’s will, karma, or a curse. However, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive interpretations. When pressed, a hearing parent will generally be more specific about the manner in which god’s will, karma, or the curse manifested themselves – through the child’s being afflicted with an illness or an accident befalling them. This does not go both ways; deaf individuals who are members of deaf social networks are typically not willing to suggest that karma or god’s will played a hand in their illness or accident.

However, while the narratives told by members of deaf social circles usually group events like visits to *jhankris* and priests in the portion of the story that discusses hearing family’s interpretation of deafness as a spiritual curse, it is analytically difficult to treat the activities of religious healers as non-medical. While there is a distinction between such practitioners and biomedical doctors in Nepal, as in much of South Asia

most Nepalis are pragmatic and eclectic in their approaches to treating illness (Marriott 1955; Amarasingham 1980; Nichter 1978). Indeed, in most of the narratives I have collected, hearing families seeking to cure their child's deafness visited both religious healers and biomedical practitioners. The order in which such specialists are consulted however, can be significant.

The way a given family will interpret a member's deafness is connected to their social class, status, and geographical location. In Kathmandu, for example, biomedicine is considered the most effective cure for many kinds of afflictions. In large part this is because of its status as an expensive, foreign, and modern style of treatment. However, because of this expense, home remedies are the first line of defense for most families. In treating hearing loss such remedies often include vigorously cleaning out the ear and probing its interior (which can in fact make deafness resulting from illness or an accident more profound). What type of specialist a given family then turns to depends on geographical and social location. Because it is less affordable, access to the biomedical construction of deafness, in which hearing loss is seen as a morally neutral disability, can be a last resort or inaccessible to some families of deaf children – hence, in many of the life stories I have been told the arc begins with religious practitioners.

For example, in transcript 2 below, a deaf woman from a rural area describes how she came to enter deaf social life. Having been born deaf, her parents first took her to many different temples in hopes of restoring her hearing. Finally, as no results were forthcoming, it was necessary to give up on this approach. It was only much later, when she was seven years old, that her parents were able to take her to Kathmandu for biomedical treatment. While the doctor thought that she might have some residual

hearing that could be amplified through hearing aids, her deafness was too profound to be “cured” through this route either. Eventually, she was transferred from a hearing school to a deaf class in a city in southern Nepal, where she was able to interact with other deaf individuals and acquire sign. Even in life stories told by deaf individuals who were first taken to a biomedical doctor however, when this did not result in a cure, in many cases the family subsequently sought the aid of religious practitioners who attempted to address what is seen as the moral root of the problem. An example of this arc appears in Transcript 3.

Transcript 2

The following transcript is in two sections. The first section contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals) and an English translation. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). Each section is numbered for comparison. The script is written from the receptive viewpoint and in vertical lanes that better show the use of signing space.

1. GROWING-UP I BORN DEAF

Growing up, I was born deaf.

2. PARENTS OWN RELIGION WENT-TO-MANY-PLACES BECAUSE WANT I HEAR

My parents took me to many of our religion's places because they wanted me to hear.

3. TAKE GOD HELP-ME

To take god's help for me.

4. FATHER SEE SAD QUIT

My father saw (it wasn't working) and sadly quit.

5. AGE 7 KATHMANDU CAME

At age 7 I came to Kathmandu.


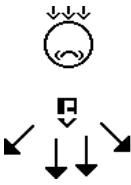




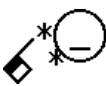

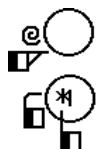


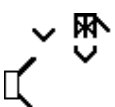


6. PARENTS GO-TOGETHER DOCTOR

I went together with my parents to a doctor.

7. EAR SHUT

(But) my ear was shut.

Transcript 2: Sutton SignWriting

 <p>1A. GROWING-UP</p>	 <p>2D. WENT-TO-MANY-PLACES</p>
 <p>1B. 1</p>	 <p>2E. BECAUSE</p>
 <p>1C. BORN</p>	 <p>2F. WANT</p>
 <p>1D. DEAF</p>	 <p>2G. I</p>
 <p>2A. PARENTS</p>	 <p>2H. HEAR</p>
 <p>2B. OWN</p>	 <p>3A. TAKE</p>
 <p>2C. RELIGION</p>	 <p>3B. GOD</p>

Transcript 2: Sutton SignWriting continued:

<p>3C. HELP-ME</p>	<p>4C. KATHMANDU</p>
<p>4A. FATHER</p>	<p>4D. CAME</p>
<p>4B. SEE</p>	<p>5A. PARENTS</p>
<p>4C. SAD</p>	<p>5B. WENT-TOGETHER</p>
<p>4D. QUIT</p>	<p>5C. DOCTOR</p>
<p>4A. AGE</p>	<p>6A. EAR</p>
<p>4B. SEVEN</p>	<p>6B. SHUT</p>

Transcript 3

The following transcript is in two sections. The first section contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals) and an English translation. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). Each section is numbered for comparison. The script is written from the receptive viewpoint and in vertical lanes that better show the use of signing space.

1. I HEARING SHUT SICK.

I was sick and my hearing shut.

2. EAR REPEATEDLY-DRAINED PUSS.

Puss kept draining from my ear.

3. DOCTOR WENT-TO-MANY.

I went to many doctors.

4. TOOK-MEDICINE.

I took medicine.

5. EAR CLEAN NOT.

But it did not clean my ear.

6. FIRST.

This was first.



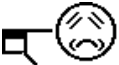
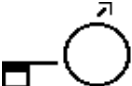


7. SECOND, THEN WENT-REPEATEDLY PUJA TEMPLE GOD g-o-d GAVE-OFFERINGS I-WENT PRAYED

Second, we repeatedly went to do puja at the temples, giving offerings to god. I went and prayed.

8. I HEAR NOT

I did not hear.



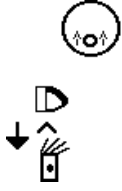

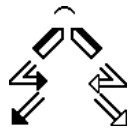

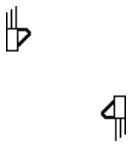
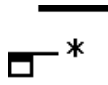
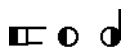
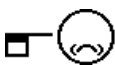

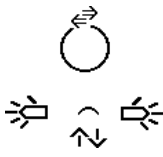
Transcript 3: Sutton SignWriting

<p>1A. I</p> 	<p>1D. SICK</p> 
<p>1B.EAR</p> 	<p>2A. EAR</p> 
<p>1C. SHUT</p> 	<p>2B. REPEATEDLY-DRAINED</p> 

Transcript 3: Sutton SignWriting continued

<p>2C. PUSS</p>	<p>4B. CLEAN</p>
<p>3A. DOCTOR</p>	<p>4C. NOT</p>
<p>3B. WENT-TO-MANY</p>	<p>5A. FIRST</p>
<p>3C. TOOK- MEDICINE</p>	<p>6A. SECOND</p>
<p>4A. EAR</p>	<p>6B. THEN</p>

Transcript 3: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>6C. WENT-REPEATEDLY</p>	 <p>7A. I</p>
 <p>6D. PUJA</p>	 <p>7B. WENT</p>
 <p>6E. TEMPLE</p>	 <p>7C. PRAYED</p>
 <p>6F. GOD</p>	 <p>8A. I</p>
 <p>6G. g-o-d</p>	 <p>8B. HEAR</p>
 <p>6H. GAVE-OFFERINGS</p>	 <p>8C. NOT</p>

While biomedical treatment is often considered the most prestigious, this is not a unified symbolic marketplace. Religious healers are more affordable than biomedical practitioners and assert a moral contrast between their practices on this basis. Hence, the deaf are caught up in competing forms of morality; those associated with religious healing on the one hand, wherein the practitioners are seen as moral but the deaf patients are marked as immoral or polluted by their physical difference, and those associated with biomedical healing, wherein practitioners can be seen as grasping and immoral but within which the deaf patients are seen as absolved of moral responsibility for their condition.

However, the biomedical model still constructs deafness itself as negative. While deaf individuals may be supported in what is seen as their struggle to cope with a disability, deafness is constructed as an undesirable condition, an illness to be cured. In cases in which medical intervention or the application of hearing aids is not successful in doing so, educators who adhere to this model typically attempt to mitigate the resulting disability through oralist procedures – attempting to teach a deaf person to speak and read lips. Hence, even after the first classes for the deaf were expanded and moved to a schoolhouse, their focus remained on oralism in attempting to allow the deaf students to function analogously to, or ideally pass as, hearing persons in order to “cure” their deafness socially if not physically.

In such contexts the use of sign language is often strictly discouraged, and the first Nepali schools for the deaf were no exception. As Acharya notes, “The teachers working at the instruction center did not allow the deaf students to communicate or study using sign language. In order to suppress their natural tendency to communicate in a manual manner, the teachers would scold them, hold their hands down, twist their ears,

pull their hair, etc. This done in an effort to channel their efforts towards communicating with sounds, unnatural for deaf people” (Acharya n.d.). Eventually, following trends in international deaf education, Nepal’s schools for the deaf adopted the Total Communication approach, which allows signing in the classrooms. However, the form of this signing is based on Nepali spoken language grammar, which remains the target language in this model.

The Linguistic model of deafness

The biomedical model provided a platform from which deaf individuals in Nepal could resist the dominant religious paradigm that constructs their hearing loss as a marker of moral lack. It also led to the establishment of the first deaf schools that brought deaf individuals into social contact. However, heavy use of a medical model that constructs deafness as an illness or disability is at odds with the current perspectives of many international deaf organizations, where it is the medical understanding of deafness that is seen as oppressive and problematic. This approach has increasingly influenced the understanding of deafness in Nepal’s deaf associations, which receive funding and support from international deaf associations (particularly those based in Scandinavia). Within this model, the initial cause of deafness is often still attributed to medical reasons, but the resulting deafness is not construed as an illness or disability. Instead, the deaf are seen as a linguistic minority group, who are as functional as any other social group so long as they have access to a sign language.

This construction of deafness was initially not acceptable to the Nepali government. When the first graduates of the deaf school attempted to register their newly formed deaf association with the Panchayat government in 1980, they were turned down.

Despite having been declared illegitimate by the government, the group continued to grow in numbers and after the Jana Andolan of 1990, when expanded political freedoms were granted to the Nepali citizens, the Kathmandu Association of the Deaf became the first legally established deaf association in Nepal. Indeed, the leaders of the Nepali deaf organizations very explicitly link the status of the deaf in Nepal with the political history of the nation:

In Nepal, perhaps sign language would have developed more than 150 years ago. There were deaf people born at that time too but together with the political corruption of the country the sign language of deaf people was extinct. At the time of 104 years of the Rana regime there were no educational opportunities for even hearing people, so let us not imagine the dire situation for the deaf. After that, even during the 30 years of Panchayat regime there was no opportunity for Nepali deaf to make sign language flourish. So much so that (the Panchayat) did not even recognize fledgling deaf organizations and associations. The deaf simply wanted to develop organizations to enable their community to contribute as a human resource to the country's development. But that era's dark regime didn't pay attention to this fact and seemed committed to keep the deaf in shadow. The success of the historic People's Movement in 2046 opened up the door of freedom for the deaf people too. Together with the advent of democracy, the Kathmandu Association of the Deaf got recognition from the government and was established in 2047 Asar. After this, deaf Nepalis had the opportunity to develop Nepali Sign Language from fingerspelling to the language itself. This process still continues. In this way the suffocation in the hearts of deaf people from the Rana regime through the autocratic Panchayat regime began to be relieved. These political milestones were also milestones for the deaf community (Acharya n.d.).

One of the important distinctions introduced into Nepal by international deaf organizations at this time, and taken up by the newly official local deaf association, was the differentiation between the inability to hear and self-identification as a member of a signing community. While in much of the literature concerning American deaf communities a terminological distinction is made between deaf and Deaf (the uncapitalized spelling referring only to the fact of audiological impairment and the

capitalized version indicating self-identification as a member of a signing community), in his history of the deaf in Nepal Kiran Acharya distinguishes instead between the two terms most broadly applied to the deaf in Nepal: *latto* (dumb) and *bahiro* (deaf). Like the d/Deaf distinction, the important difference between these terms hinges, he claims, not on the physicality of one's condition but on the ability to communicate effectively:

“The derogatory term "*latto*" (dumb) is used to describe the deaf in Nepali society. However, in a situation in which a conversation is ongoing between deaf signers, a hearing onlooker who does not know sign language is themselves *latto*. Therefore, the status of being *latto* actually depends on the ability to communicate and not on sensory ability per se” (Acharya n.d.).

Several important questions are raised by his definition of *bahiro*: first, where does this leave homesigners (individuals who, isolated from an accessible language past the critical age for language acquisition, may be highly constrained in their ability to acquire signed or spoken language)? Under this rubric, can profoundly deaf homesigners who face significant difficulties in acquiring the forms of NSL be considered *bahiro*, or must they be considered *latto*? This question will be explored further in Chapter 5. Second, in linking *bahiro* status with use of a particular language, NSL, this stance aligns the deaf with other linguistic minorities in Nepal. As deaf individuals in Nepal have increasingly constituted themselves as a distinct cultural group, defined primarily by a shared language, and have found marriage partners and employment on the basis of their deafness, they can increasingly be construed as belonging to a deaf caste or *jati*. Here, just as the religious and medical models of deafness can shade into one another in Nepal, the linguistic minority model interacts in complicated ways with the religious model.

The term *jati* refers to a ranked endogamous group, often associated with a particular occupation. Though “caste” is the gloss most frequently used in writing about

the concept in English, the term is most closely translated as “species” and implies that the persons or objects to which it is applied have a shared essence. While castes are thought of as essential and primordial, as my discussion of the Muluki Ain in Chapter 1 demonstrated, assignment to a particular caste is socially and historically mediated. While the Muluki Ain and the use of caste as a governmentally sanctioned method of structuring relations has been banned in Nepal since 1963, in practice caste identity remains extremely salient and continues to be used by the government to identify what it considers distinct social or ethnic groups within the country.

The Shah government classified *jatis* on linguistic grounds – as such, a claim to a distinct language became the vehicle through which an ethnic group or caste could make its presence known to the polity (Guneratne 1998:765). Hence, in linking *bahiro* status with use of a particular language, NSL, the linguistic minority construction of deafness aligns the deaf with other linguistic minorities in Nepal. The designation of *jati* does not solely hinge on language however, but also entails particular kinds of social reproduction, including intermarriage and inherited occupation. Below, I outline how these other important features contribute to an emerging construction of deafness as a caste that stems from the intermingling of the religious and linguistic minority understandings of deafness.

Deaf (inter)marriage

Endogamy is one of the defining features of caste relations, and along with rules for commensality, is one of the primary means of maintaining the social distinction between castes (Levine 1987). Married people in general are particularly prone to ritual pollution because of the nature of householder responsibilities (eating, sex, reproduction

– activities rife with the potential to produce and transmit impurity). Furthermore, the porous nature of the individual makes marriage an important site for the transmission of pollution between both partners and entire households. In a cross-caste marriage these activities produce even greater pollution, further endangering both the couple and those with whom they cohabit.

It can be problematic for similar reasons for a deaf person to marry through normal channels. If a deaf person is constructed as inherently polluted, it can be difficult to locate a “normal” person of the same caste with whom to enter into marriage precisely because it is such an important site for the transmission of pollution. Marrying a deaf child to someone of a lower birth caste, perhaps an easier bargain to strike, is also problematic because of the need to maintain caste endogamy. Nevertheless, deaf marriages with hearing individuals from their birth castes do occur, for a variety of reasons. In some cases there may be something “wrong” with the hearing partner, such that the families consider the match a good compromise. For example, in one of my interviews a deaf informant notes that his wife is several years older than he is, and was perhaps reaching the age at which she would no longer be considered marriageable when their union was arranged. In some cases a family is willing to marry a deaf partner to a hearing person of a lower caste, but one that is “close enough” under the circumstances. In other cases, the family of the deaf individual is of such high status, position, or wealth, that these advantages can override the problem of the hearing loss. Finally, sometimes both families reject the notion that deafness indexes inherent pollution.

Deaf individuals are not always particularly happy with this kind of arrangement however. It’s very rare that a hearing spouse learns Nepali Sign Language and becomes a

part of deaf social life. As Acharya notes, “If a hearing man is married to a deaf girl (or vice versa), he or she may not want to talk with his/her spouse. For example, if the hearing person was seen to be conversing with sign, others might see this and mock him/her for being married to a deaf person. This kind of social pressure can also make the deaf person become shy and introverted, and their feelings can be suppressed” (Acharya n.d.). As a result, the hearing spouse typically interacts with the hearing members of the family much more than with the deaf spouse. Marriage in Nepal generally focuses on relations between family groups living in extended households, rather than focusing on the individual relationship between the husband and wife. Deaf individuals report that this often increases their sense of isolation within hearing households – and many male members of the deaf associations who have hearing wives live away from their spouse and family in a rented apartment in the city. Given gender dynamics in Nepal, this is not typically an option for deaf women with hearing husbands. As a result, they are sometimes pulled away from deaf social networks after marriage – a fact that they greatly lament.

For these reasons, intermarriage between deaf individuals is very common among participants in deaf social life. The ideal in these cases is to find a suitable deaf marriage partner from a compatible caste, and indeed this does characterize most of the deaf intermarriages in Kathmandu. For example, one deaf man explained that he insisted to his family that he would only marry another deaf person – however, not having any particular individual in mind he allowed them to scour their own caste network for a deaf woman of the appropriate Newar caste. They were able to find several suitable deaf girls from the correct social group, and he chose from among them. As a result, the couple

remained within the joint family system, living in the deaf husband's ancestral home. While the hearing members of this family are not fluent in sign language, the deaf husband is able to translate effectively from the NSL that he and his wife use together, to the system of homesigns he had constructed over the years with his immediate family. The couple now has a hearing son, who is fluent in NSL, Newari, and Nepal and who facilitates much of the communication within the family group.

In some cases, when a hearing family will not take the trouble to locate a deaf person of the appropriate caste, the leaders of the deaf association may (with some reluctance) step in. For example, a young deaf woman from a remote region in western Nepal with whom I was acquainted, who had spent a year in Kathmandu learning NSL and tailoring skills, felt isolated once she returned to her birth village. As a result, she decided to elope with a young deaf man not approved of by her family, and the couple returned to Kathmandu. However, he robbed and abandoned her in the city, at which point she came to the deaf association for assistance. The leaders were deeply concerned about her situation – while they didn't want to return her to her home unmarried, where she would be in a state of shame, they did not feel they could personally take on the responsibility of supporting her in the city. Finally, they decided to assist her by locating a suitable marriage partner in Kathmandu.

They found an unmarried deaf homesigner who, though not particularly fluent in NSL, was gainfully employed as an electrician. While not of the exact caste as the deaf girl, the match was close enough, and acceptable to his family, with whom the couple would reside. He was not entirely sure that he wanted to marry, but was willing to consider the match when he was approached by the leaders of the deaf association.

Typically, a young man's parents would first show him a photograph of a prospective bride and then arrange a formal meeting if he wanted to proceed. In this case, as those organizing the match lacked a photograph of the woman, I was recruited to briefly film her and then (with her permission) show the footage to the potential groom.

Several days later, a formal meeting was arranged and I was invited to attend as, by helping with the pre-viewing by videotaping the woman, I had been drawn into the matchmaking circle. The deaf association was filled with onlookers, excited that a marriage between deaf individuals was in the making. For privacy the potential couple, the president of the deaf association, a female deaf teacher, and I adjourned into the president's office and firmly shut the door. The potential bride and groom were extremely nervous and declined to sign directly to one another. In fact, the only explicit comment either made about the other was the deaf woman's slightly panicked comment: "He looks old!" Fortunately, it did not appear that the potential groom observed this statement.

This event parallels a "normal" engagement procedure in many ways, except that the leaders of the deaf institution acted as the girl's parents. However, the hearing families were not cut completely out of the process - the groom's family was consulted first and, after the viewing was completed, a member of the association escorted the deaf woman back to her home village, where the proposed marriage would be explained to her family. When I last left the field she had not yet returned, and there was a great deal of anticipation about the possibility that the match would go through (but also concern on the part of the deaf leaders that they might be made financially and ritually responsible to contribute to the wedding).

Not all deaf intermarriages cleave so closely to broader social patterns however. While marrying across caste boundaries carries social risks, it can also serve to redefine the limits of a particular caste. Similarly, many deaf people from vastly different castes have, after coming to know one another in deaf schools, chosen to elope – a practice which contributes to the emerging conception of the deaf as their own caste. Such marriages particularly challenge social conventions when the members of the couple are from widely separated social groups, as in marriages between caste Hindus and Tibeto-Burman Buddhists. In one such case with which I am familiar the couple was firmly ejected from both of their social groups and, moving to an urban center away from both families, attached themselves to the local deaf association and allowed this social network to replace those they had lost. Their hearing son is growing up as part of the deaf community and, as he is a native signer, could be considered *bahiro* according to the Acharya's definition of the term. Indeed, because this family group no longer had attachments to their hearing families, there was no other social group into which the child could be socialized.

In another case, also involving marriage between a caste Hindu woman and a Tibeto-Burman man, the couple has been tentatively accepted by their families (after a period of extreme conflict), but are planning to settle on their own in an urban center. When they visited the Kathmandu Association of the Deaf to share this news they were feted and applauded by the members. It's important that in each of these cases the couple was able to escape some of the negative consequences of their socially unacceptable marriage by relocating to urban areas where deaf social networks could at least partially replace those they had left behind. However, it remains to be seen whether any children

they produce will, if hearing, be incorporated into their hearing families' social networks and, if so, which side of the family will incorporate them²⁰.

Table 2: Marriage status of 39 members of the deaf association

IV. Hearing status	V. Cross-caste	VI. Same caste
VII. Deaf intermarriage	7	11
Deaf and hearing marriage	3	6
Unmarried past typical age for marriage: 12		

The marriages I have recorded as cross-caste in the table above refer to unions across widely separated social categories (rather than the more common Brahmin/Chetri unions). The continued resistance to cross-caste deaf marriage demonstrates that deaf individuals are not entirely constructed as a separate caste by their hearing families. If this were so, deaf inter-marriage would not be considered controversial even in cases in which the partners came from different birth castes. However, as the linguistic minority model of deafness has become more widespread, its interface with the religious model seems to be working to make deaf intermarriage (and the attendant notion of a deaf caste) increasingly common and acceptable. At the same time however, cross-caste marriage in general is becoming more common and acceptable in Kathmandu. This may work to change the ways in which marriage relates to the constitution of *jati*.

²⁰ This is an interesting question I plan to explore in future research, as increasing numbers of deaf couples from different birth *jatis* have children. As I have mentioned above, deaf social life can be considered a recruitment culture because its members are typically not born into deaf social networks but must encounter them later in life. As deaf individuals marry however, some individuals are born into deaf social networks. Because deafness is not usually hereditary in Nepal, however, such children are typically hearing. The status of such individuals is not always clear, but will provide an interesting view of the changing models of deafness used by both deaf and hearing Nepalis.

Deafness, caste, and employment

There can be serious financial consequences for leaving or being ejected from one's birth caste in a society in which employment is typically either inherited (by caste) or obtained via family connections. In order to survive in such cases, deaf individuals frequently must perform labor that marks them explicitly as low caste. For this reason, it can appear that deafness is largely a phenomenon of the low castes, which further reinforces its association with pollution and punishment, though this state of affairs does not manifest itself via birth patterns but must be actively produced.

Interestingly, in attempting to train their members in job skills, one of the deaf associations' primary areas of focus is to instruct them in tailoring, typically a lower caste inherited occupation. When I asked a prominent member of the deaf association about the possible image problems this might create, or whether this sort of occupational shift might reinforce the association between deafness and low-caste status, he began by saying that caste differences are no longer important in Nepal, though they were divisive "long ago". He said that low-caste people, if they are able to study and obtain a degree, abandon their traditional occupations and hence, occupation and caste no longer map cleanly onto one another. When I asked then, if it would be strange for a deaf Brahmin to enter a deaf occupational program that teaches tailoring he made the comments represented in Transcript 4 below.

Transcript 4

The following transcript is in two sections. The first section contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals) and an English translation. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). Each transcript is numbered for comparison. The script is written from the receptive viewpoint and in vertical lanes that better show the use of signing space.

1. SIGN DEAF BRAHMIN I SEW.

If I were a deaf signing Brahmin, I'd sew.

2. WANT WORK FOOD HUNGRY – WHAT-TO-DO?

If wanted work and food and was hungry – what-to-do?

3. SEWING.

Sewing.

4. GO STUDY GET WORK SEW

I'd go study and get work sewing.

5. I -

I –

6. IS!

There is!

7. THERE GORKHA IS ONE DEAF BRAHMIN SEW MONEY SELL PROFIT.

In Gorkha there is one deaf Brahmin tailor who sews, sells and profits financially!

8. DEAF IS.

He is deaf!








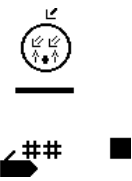

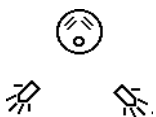
9. Surprised!

I was surprised!







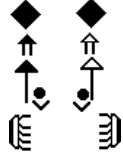


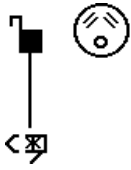
10. BRAHMIN!

A Brahmin!











Transcript 4 Sutton SignWriting

 <p>1A. SIGN</p>	 <p>2A. WANT</p>
 <p>1B. DEAF</p>	 <p>2B. WORK</p>
 <p>1C. BRAHMIN</p>	 <p>2C. FOOD</p>
 <p>1D. I</p>	 <p>2D. HUNGRY</p>
 <p>1E. SEWING/TAILORING</p>	 <p>2E. WHAT-TO- DO</p>

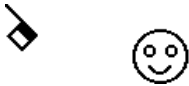

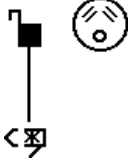


Transcript 4: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>3A. SEWING</p>	 <p>4E. SEWING</p>
 <p>3B. GO</p>	 <p>5A. I -</p>
 <p>3C. STUDY</p>	 <p>6A. IS</p>
 <p>4C. GET</p>	 <p>7A. THERE</p>
 <p>4D. WORK</p>	 <p>7B. GORKHA</p>

Transcript 4: Sutton SignWriting continued

<p>7C. IS</p> 	<p>7H. MONEY</p> 
<p>7D. ONE</p> 	<p>7I. SELL</p> 
<p>7E. DEAF</p> 	<p>7J. PROFIT</p> 
<p>7F. BRAHMIN</p> 	<p>8A. DEAF</p> 
<p>7G. SEW</p> 	<p>8B. IS</p> 

Transcript 4: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>8C. THERE</p>	 <p>9A. SURPRISED!</p>
 <p>8D. GORKHA</p>	 <p>10 A. BRAHMIN!</p>
 <p>8E. IS</p>	

The surprise he felt and the amazed glee with which he reported this fact somewhat belied his earlier bland assertions that caste no longer matters in occupational choices. In fact, when announcing the existence of the deaf Brahmin tailor, he repeated himself several times and made eye contact with all the other deaf people in the association room, grinning as they too expressed surprise. In this respect his narrative reveals competing voices in the Bakhtinian sense – both the official voice of the deaf association and of the Nepali state which officially asserts that traditional meanings need no longer attach to caste identity, and a voice that belies the former claim as he recounts as noteworthy a rare experience that actually fit that ideal. For in fact, it is largely the case that deaf individuals who take the tailor training are not from upper caste families.

Tailoring is not the only occupation for which deaf individuals are trained in Kathmandu. A significant alternative, but highly competitive, career path is to be trained to serve as wait staff in a chain of Western style fast food outlets called the Bakery Café. In this case, the tension between different models of deafness is drawn on to project a particular kind of image for the restaurant through its use of deaf servers. As mentioned above, a pervasive rhetoric of modernity tied to Western notions of development (Pigg 1992) has been promoted by the Nepali state since the fall of the Ranas. However, life in Nepal is mediated by caste logic and religious notions of propriety that circumscribe the extent to which subjects can suitably enter into modern consumerism, which can be associated with social vices and moral decay (Leichty 2002). The Bakery Café navigates this complex moral terrain through the hiring of deaf wait staff.

The Bakery Café is a chain of expensive family style fast food restaurants. The fare includes burgers (buffalo standing in for beef, which is taboo in Hindu dominated Nepal), pizza, fried chicken, sizzler plates, french fries, momos and thukpa (dumplings and noodle soup – the latter two being popular fast foods of Tibetan origin). The waitresses are uniformed in short skirts (above the knee), while in the warm months the male servers wear shorts. Though fashion and standards of acceptable modesty are in rapid flux in the capitol (indeed, standards concerning young women's clothing have changed drastically over the nine years during which I have been coming and going from Kathmandu), such attire remains on the cutting edge of propriety in most circles.

The Bakery Café is a popular location for young people to bring dates (again, skating the ever widening edge of propriety) and is one of the most popular places to celebrate Valentine's Day, a holiday event that remains new to Nepal but is becoming

popular with middle and upper class youth. On Valentines Day in 2005, for example, I spent the afternoon with several deaf employees of the Bakery Café who were anticipating their shift that evening with trepidation, as they expected to be kept at work quite late due to an onslaught of customers. Nepal has not seen highly publicized protests against Valentines Day, such as those held in India by the Shiv Sena (a Hindu fundamentalist group) who, claiming that the holiday opposes Hindu culture, attacked a Wimpy Burger restaurant (an expensive fast food store of the Bakery Café type) where the holiday was being celebrated by young couples. However, many parents in Nepal share such sentiments about the holiday.

How does a space like the Bakery Café fit into the tension Leichty has identified in the project of being “suitably modern” - to engage with modernity without seeming morally corrupt? In large part it does so through the presence of deaf waiters. The chain has had outlets featuring an all-deaf wait service staff since the opening of the New Baneshwor location in 1997. I was there for the grand opening, with an envoy of representatives from the major Scandinavian deaf institutions working with the Kathmandu deaf associations. Since then, in each of the now three branches of the Bakery Café in which the wait staff are deaf, each table is outfitted with a sign noting the “special” nature of the wait staff. These notices are decorated with *mudras*, hand positions carrying complex meanings found in Hindu and Buddhist iconographic sculpture and painting, which serve as a contextualizing element for patrons not familiar with sign language. Patrons are not expected to employ sign language in ordering their food however. Rather, the signs suggest that ordering be accomplished by pointing at the menu- in so doing assuming that all patrons will be literate in English, for that is the only

language on both the signs and the menus. This structural condition hints strongly at the kind of clientele the restaurant expects. It is also a parallel requirement that the deaf waiters who will serve in these restaurants must also be able to read English to function successfully in the restaurant. This limits the pool of deaf candidates to those whose backgrounds have made this achievement possible – generally those of relatively high caste and/or class status.

However, though such requirements allow deaf servers to function successfully as servers, choosing to hire them remains a potentially risky move for a business. This is because, while in many senses class logic is replacing concerns with caste in Kathmandu, concern about ritually pollution remains relevant (Leichty 2001). As food is an important medium for its transmission, hiring deaf waiters (still often seen as inherently polluted) could be a suicidal move for a food service establishment. If the purpose of these restaurants were only to cater to foreigners, then it would not be so worrisome – lower caste individuals have long been in the business of serving Western style foods to foreign visitors. However, the Bakery Cafes are as much or more aimed at Nepali clientele as at tourists. And because the deaf status of the servers is clearly advertised, should a potential client take exception, he or she would be unable to hide behind uncertainty about the ritual status of the server.

When I interviewed the Bakery Cafe founder, Shyam Kakshapati, he admitted to being troubled by this when he first conceived of training deaf waiters. He had wanted to provide employment opportunities to deaf individuals but was unsure whether the clients he was looking for could accept deaf waiters. He was also concerned that upper middle class clientele might see the deaf employees as a sign of cheapness of the part of the

ownership, that the owners were slumming it by hiring inexpensive, incompetent labor. He concluded that the best way to deal with these concerns was to actively advertise the presence of the deaf waiters as a way of demonstrating the restaurant's affiliation with development and modernity, and its break with a traditional past. In fact, to date, deaf employees in the chain only work positions on the floor, where they can be prominently displayed to the public. Because the deaf waiters must be able to read English to qualify for employment at the Bakery Café, however, this guarantees that most of them come from middle to upper class, and typically upper caste, backgrounds. Hence, consumers' willingness to accept food from them primarily challenges the notion that deafness is a matter of polluting karmic punishment, while not challenging a caste-based logic of commensality as directly as it would if the deaf servers came primarily from lower caste families.

At the same time, the presence of the deaf servers has allowed the Western accoutrements (short skirts, dating couples, aura of sexualized consumerism) of the Bakery Café to avoid being read as "unsuitably" modern, as the deaf workers can index aspects of the modern that are usually seen as positive – development, achievement and progress. Indeed via the act of eating in an expensive restaurant, consumers can see themselves as actively participating the development of the deaf. This activity creates links back to a religious moral order in which charitable acts allow individuals to accrue merit. In this way, the tension between different coexisting models of deafness allows their presence in the restaurants to function as a complex sign.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined religious, medical, and linguistic models of deafness that coexist and compete in the lives of deaf Nepalis while tracing the links between these ideological approaches to deafness and the Nepali state, international aid organizations, and international deaf cultural organizations. I argued that these models underpin the formal and ideological variation in the NSL standardization project, by demonstrating that the medical model adhered to by the deaf schools underlies their framing of NSL as a manual version of Nepali and the fact that their teachers sign in Nepali word order. The deaf associations however, see the deaf as a linguistic minority and therefore NSL as a separate language. As we will see in the next chapter, the distinct spatial grammatical forms employed in association classes reinforce this claim.

As Kleinman's intended use of the term explanatory models suggests, people and institutions adhering to different models of deafness come into contact with each other and may compete or co-exist. This is an important point to consider in Nepal, where, in many cases, deaf individuals' life trajectories involve exposure to all of these frameworks, as their families often ascribe to a religious model, the deaf schools they may attend as children adhere to a medical model, and the deaf associations that become their social center promote a linguistic minority model. While the religious and medical perspectives are often seen as diametrically opposed (though this depends on the definition of medical in a given case), the religious and linguistic model overlap in ways that can construct the deaf as belonging to their own caste, with implications for deaf

intermarriage and employment. Finally, I have shown that the tensions between the different models can be actively exploited (as in the use of the deaf as multivalent symbols in the Bakery Café) or, in the case of the deaf institutions, can be made covert. This has allowed for the coexistence of different ideological positions and grammatical forms within the overarching standardization project, which will be explored further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FORMAL AND IDEOLOGICAL VARIATION ACROSS INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

Introduction

In this chapter I present data from classroom interactions in several of Kathmandu's central deaf institutions to demonstrate one of the important effects of the standardization project's restriction to lexical items – that each institution promotes different grammatical constructions while adhering to a single overarching standardization effort. In the previous chapter I argued that these grammatical forms are linked to distinct ideologies about the nature of Nepali Sign Language that are grounded in each institution's relationship to the Nepali state and various international interests. Below I analyze and compare these grammatical differences, with attention to the manner in which spoken, written, and signed language interact in classroom contexts.

Sign language instruction in the deaf institutions works both to socialize students to use certain forms, and has the potential to socialize them through these forms to adopt different perspectives about the nature of NSL. However, while the teachers in the schools and associations can expose their students to particular kinds of signing practice, they cannot in so doing fully dictate the kinds of linguistic forms the students will produce. Rather, the student bodies in each of these institutions –older individuals (often homesigners) in the associations and young children in the schools – contribute in different ways to the dialogical process of language socialization. Homesigners in the deaf association run classes are often unable to acquire the visual grammatical

constructions introduced by their instructors and continue to produce homesigns²¹ – utterances that occupy a linguistic ground between gesture and signing. On the other hand, deaf children in the schools, through their interactions with one another, produce complex grammatical constructions quite distinct from those used by their hearing instructors. These unintended outcomes introduce additional formal, and potentially ideological, variation into these institutional contexts.

Language socialization in deaf institutions

Socialization, as conceived of by linguistic anthropologists, is an inherently dialectic process, in which novices as well as experienced participants exert creative force (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a and b; Ochs and Scheffelin 1984; Kulick 1992). In all contexts, individuals actively respond to and organize the linguistic and cultural information they encounter while socializing and being socialized through their interactions with both authorities and peers. This perspective is particularly well suited to deal with the thoroughly documented fact that deaf children drive the process of homesign construction in hearing family contexts (Goldin-Meadow and Mylander 1990) and that many sign languages have emerged through the social interaction of deaf children brought together in educational contexts (Kegl 2002, Reilly 1995.). At the same time, by focusing on a context in which institutional efforts to socialize deaf individuals to produce certain grammatical forms often fails, this chapter contributes to work in language socialization that attends to cases in which the process has unpredicted outcomes, demonstrating that this perspective can account for change as well as social reproduction (e.g. Kulick 1992).

²¹ Systems of homesigns that are produced by deaf individuals and their hearing interlocutors in the absence of a sign language vary in their complexity.

While schools are significant sites for social, cultural, and linguistic (re)production in hearing contexts, as they are at the center of deaf social life they are a particular focus of scholarly concern in deaf studies. Much of this research has focused on exploring how the emergence of sign languages within these settings can shed light in the biological basis of human language more generally (Kegl 2002, Senghas and Coppola 1994). Many other scholars have focused on such educational institutions as key sites in which ideological battles over the nature of sign languages have been fought, with particular focus on the debate between oralists and manualists (Lane 1984, Baynton, 1996, Plann 1997, Monaghan, 2003). Less frequently have there been studies that examine how these different ideological positions can vary within institutions and across the different institutional contexts that deaf people may move through during their life histories. By doing so in this chapter, my work is informed by linguistic anthropological perspectives that acknowledge that socialization does not end in early childhood but continues through life.

In addition, in considering the fact that deaf individuals in Nepal are exposed to a variety of ways of signing, some of which are highly influenced by spoken and written Nepali, in this chapter I diverge from linguistic descriptions of sign languages that take pains to emphasize their independence from the spoken languages with which they are in contact. This position has often been taken by researchers attempting to stress the fact that sign languages are complete linguistic systems, in the face of widely held ideologies that have considered sign languages generally to be manual forms of spoken languages. However, by restricting their studies to the linguistic output of deaf individuals exposed to sign language from birth by deaf parents, such descriptions fail to represent the largest

portion of deaf signers, most of whom are born to hearing parents and often undergo a long period of time during which they are exposed to spoken language influenced signing (or full blown oralism) in schools (Lucas and Valli 1989).

As a result, the signing of many deaf individuals is influenced by contact with spoken and written languages, including the mouthing of words, fingerspelling, and the ability to switch between signing in spoken language word order and employing visual grammatical constructions. Ignoring this variation can lead to the erasure of the existence of these different forms of signing, as they may all be referred to in practice and in the literature by a single label, as is the case in Nepal where the term Nepali Sign Language encompasses several grammatical styles diverse enough to be considered separate codes (despite the shared lexicon). It is equally problematic to erase these distinctions as it is to assert an overly strict linguistic boundary that precludes contact between signed and spoken languages. Therefore, in this chapter I have attempted to produce a more fine-grained consideration of the linguistic variation encompassed within the term Nepali Sign Language, in order to avoid simplifying this complex sociolinguistic context.

Variation in signing practice across institutional contexts

Standard lexical items

In each of Kathmandu's deaf institutions, the standard lexical items are taught from the dictionary. Below I provide a representative example of the presentation of the standard lexical items, taken from a small deaf association outpost class taught on the outskirts of the Valley. Four deaf adults, and three young hearing participants (aged

between 12-18) who were interested in learning sign language because of a deaf relative, interest in working as an interpreter, or curiosity, were in attendance at the lesson.

Figure 5: The instructor points to the written Nepali word “Pharknu” (to return).

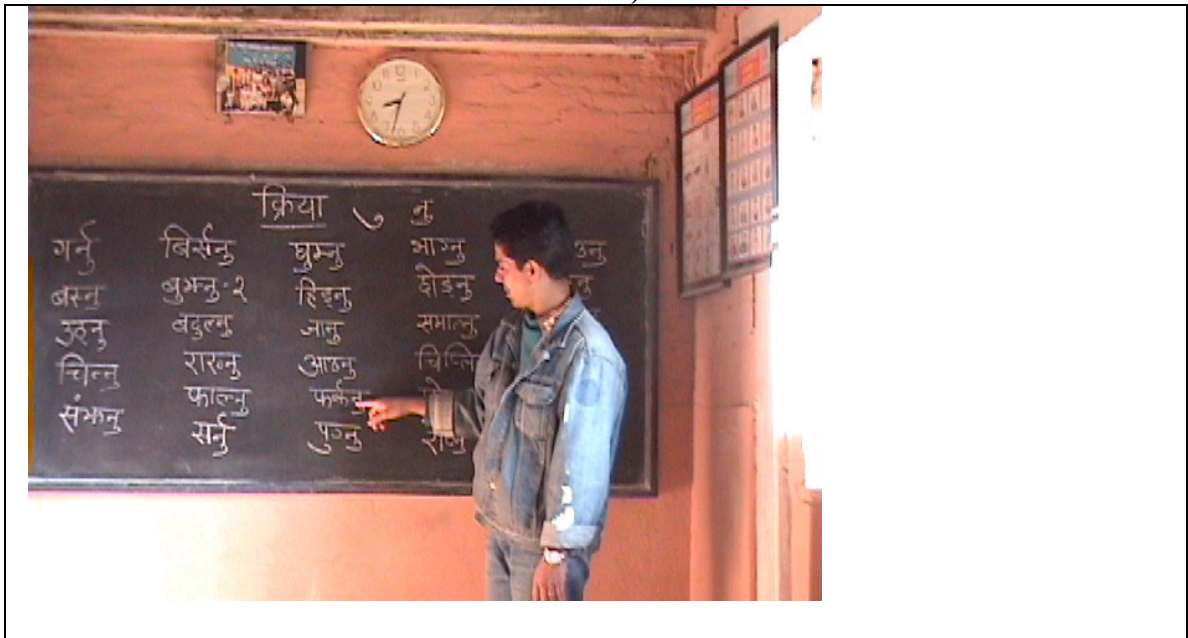


Figure 6: The instructor performs the sign “RETURN”



This class was held bi-weekly in the mornings, between the typical breakfast snack and tea and the first rice-vegetables-and lentils (*daal-bhaat*) meal of the day. Many people don't go to school or the office until after this first meal, so this is a convenient time to hold the classes (although one deaf woman participant generally had to leave early in order to return home in time to help prepare her family's morning meal). When the class itself officially began, the instructor turned to the lexical items he had written in Nepali on the board and, pointing to each, modeled the NSL sign associated with it. His introduction of these signs did not include any instruction concerning their deployment in context (though both Nepali and NSL modify the verbs, in different ways, to reflect things such as person and tense).

After the teacher's recitation to the class, each student was called to the board to perform each sign, and was corrected on any mistakes in form. Such correction can extend beyond monitoring the shape, location, orientation, and movement of the hands to

include non-manual aspects of the sign such as affect. For example, on one occasion I observed a hearing student perform the sign “HAPPY” with a serious look on her face. The instructor took great pains to explain to her that doing so was inappropriate - that a smile was necessary to correctly perform the sign (this recalls the debates about prosody and Sutton SignWriting mentioned in Chapter 2).

Figure 7: The teacher corrects the student's form.



As this example suggests, to a great degree the structure of the dictionaries informs the structure of language instruction in the deaf institutions, as most classes similarly involve the presentation of standard lexical items that are linked to corresponding Nepali and/or English words written on a blackboard. There is no explicit instruction concerning how these lexical items might be strung together – rather, the students in both types of institution glean grammatical rules by observing the signing of

their instructors and peers. That these grammatical constructions vary across institutional contexts will be demonstrated below.

This example also points to one of the ways that NSL and Nepali (in its written form) are in contact within these classes. Because such an exercise requires the ability to both recognize the written Nepali words and to produce the appropriate sign form, these classes can simultaneously serve different purposes for different participants. For deaf or hearing students literate in Nepali, the words on the board are simply cues in an exercise that focuses on recalling the signed lexical items. For deaf signers familiar with the signs, but not fully literate in Nepali, the challenge may be to recognize the written word. And for signers (and homesigners) who are not proficient in either code, the activity attempts to teach both the ability to recognize Nepali words and to produce NSL signs. However, while contact between spoken and written Nepali is significant in all of the Nepali Sign Language classes in Kathmandu, the manner in which each institution frames the relationship between the languages in each of these modalities, and the results of this contact on signing form, varies significantly between the schools and associations.

The school for the deaf

Total communication and language contact

Contact between NSL and Nepali is not a necessary condition – it is quite possible for a sign language to be uninfluenced by the spoken language(s) surrounding it – but a result of the particular trajectory that deaf schools have taken since their inception in Nepal. Ironically, the influence of Nepali on NSL was likely to have been less pervasive during these schools’ earliest oralist period (in the 1960s), when manual communication was discouraged. Because of the ineffectiveness of the oral method, the signing that

developed despite administrative disapproval (from a contact pidgin formed from the home sign systems with which the children came to school and likely creolized across cohorts of incoming students) was not influenced by Nepali to a great extent (Acharya n.d.).



However, in the late eighties/early nineties, the school programs switched to the Total Communication technique, which encourages manual communication. Just what the nature of communication in that modality should be, however, has been a matter of debate in the deaf educational systems worldwide that employ this pedagogical system. In Nepal, as in many other countries, the manual communication promoted in Total Communication classrooms is not based on the signing practice of deaf adults but on the dominant spoken language of the larger community, to facilitate the acquisition of literacy in said language. Many linguists and deaf signers question the viability of such “artificial” codes, but they are widely embraced by educators and hearing parents of deaf children.

These codes typically involve the performance of signs in the same syntactical order as the dominant spoken language in the area. In addition, the lexical items themselves are usually constructed to cleave as closely as possible to the target spoken language’s words. For example, in Signed English (SE) a code frequently used in U.S. deaf education, the sign for “BUTTERFLY” would be a compound of the individual signs for “BUTTER” and “FLY”. Many proponents of American Sign Language consider this approach, in which the primary object of semiotic relationship is the spoken language and not the referent, ridiculous. However, this is precisely the desired semiotic

relationship for educators who view the manual channel as a bridge to the target spoken/written language.

It is important to note that natural sign languages, including both ASL and NSL, also often include forms that mark points of contact with spoken and written language. For example, many signers mouth some words (often an artifact of experience in pedagogical systems that promote oralism) and many lexical items in both languages are initialized. This means that the sign’s handshape takes the form of the fingerspelled first letter of the corresponding word in a written language.

Figure 8: An initialized sign in Nepali Sign Language

NSL fingerspelling for the letter KA	The sign “WHICH”, that translates in Nepali to the word “ <i>Kun</i> ”. The handshapes for the sign take the form of the fingerspelled first letter of the Nepali word.
	

The Total Communication pedagogical approach was implemented in Nepal by the principal of Kathmandu’s Naxal School for the Deaf, who frequently visits the U.S. in order to remain up to date on new approaches in deaf education. While her subsequent decision to introduce manual communication into the deaf school classrooms was widely

approved of by those deaf signers who, having graduated from the school had formed the deaf associations and institutions currently driving the standardization project, the principles along which new signs were to be constructed in this framework have been more controversial. There are disagreements between some hearing and deaf leaders of Nepal's deaf institutions (that mirror those between many deaf signers and hearing teachers in the U.S.) about what the proper source of innovation and standardization of NSL should be. While many deaf signers feel that, by virtue of their deafness, they should serve as the highest authorities in that regard (for indeed, their communicative practice generated the bulk of the linguistic forms of NSL) some hearing teachers and linguists in Nepal feel that their expertise suggests that they themselves could construct and refine the language in a more "logical" manner.

In addition, many hearing sign language educators feel that the association's standard signs are not sufficiently iconic of the spoken Nepali language- conceiving of sign language as a vehicle by which disabled individuals can access the spoken language in another modality rather than as a language in its own right. Examples of deaf generated standard signs that they feel need improvement include the sign "ORGANIZE". The morphemes in the Nepali term, "*ayojaana*," include "*ayo*" -to come, and "*jaana*" or people. Hence, many hearing teachers would prefer a compound sign of the signs "COME" and "PEOPLE". The current sign did not arise in this manner however.

Another sign some hearing educators of the deaf see as problematic is that for the town "KIRTIPUR," in which the second half of the sign is derived from the sign "BRIDGE". Ironically, this is an artifact of the relatively minor degree of contact between Nepali and NSL in the early oralist period – when deaf students who were being

taught to lip-read mistook the “*pur*” in Kirtipur (a Sanskrit morpheme referencing fortifications and often a part of city names in South Asia) for “*pul*” or bridge, because the sounds were indistinguishable for lip-readers. While the form of this sign is influenced by Nepali, the fact that it takes an “incorrect” form marks it as deviant from the hearing educators’ perspectives.

These efforts to treat NSL as Nepali in a different modality arose not only because of the deaf school’s contacts with international deaf educational pedagogy, but also because of Nepali governmental policies for education. When the deaf schools were founded, in order to prepare their students to take the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam, they had to claim that Nepali was their primary medium of instruction. The SLC, which is roughly equivalent to a high school diploma in the U.S. is an important acquisition for deaf graduates seeking gainful employment. Since the 1990 People’s Movement, the constitutional stance of language in education has changed. Though Nepali is still considered the “language of the nation”, all mother tongues have also been considered national languages and they may be used in schools. However, despite this official change, schools still primarily educate their students in Nepali (and alternatively, English). David Gellner reports, for example, that he knows of only one school in the Kathmandu Valley in which the primary language of education is Newari (or Nepal Bhasa), the mother tongue of the Valley’s large Newari population (Gellner 2005). This environment encourages the deaf schools to continue to frame NSL as Nepali in another modality.

Three modalities in the classroom – simultaneity and disjuncture

Despite the objections laid out above, the standard lexical items employed in the deaf schools are the same as those taught in deaf run institutions (with the exception of some technical science and math terms used in upper grades constructed by the teachers and codified in the only non-deaf association sanctioned dictionary). However, the grammatical information conveyed in the form of instruction tends strongly towards Nepali structural patterns, including signing in SOV word order and modifying signs with post-fixes rather than employing spatial grammatical constructions. Most of the teachers in the deaf school are hearing Nepalis, who simultaneously speak and sign while running their classrooms. This simultaneous production of codes in two different mediums is made possible by the fact that these teachers' signs cleave closely to the structure of spoken Nepali. However, as the examples below demonstrate, these codes do not map onto one another perfectly. While the simultaneous production of the codes supports the school's explicit ideological position that NSL is Nepali in another medium, points of divergence highlight more implicit aspects of the deaf school's language ideologies concerning the relationship between written and spoken Nepali and NSL.

Figure 9: The teacher addresses her class in the deaf school



Transcript 5

The transcript is in two sections. The first contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals), the spoken Nepali channel (in italics), and an English translation. Points at which the manual and spoken channels diverge are marked in bold. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). Each transcript is numbered for comparison. The script is written from the receptive viewpoint and in vertical lanes that better show the use of signing space.

1. WE PL SCHOOL GO WHAT DO?

Haamiharu school maa gayera ke garne?

Having gone to school what do we do?

2. (students reply "PLAY") ONLY?

Ho...matra? Hoina.

Yes...only? No.

3. **READ, WRITE NOT?**

(nothing in spoken channel)

Not to read and write?

4. (some students reply "TO READ" and/or "TO WRITE") YES, YES, YES, YES...

Ho, ho, ho, ho.

yes, yes, yes, yes...

5. WE PL SCHOOL IN GO WHAT DO?

Haamiharu school maa gayera ke garne?

Having gone to school, what do we do?

6. SLEEP IS? NO. WHAT?

Sutne ho? Hoina. Ke garne?







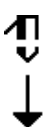



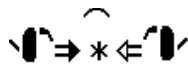

To sleep? No. What is done? (student indicates the illustration of children playing on a school playground)

6. THEY ALL PLAY ONLY?










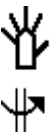
Yahaa *subhai khel – khelne matra?*

Here they all play – only play?


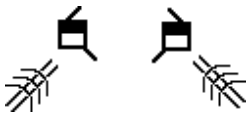


Transcript 5: Sutton SignWriting

<p>1A. WE</p> 	<p>2A. ONLY</p> 
<p>1B. PLURAL-MARKER</p> 	<p>3A. READ</p> 
<p>1C. SCHOOL</p> 	<p>3B. WRITE</p> 
<p>1D. GO</p> 	<p>3C. NOT</p> 
<p>1E. WHAT</p> 	<p>4A. YES, YES, YES, YES</p> 
<p>1F. DO</p> 	<p>5A. WE</p> 

Transcript 5: Sutton SignWriting continued

<p>5B. PLURAL</p> 	<p>5G. DO</p> 
<p>5C. SCHOOL</p> 	<p>6A. SLEEP</p> 
<p>5D. IN</p> 	<p>6B. IS</p> 
<p>5E. GO</p> 	<p>6C. NO</p> 
<p>5F. WHAT</p> 	<p>6D. WHAT</p> 

Transcript 5: Sutton SignWriting continued

<p>7A. THEY</p> 	<p>7C. PLAY</p> 
<p>7B. ALL</p> 	<p>7D. ONLY</p> 

The utterances transcribed above are an excerpt from a class 1 lesson at a Kathmandu deaf school. The written channel, at this grade level, primarily consists of key lexical items around which the lesson is based. The manual and oral communication are produced simultaneously and though the two modes largely map onto one another this lamination is not perfect.

In some cases, when the spoken and manual channels diverge, the manual channel contains more information. For example, in line 3 in the above transcript the teacher prompts the students to give the correct answer (to read and write) by signing “READ NOT? WRITE NOT?” after which several children sign “TO-READ” and “TO-WRITE.” This prompt does not appear in the spoken channel. More frequent, however, are moments in which the spoken channel contains more information than the manual. This conveys a largely implicit language ideology that NSL is not only a manual version of Nepali, but also an impoverished version. For example, in lines 1 and 5, the instructor’s spoken discourse includes the phrase “*school maa gayera ke garne*”. The (Verb)+era construction translates to “having (Verb)ed”, a past- perfective. Hence the question is “having gone to school, what do we do?”. There is no equivalent to this grammatical construct in the accompanying manual communication that the teacher provides (although it would be quite possible to sign in such a manner as to indicate this

information, this construction is not explicitly taught in the training a hearing teacher of the deaf would have undergone, but must be learned through extended linguistic and social interaction with deaf signers). Rather, the manual channel is somewhat ambiguous, and could potentially be understood as “what do we do to go to school”; a student could conceivably reply, “WALK”.

Figure 10: A teacher addresses her class, holding a picture of a cow



Transcript 6

The transcript is in two sections. The first contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals), the spoken Nepali channel (in italics), and an English translation. Points at which the manual and spoken channels diverge are marked in bold. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). Each transcript is numbered for comparison. The script is written from the receptive viewpoint and in vertical lanes that better show the use of signing space.

1. (Indicating a picture of a cow)THIS YOU-PLURAL PLURAL POSESSIVE HOUSE IN IS THIS?

Yo timiharu ko ghar maa chaa?

Do you all have this in your house?

2. **YOU-ALL** HOUSE THIS ISN'T.

Chha, ghar maa? Chhaina.

It is, in the house? No.

3. CITY HOUSE IN **MILK** COW LIVE PLACE ISN'T.

Sahar ko ghar maa gai basne tau chhaina.

City houses don't have a place for cows.

4. VILLAGE **GO**, OWN OWN HOUSE COW IS.

Gau ho. Gau, gau aphno aphno ghar maa gai chha.

The village, yes. In the village each person's house has a cow.

5. IS THIS WE- WE TO WHAT GIVE THIS?

Yo gai le haami, haami laai ke dinchha?

What does the cow give to us?

(Student replies, "GRASS")

6. (NOTHING IN THE MANUAL CHANNEL)

Gai le ghas ho?

Grass from the cow?



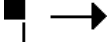


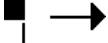





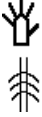
(Another student replies, "MILK")

7. THANK-YOU. IS MILK GIVE GIVE.

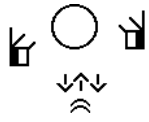
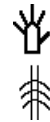






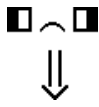

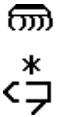

Shabash! Dudh dinchha ho.

Good work! It gives us milk!


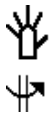










Transcript 6: Sutton SignWriting

<p>1A. THIS</p> 	<p>1G. IS</p> 
<p>1B. YOU-PL</p> 	<p>1H. THIS</p> 
<p>1C. PLURAL</p> 	<p>2A. YOU-ALL</p> 
<p>1D. POSSESSIVE</p> 	<p>2B. HOUSE</p> 
<p>1E. HOUSE</p> 	<p>2C. THIS</p> 
<p>1F. IN</p> 	<p>2D. ISN'T</p> 

Transcript 6: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>3A. CITY</p>	 <p>3G. ISN'T</p>
 <p>3B. HOUSE</p>	 <p>4A. VILLAGE</p>
 <p>3C. IN</p>	 <p>4B. GO</p>
 <p>3D. COW</p>	 <p>4C. OWN</p>
 <p>3E. LIVE</p>	 <p>4D. OWN</p>
 <p>3F. PLACE</p>	 <p>4E. HOUSE</p>

Transcript 6: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>4F. COW</p>	 <p>5F. WHAT</p>
 <p>4G. IS (HUNCHA)</p>	 <p>5G. GIVE</p>
 <p>5B. THIS (points at picture of cow)</p>	 <p>5H. THIS (points at picture of cow)</p>
 <p>5C. WE</p>	 <p>6A. THANK-YOU</p>
 <p>5D. WE</p>	 <p>6B. IS</p>
 <p>5E. TO</p>	 <p>6C. MILK (6D. GIVE 6E. GIVE)</p>

The above transcript is derived from a grade 2 class in the same institution. Once again, it is possible to view the manner in which the two codes are produced simultaneously by the hearing teacher, though there are points of overlap or divergence between the two channels. First, in line 2 of the NSL transcript, the teacher signs “YOU-ALL PL”. In this instance, by adding the plural postfix, the teacher is following spoken Nepali morphology, in which the pluralization of the pronoun takes the form of the postfix “*haru*”. In the signed channel however, this is redundant, as the form of the pronoun (sweeping the index finger across the front of the signing space rather than pointing to one location) has already encoded the pluralization. This kind of redundancy is characteristic of codes of manual communication that are based on a spoken language model and highlights the fact that the hearing teachers promote signing that follows spoken Nepali structures over the visual grammar possible in the manual channel (the potential of which they might be unaware).

At the same time, the pronoun used in the spoken Nepali channel, “*timi*”, encodes social information about the relationship between the speaker and the addressee(s). Nepali has a fairly elaborated system of 5 different honorific pronouns, with which verb endings usually agree (though there are dialects of Nepali that do not inflect verb endings in this way). The teacher’s use of “*timi*”, the familiar form of “you” is culturally appropriate in this context. If the children were producing spoken Nepali, they would asymmetrically return “*tapaain*”, the respectful form of “you”, when addressing the teacher. However, NSL does not formally encode these differences in pronouns, though it is possible (if rare in actual signing practice) to encode 2 levels of respect/familiarity in verb endings. Hence, the linguistic and social information conveyed in the two channels

differs and once again the teacher's manual output contains less information than the spoken.

Finally, in line 6 of the transcript, the teacher asks the students what the cow gives us, searching for the answer "MILK". The formal properties of her question vary in the two channels, leading several students to misunderstand her question. The Nepali channel includes the grammatical marker "*le*", an ergative construction that indicates the agent of an action (i.e. *gaai le*= "by the cow"). The spoken sentence also includes the marker "*laai*", which indicates to whom or to what an action was performed (*haami-laai*; "to us"). In the spoken Nepali channel it is quite clear that it's being asked what the cow gives to us, rather than the other way around.

In the teacher's manual channel this is much less clear. While she includes the sign "TO" which represents the word "*laai*," lexical items representing these kind of spoken grammatical markers are not generally formally introduced to children at this grade level. More typically, in signing practice that takes advantage of spatial grammatical possibilities, "COW" and "WE" would be set up in signing space and then the sign "TO-GIVE" would move from the agent to the patient. Sign language linguists label this kind of construction an "agreeing" verb, in that movement through signing space marks the verb's arguments (Padden 1983). This kind of spatial grammar characterizes the signing of most non-homesigner deaf adults in Kathmandu and can also be seen in the cross-talk of the children conversing with one another in the classroom (more on the relevance of such cross-talk below). Hence, as the teacher performs the sign "GIVE" moving from her chest out, it is unsurprising that the first answer ventured to the teacher's question is "GRASS", as the student read this sign as suggesting that the item

was given from the teacher to the cow. After responding critically to this response, the teacher is very pleased and congratulatory when one of the students, grasping the significance of the Nepali language morphology answers, “MILK”. In this way, she reinforces a reading of the signs that treats Nepali-based structures as correct and relies on post-fixes as grammatical markers rather than the spatial relationships that are used in many other signing contexts, such as in the deaf-taught association class I will analyze below.

In all of these examples, for students to notice these points of lamination and/or disconnect, they need to be able to access both channels of communication and, in subsequent grades when the teacher’s signing and speech are meant to laminate onto the texts in their school books, the written modality as well. This ability requires literacy in Nepali and some facility with lip-reading which, while no longer the primary means of instruction in the deaf schools, still has a role. While all three codes may not be accessible to students in the lower grades, for older students who have acquired reasonable facility in each code (though lipreading does not permit complete access to the oral channel) the simultaneous presentation of written, spoken, and signed language reinforces the school’s dominant ideology that NSL is Nepali, while gaps in this lamination point to their differences which, in the teachers’ style of signing, usually indicate that NSL is the most impoverished channel²².

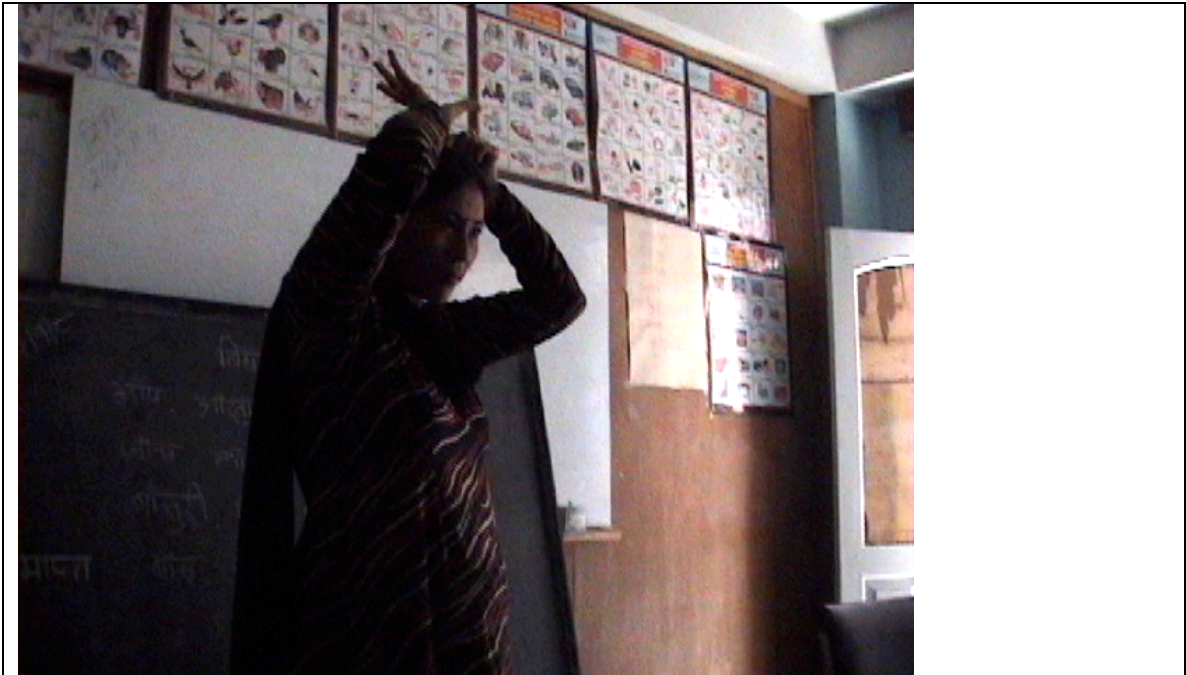
²² This can be compared with the manner in which the differences between written and spoken language are frequently interpreted to mean that written is a superior channel of communication (and is typically the version of the language considered the most standard).

Nepali Sign Language and spatial grammar in deaf association classes

In their efforts to promote NSL as the deaf people's mother tongue, the deaf run associations respond to governmental structural forces in a different way – by arguing that NSL is a distinct language that maps onto a distinct cultural group. Accordingly, instruction in deaf association classes are taught by adult deaf signers who do not speak while signing and who employ the spatial grammatical constructions distinct from spoken Nepali. To highlight this difference, below I provide a transcript from a sign language class in Kathmandu's Swedish Sewing Project. While the Project is administered by the Kathmandu Association of the Deaf, it is funded by a Swedish Deaf Association that strongly promotes a linguistic minority model of deafness and accordingly supports the assertion that NSL is a distinct language.

Each *Baisak* (the first month of the Nepali year) a new group of adolescent deaf girls recruited primarily from rural areas comes to live in the Project's student hostel in the New Baneshwor neighborhood of Kathmandu. These girls who generally have not been exposed to other deaf people or signing, live together for one year to study both Nepali Sign Language and sewing skills. The goal is their return to their home villages at the end of the program, there to earn a living as tailors, though this scheme is somewhat marred by the fact that many of the girls strongly resist returning to an area where they will be unable to communicate with others in NSL.

Figure 11: A teacher addresses her class in the Swedish Sewing Project



Transcript 7

The transcript is in two sections. The first contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals) and an English translation. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). This portion is written in lanes that can be read top to bottom and then left to right. The lanes allow better representation of the use of signing space. Each transcript is numbered for comparison.

NSL:

1. JH JHANKRI.

Jh. Jhankri

2. VILLAGE YOU-PL SICK MEDICAL-DOCTOR, MEDICINE ISN'T.

In the village when you are sick, there are no doctors or medicine.

3. JHANKRI EXORCISES-YOU, EXORCISES-ME.

The jhankri exorcises you, like this.

4. YOU-PL UNDERSTAND?

Do you understand?

5. SEEN? SEEN YOU-PL?

You've seen this?

6. BANGS-ON-DRUM, WEARS-FEATHERED-HEADRESS.

He bangs on a drum and wears a feathered headdress.







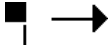
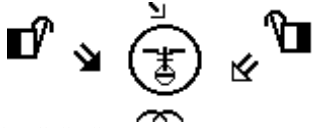

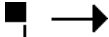

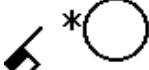


7. UNDERSTAND?

Do you understand?


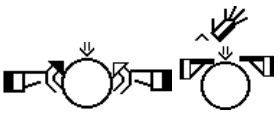
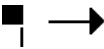


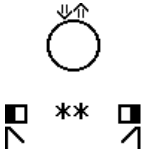
8. SAME.

It's the same.

Transcript 7: Sutton SignWriting

<p>1A. JH</p> 	<p>2F. ISN'T</p> 
<p>1B. JHANKRI</p> 	<p>3A. JHANKRI</p> 
<p>2A. VILLAGE</p> 	<p>3B. EXORCISES-YOU</p> 
<p>2B. YOU-PL</p> 	<p>3C. EXORCISES-ME</p> 
<p>2C. SICK</p> 	<p>4A. YOU-PL</p> 
<p>2D. MEDICAL-DOCTOR</p> 	<p>4B. UNDERSTAND</p> 
<p>2E. MEDICINE</p> 	<p>5A. SEEN</p> 

Transcript 7: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>5B. SEEN</p>	 <p>6B. WEARS-FEATHERED-HEADRESS</p>
 <p>5C. YOU-PL</p>	 <p>7A. UNDERSTAND</p>
 <p>6A. BANGS-ON-DRUM</p>	 <p>8A. SAME</p>

In this class, the teacher conveys a variety of lexical items to the students (in this case they are grouped not by semantic or grammatical category but by the fact that they all share a common letter in the Devanagari alphabet in which Nepali is written). Once again, Nepali and NSL are in contact, but in a significantly different way. The signs are being linked with written Nepali lexical items but Nepali grammatical constructions are not being conveyed either in writing or in the partial sense possible through spoken Nepali-based signing. Rather, the deaf teacher’s signing employs a variety of grammatical forms found in sign languages world wide – forms that are not produced by the hearing teachers.

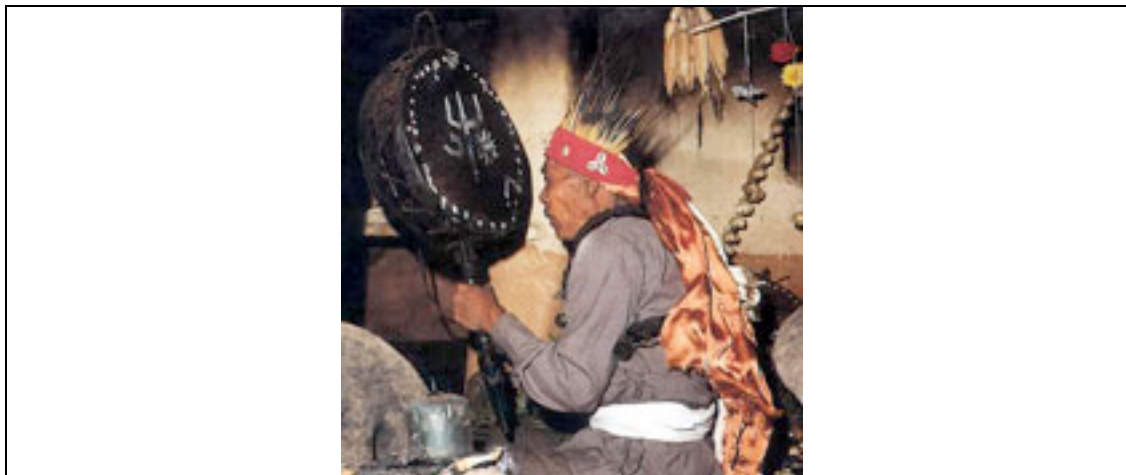
These include the deaf teacher’s use of spatial reference points, classifiers and role-shifting to, in this example, describe a *jhankri* (or shaman/healer) to the students. As mentioned above, agreeing verbs use spatial reference points to “agree” with one or more noun arguments. Where the morphology of the verb includes a device such as a classifier

hand shape, the word order of the sentence will be relatively free. Classifiers, postulated to be universal to deaf sign languages, are a “formally distinct subsystem dedicated solely to the schematic structural representation of objects moving or located with respect to each other in space” (Talmy 2003: 16). While these forms are frequently mistaken as mimetic, there are morphological and syntactic constraints on their use and combinations that vary from sign language to sign language (Supalla 1982; Emmory 2002:74)²³.

In the clip above, the teacher employs several handling and instrument classifiers (those that describe how an object might be held or used) along with whole entity stative-descriptive classifiers (those that describe the shape of an object) in defining the word “jhankri”. In line 6, the teacher uses a handling classifier to describe a jhankri’s habitual banging on a drum and stative-descriptive classifiers to further describe the characteristic headdress worn by a jhankri. Line 3 contains an example of role shifting. The teacher, in performing the action of an exorcism, in turn takes on in turn the roles of the acting jhankri and the subject of the exorcism, marking this shift with agreeing verbs and body shifting. The motion of the verb agrees semantically with the shifting locations of the actor and patient, while the verb’s hand shape is a handling classifier representing the stick a jhankri uses to fling water on a client as part of a healing ritual.

²³ My focus has not been to identify the nature of these restraints in Nepali signing, though this could be an interesting future contribution to the comparative study of sign language grammars.

Figure 12: Jhankri (shaman) in Central Nepal. Photo by J.P. Girolami



While teachers in the deaf associations classes also instruct their students in Nepali literacy, eventually moving beyond the recognition of single written words to the construction and comprehension of larger blocks of text, the signing they use in addressing their students continues to employ these spatial grammatical constructions and does not strictly follow spoken Nepali structures. In this respect, communicative practice in the deaf associations bolsters the claim that NSL is a language distinct from Nepali.

Unintended outcomes


As we can see from such examples, hearing and deaf teachers convey different grammatical information, which reflects and perpetuates different ideologies about the nature of NSL to their students, even as they reinforce the standard lexicon. However, while the instructors in these different deaf institutions promote different grammatical



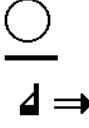
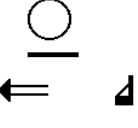
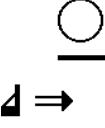
constructions, theirs is not the only, or necessarily the most powerful, influence on students' signing practice. Students in the deaf schools, particularly in the lower grades, spend as much or more time signing with one another than they do attending to the teacher. As in other, similar contexts, students actively reconstruct the sign forms presented to them by their teachers through these social and linguistic interactions (Singleton and Newport 2004; Senghas and Coppola 2001).

In particular, they re-analyze the potential spatial grammatical uses of and morphological complexity frozen into the sign forms that the teachers employ. For example, a teacher may perform the sign "TO-GIVE" signed between the fixed points inscribed in the dictionaries (from signer's chest, extending directly forward as seen in line 5 of transcript 6), using word order and spoken Nepali-based post-fixes to indicate both who is doing the giving and to whom. When conversing with one another however, the students typically take the verb stem and, by changing the motion and directionality of the sign, convey that information through the direction the sign moves between an agent and patient that have been introduced into signing space (or who are physically present). Their ability to do so may stem from some of the students' contact with older deaf signers, or may have appeared spontaneously in the signing practice of the deaf student body (as has been documented in Nicaragua²⁴ (Kegl 2000).

²⁴ This is the first case in which the emergence of a sign language from the signing practice of deaf students brought together in an educational institution has been documented by linguists.

Table 3: Different ways of inflecting the sign “GIVE”

GIVE as performed by most hearing teachers (and as represented in uninflected form in the NSL dictionary).







Examples of GIVE inflected for different meanings according to spatial agreement, as produced by deaf students in the school. These are only a few possible ways to inflect the verb.				
				
I give to you.	You give to me.	I give to him./her..	He/she gives to him	He/she gives to me.

As a result, deaf students who entered the deaf schools early in life and then graduated to deaf social life in the associations are often able to control a wide range of forms – including written Nepali, signing in Nepali grammatical order, and NSL that take advantage of spatial grammar. Such graduates often code-switch between these when addressing hearing or deaf individuals. For example, in the NSL class I began this chapter by describing, which included both hearing and deaf students, the instructor (a graduate of the Naxal school) code-switched between signing that was relatively more or less influenced by spoken Nepali grammar in addressing different interlocutors. Transcript 8 below records how he asked a hearing participant for his name. While he did not speak or mouth Nepali words, his signing maps perfectly onto the corresponding sentence in the spoken language. Transcript 9 shows how he asked the same question of a deaf

participant. In this case, he has used non-manual grammatical markers to mark the addressee (through eye gaze) and the fact he is asking a question (through brow-furrow and head tilt). This kind of code-switching may have far-reaching consequences. As such individuals often teach the deaf school's new hearing teachers to sign, this practice reinforces the different signing styles associated with each institution.

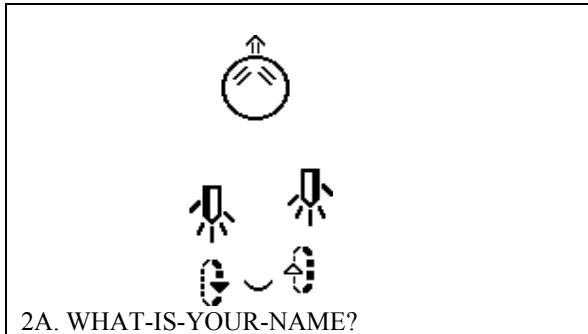
Transcript 8

1. YOU POSS NAME WHAT IS?
Tapaai ko naam ke ho?
 What is your name?

1A. YOU 	 1D. WHAT
 1B. POSSESSIVE-MARKER	 1E. IS
 1C. NAME	

Transcript 9

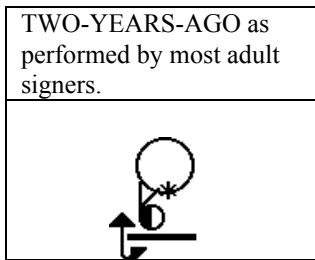
1. WHAT-IS-YOUR-NAME?
What is your name?



On the other hand, while homesigners taught by deaf teachers in the associations and the Swedish Sewing Project are exposed to spatial grammatical forms of NSL in the classroom, because they may be constrained in their ability to acquire a language due to earlier linguistic isolation, their use of such forms is often as frozen as hearing signers²⁵. Deaf teachers in the associations often produce morphologically productive combinatorial signs – for example, combining the morphemes for “TWO”, “YEAR,” and “PAST” to produce a single sign meaning ”TWO-YEARS-AGO”. Homesigners often cannot perform a single sign in this fashion, but produce each morpheme independently, one after the other. Work on sign language acquisition by deaf children of deaf parents suggests that the ability to break up and reanalyze the components in morphologically productive signs is acquired only after deaf children can produce each element independently (Supalla 1982). The inability of some former homesigners to do this suggests that they are unable to reach this stage of sign language acquisition.

²⁵ Homesigners differ in the degree to which they are able to acquire new forms – while some may have difficulty acquiring even the standard lexical items, others may have difficulty with certain grammatical constructions. In the Chapter 5 I will link these differences to the degree and duration of linguistic isolation experienced by individual homesigners.

Table 4: Different ways of signing “TWO-YEARS-AGO”



TWO YEARS AGO as performed by many of those homesigners who are able to acquire the new lexical items but not the productive morphology presented by their sign language instructors.

TWO	YEARS	AGO

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the wide range of signing practices that are referred to by the term Nepali Sign Language, noting that two important deaf institutions – the schools and the associations – differ significantly in the way they frame the language in response to broader structural conditions and Nepali language politics. I have demonstrated how these ideological positions concerning the status of NSL affect the formal properties of signed grammar in each context, while noting that each institution adheres to the overall standardization project by promoting the same lexical items.

However, students don't always perform the grammatical constructions promoted by their instructors, either because they can't (in the case of homesigners) or because they are able to use more complex forms in dialogue with their peers (as is done by deaf children in the schools). As a result, deaf students who enter the deaf schools early in life and then graduate to deaf social life in the associations are often able to control a wide

range of forms – including written Nepali, signing in Nepali grammatical order, and NSL that exploits the possibilities of visual grammar. At the same time, they've been exposed to a variety of ideological positions about the nature of deafness, both presented explicitly and embedded in the formal properties of different teachers' signing. Having access to these different positions allows deaf individuals to choose their own position regarding the nature of NSL and those who remain a part of deaf social networks often ultimately adhere to the linguistic minority model presented by the deaf associations. However, just as the focus on lexical items allows different grammatical forms of signing to co-exist within a single larger standardization project, the different ideological positions about the nature of NSL also co-exist and can be selectively drawn on by signers to bolster both their individual status and that of their language. This will be explored further in Chapter 6.

**CHAPTER 5: “HERE IN NEPAL THERE ARE NO OLD DEAF PEOPLE”:
HOMESIGNERS, MIRRORING, AND THE DIALOGIC CONSTRUCTION OF
*BAHIRO***

Introduction

The quote included in the title of this chapter was the response I received when, having realized that I had not met any deaf Nepalis older than age 30 or 40, I asked a friend at the deaf association to introduce me to some elderly deaf signers. In fact, there are many older deaf people in Nepal, including both those deaf from a young age and those who grew deaf in their later years. While the latter, who don't sign and are firmly ensconced in hearing social networks, are uniformly considered a separate category, why should old people who have been deaf since childhood not count? This is due to the distinction, outlined in Chapter 3, between *bahiro* (deaf) and *latto* (dumb); the important difference between these terms hinges not on the physicality of one's condition but on the use of sign language. Very few elderly Nepalis are considered *bahiro* because they were born before the advent of the deaf institutions in Nepal, and so there was no possibility of their being able to enter into deaf social life or a signing community until at a very advanced age. As a result, most often such individuals never become a part of these networks and remain *latto*, a state of affairs that has led to the comment quoted above. However, though it is very rare, elderly deaf people do sometimes become a part of deaf social life.

Such individuals can be characterized as homesigners because they reached and passed the critical age for language acquisition without being exposed to an accessible

language. Not all homesigners are elderly; while historical circumstances place almost all members of older generations in this category, the particular life trajectories of deaf individuals can lead much younger deaf people to remain isolated from sign language and deaf social life until past adolescence. Indeed, the majority of deaf signers in Nepal were not born into deaf families but were recruited into deaf networks in childhood or beyond. Hence, while elderly deaf people are sometimes erased from the social landscape, homesigners of a variety of ages remain an important feature. In this chapter I consider the manner in which they are incorporated into a deaf social life that revolves around the use of NSL.

As I have argued in Chapter 2, the fact that the project to standardize NSL is limited to the level of the lexicon can limit its gate-keeping potential, allowing a wide range of signing practice to count as standard. This allows many deaf individuals, whose signing style and competencies vary widely according to factors including signers' age at first exposure to an accessible language, to derive the social benefit of being considered *bahiro* producers of standard NSL. For example, while the last chapter dealt briefly with the constraints some homesigners face in acquiring the spatial grammatical constructions employed by deaf instructors in the association classes, because they control the standard lexical items their linguistic output is considered NSL despite other differences in signing style. In this respect, the standard language ideology surrounding NSL varies somewhat from most standard language ideologies in that it works less as a gate-keeping project than as a means of collecting a wide range of signing styles under one linguistic label and, by adding to the numbers of *bahiro* users of NSL, bolstering the political clout of the deaf as a social grouping in Nepal.

However, homesigners vary widely in the degree to which they are able to acquire new forms and many are in fact unable to independently produce even the standard lexical items. Nevertheless, through a variety of strategies, such individuals can produce the standard signs in dialogue with more competent signers by copying or, in some cases, mirroring, the forms they supply. Though this practice clearly marks homesigners as such, it also creates the possibility for full signers to manipulate the formal properties of NSL to allow homesigners to successfully produce the standard forms, in some cases even by reversing the orientation of their own signs.

How are participant roles distributed in such interactions? Under what circumstances can homesigners be constructed as not only animators, but also principals and authors of the linguistic forms they can produce only in concert with full signers? In Peircean terms, can the manual forms they produce be considered legisigns, replicas of the standard linguistic signs of NSL, or are they sinsigns,²⁶ signs only by virtue of the accident of their existence (Parmentier 1994:23)? I argue that these questions hinge on semiotic ideologies concerning what counts as signs and who/what can produce them (Keane 2003). From a semiotician's perspective, mirrored sign forms in particular must be considered sinsigns, because they are produced in response to the movements of an interlocutor rather than in relation to the conventional linguistic sign. However, it is important to distinguish between what signs actually are (from a semiotician's perspective) and what they are taken to be in a particular social context²⁷. I argue that the fact that deaf social life in Nepal is characterized by the emergence of both individual competency and NSL itself from social interaction within deaf institutional contexts,

²⁶ I thank Richard Parmentier for bringing this question to my attention.

²⁷ I thank Josh Reno for reminding me to consider these different orders of semiosis.

contributes to a local semiotic ideology that allows for the distribution of sign making and authorship across participants in dialogic interactions. As a result, homesigners' manual output can be considered the production of standard NSL signs even when this can only be accomplished through the support of full signers, in turn allowing such individuals to be considered *bahiro*.

Homesigners

The theoretical thrust of many anthropological studies of deaf communities and sign languages has been to show that primary categories of social description, such as language, culture, ethnicity, or identity, are applicable to studies of the deaf. This allows deaf signers to be seen as a “normal” linguistic minority, who are validated by, and validate, existing social and linguistic theory. In service of this effort, aspects of deaf social life that violate these precepts are often sidelined (Bechter in press). However, it must be noted that these are often the aspects of deaf life that most fundamentally characterize it. For example, a disproportionate number of studies focus on sign language and deaf social life in families in which deafness is hereditary and deaf social reproduction occurs in a manner analogous to hearing social reproduction. However, the vast majority of deaf signers come from hearing families. As a result, the majority of participants in deaf social networks are not native signers, but encountered a sign language later in life – as a result, Deaf culture has been termed a conversion or recruitment culture (Bechter in press; Wrigley 1996). The effects of this fact on linguistic and social diversity in signing networks are under-examined and under-theorized.

This sort of theoretical bias is not restricted to studies of the deaf. As Goodwin notes, in much linguistic and social theory actors are assumed to be the “prototypical

competent speaker, fully endowed with all abilities required to engage in the processes under study” claiming that, “such assumptions both marginalize the theoretical relevance of any actors who enter the scene with profound disabilities and reaffirm the basic Western prejudice toward locating theoretically interesting linguistic, cultural, and moral phenomena within a framework that has the cognitive life of the individual as its primary focus” (Goodwin 2004:151). In this respect, attention to the role of homesigners in deaf social life addresses not only deaf studies but also helps fill a gap in the broader anthropological and linguistic literature.

The term “competence” as it appears in much of the linguistics literature, derives from a Chomskyan separation of an abstract underlying competence from performance. Such competency is treated as “ahistorical and asocial,” excluding “from consideration the pragmatics of language learning and acquisition (i.e., input)” (Sidnell 2001:34). This understanding of competence is closely related to Chomsky’s vision of “the “completely homogeneous speech community” that focuses on presumed linguistic universals over socio- and cross- linguistic variation (Sidnell 2001:34). In fact, most studies of homesigners have been conducted from a Chomskyan perspective, treating the gestural systems of such isolates as evidence for an underlying universal grammar that is independent of social and linguistic input. For example, based on her work with homesigning deaf children in the U.S., Susan Goldin-Meadow has concluded that the ergative construction might be a default setting of universal grammar (Goldin-Meadow 2003). However, the study of homesigners can also contribute a great deal to theoretical perspectives that highlight the importance of social interaction in language acquisition and notions of competency.

The term homesigner is a biographically defined category, determined by the age at which a given individual was deafened (at birth or in pre-lingual childhood or thereafter) on the one hand, and age at first exposure to a sign language on the other. The homesigning that the label refers to is the manual communication that a deaf child and his or her hearing interlocutors may engage in, in the absence of (or refusal on the part of the adults to employ) a sign language. While home sign systems may have “language-like” structure, researchers agree that these codes are impoverished in comparison with languages that have developed in a broader social and temporal milieu (Morford 1996; Goldin-Meadow 2003). The critical period for language acquisition theory suggests the linguistic abilities of home signers may be in many cases constrained by the age at which they were first exposed to a visually accessible language, and research on home signers who enter a deaf community later in life shows significant negative effects on their acquisition of sign language that increase with the age of the recruit at first contact with “full-blown” language (Newport 1990).

However, as has been described in other contexts (Mayberry & Eichen 1991; Morford 1996), my research in Nepal suggests that the extent to which a given homesigner is able to acquire new linguistic forms when exposed to a sign language can vary significantly. It is beyond the scope of the present study to explain this phenomenon, but my research suggests that a deaf individual’s social position is a significant factor. As Judy Kegl has succinctly put it, “language-relevant evidence need not necessarily be language” (Kegl 2001:1). Rather, deaf children whose interlocutors engage with them gesturally can actively participate (in fact, drive) the construction of homesign systems that can have many language-like features. Research suggests that a highly developed

homesign system can help stave off the negative effects of linguistic isolation (Goldin-Meadow 2003, Mordon 1996).

My experiences with twenty-six homesigners²⁸ suggest that a variety of factors come into play in Nepal in determining the likelihood that a given deaf individual will have the opportunity to construct such a homesign system. These include the family and local community's position regarding deafness (as described in Chapter Three, deafness might be considered a curse, a marker of moral lack, and/or a sign of pollution) and the social position of the deaf person in so far as they impact the manner in which a deaf person is incorporated into the social life of his or her family and community. Below I provide two contrasting examples, with the caveat that I don't make any absolute claims about the relationships between their personal histories and linguistic competencies. However, the stories are suggestive.

A deaf Nepali friend of mine, the eldest son of a Newari family living in a small, close-knit Newari town in the Kathmandu Valley, was pre-lingually deafened by a severe childhood illness. Though he did not encounter a sign language or other deaf individuals until he was a teenager, he has been able to acquire functional NSL. In part, this may be

²⁸ These twenty-six include five adult homesigners living outside deaf social networks in Mustang and fifteen adolescent and six adult homesigners within deaf social networks. I do not have full access to all of these individuals' histories, but it appears that three of the homesigners from Mustang were deafened prelingually, while the remaining two were born deaf. None of these individuals had had any contact with deaf signers or other individuals using a sign language (with the exception of myself). Of those homesigners who later entered deaf social networks, one was deafened prelingually and did not encounter other signers or sign language until he was in his late 60s. Fifteen of these individuals encountered deaf social networks and sign language in their mid-late teens (it is not always clear if these individuals were deafened pre- or post-lingually, but it appears that over half of them were deafened before acquiring spoken language). The remaining six encountered other deaf signers in their early-mid twenties and may have been prelingually deafened.

because he was always well integrated into the Newari social life into which he was born, despite his deafness. He has always been incorporated into local cultural events and is in possession of a large photo album that catalogues his participation in local clubs, festivals, and political meetings.

Because he is so well positioned, as we became friends he frequently took me on tours through the town, introducing me to important men and women, and school children, who all knew him well. With each introduction, he signed to them in a mixture of NSL and gestures and they would smile, nod, and return a few gestures. Invariably, once they learned that I could speak Nepali and NSL, they would ask me to translate his signs, confessing, “we don’t know sign language”. He was aware of this and encouraged me to serve as a translator in this manner, requesting that I help confirm the details of plans, ask about the particulars of recent events, and so on. However, these social exchanges occurred even in the absence of a potential translator – and while this communication was perhaps more phatic than referential, he and a wide range of interlocutors within the community had constructed enough mutual gestures to communicate at a basic level. It may be presumed that this level of integration into his community and local people’s willingness to attempt (successfully or not, in referential terms) to communicate with him played a role in helping him retain the capacity to acquire NSL later in life.

On the other hand, consider the situation facing a deaf woman I met in Mustang, a relatively remote region in northern Nepal, where households are spread much further apart than in a Newari settlement and the population is quite low. Growing up, she spent most of her days out on the hills with the family’s livestock – work that she could do well

despite being deaf, but which kept her alone much of the time. Eventually she was married to a deaf man from another settlement, whose youth had been spent in a similar manner. When I visited the household, her husband was in fact out with the livestock, and the only family members at home were the deaf woman and her father-in-law. As we spent the afternoon with them, I noted that I had not seen the two gesture or speak to one another, so I asked him to demonstrate how he would communicate with her. He would not do so and became embarrassed, at which point I realized that this was because, in this cultural context, a father-in-law and daughter-in-law are not supposed to talk to one another directly. Rather, a mother-in-law would address her daughter-in-law, but as the mother of her husband was deceased, the deaf woman spent most of her time alone or in uncommunicative company. Perhaps because of this particular history, she displayed many signs of linguistic isolation.

The fact that sign languages emerge only when a critical mass of deaf signers come together in close social contact, and that the effects of language isolation can vary for homesigners depending on the quality and quantity of social interaction in which they are engaged, both suggest that evidence from the study of emerging sign languages and of homesigners is supportive of theories of language that do not assume an abstract Chomskian competency, but rather stress the importance of social interaction and input, and individual and community histories.

Participant roles

As Dell Hymes has noted, competence involves more than the ability to produce grammatically acceptable utterances. It also entails understanding when to speak, with whom, and about what (Hymes 1972b). Competency can also involve the ability to

successfully utilize the voices of other speakers in one's social environment. For example, John Goodwin's research with individuals rendered aphasic after suffering a stroke details the manner in which a stroke victim is able to draw on a variety of resources, including the other participants in a conversation, to authoritatively construct narratives: participating in this "interactive field, parties with very different resources and abilities are nonetheless able to use language, including grammatical structures that are beyond their capacities as individuals to create, to build relevant action" (Goodwin 2004:154).

Understanding how an individual can be a competent speaker without necessarily producing the speech in question for himself or herself requires a more fine-grained understanding of participant roles than the traditional speaker-hearer dyad. Erving Goffman provides this, noting that an utterance's author, animator, and principal can be distributed over a range of individual participants (Goffman 1981). An animator gives voice (or sign as the case may be) to the utterance, while the author has selected the form and content of the message. Finally, the principal is the person (or institution) who is represented by, and held responsible for, the utterance. In the case Goodwin describes, the aphasic may not animate an utterance, but is considered its principle and, depending on the dynamics of a particular interaction, can be considered its author if the animator repeatedly checks in with the aphasic to see if the words chosen are those he had in mind, taking the time to stop and supply alternative words and phrases until the aphasic indicates that he is satisfied (Goodwin 2004).

Following Judith Irvine, I note that it is important not to reify participant roles but rather to attend to the manner in which they are mapped onto participants in a given context, attending to how "participation structures are constructed, imagined, and socially

distributed” (Irvine 1996:136). In the examples I will give below, the distribution of these roles across signers and homesigners in social interactions within Kathmandu’s deaf associations depends on the institutional framing of classroom interactions and other communicative genres, the social status of individual homesigners, and the unfolding dynamics of any given interaction.

Classroom performance

Over the period of ten years I have been spending time in Kathmandu’s deaf associations, there have been several homesigners who have been perpetual students in the NSL classes, attending and participating in but never mastering the lessons. In Chapter 4 I described the manner in which students are taught to recognize and produce the standard lexical items. Below I describe how this class procedure shifts when such a homesigner is called to the board to produce the signs. While other students are expected to produce the signs without prompting, with the sign form supplied by the teacher only if they hesitated too long or produced it incorrectly, homesigners are led through the recitation by the teacher. That is to say, rather than expect them to produce the forms independently, as had the other students, the teacher only requires that they produce each sign correctly by directly copying as he models each. As mentioned above, I have seen students remain in this position in the classroom over a period of ten years, never acquiring the ability to produce the standard forms independently, but publicly performing them in concert with their teachers in such a fashion several times a week.

This trajectory differs from that of those who enter into deaf social life with the ability to acquire new linguistic forms, taking the classes to gain facility with the standard lexical items and ceasing to participate in the classes once that has been achieved. The

continued participation of homesigners who do not acquire the ability to produce these signs independently suggests that the purpose of the classes is not only to teach the standard forms, but to provide a forum in which such marginal members of the association can publicly perform them. In this way, by animating the signs, homesigners are the principals of classroom interactions that allow them to be considered users of standard NSL.

Emplacement stories

Homesigners' interlocutors often provide sign forms for them outside the classroom context as well. Below I will analyze two examples, drawn from a common storytelling genre in deaf social life, that contrast in the manner in which the participant roles were distributed across participants. As I have mentioned before, deaf culture is a recruitment culture, which one must typically join rather than be born into. Those who enter deaf social networks in Nepal often talk about the arc that brought them there, and through that narrative firmly emplace themselves within a milieu defined by the linguistic model of deafness. Following Kirin Narayan, I call such narratives "emplacement" stories, as their telling is part of an emplacement process, both a strategy of coming to belong somewhere and a discursive "orientation of the self within multiple frameworks of meaning" (Narayan 2002:425). Typically, an individual tells his or her own story, and during the course of my research most of my deaf collaborators made a point of sharing theirs with me. These stories are also told by, or in collaboration with, those homesigners who have become a part of deaf social life.

Emplacement Story 1: Deepak and Shiva

My first example shows a case in which a homesigner's emplacement story was told almost entirely through the signs of another person. Transcript 10 shows Deepak²⁹, a young graduate of the deaf school, telling the life story of Shiva, a homesigner in his 30s. After Shiva greeted me, Deepak immediately stepped between us and began to tell Shiva's story for him, at one point recruiting Shiva's sign language teacher Pitambur to comment. In several places, when Shiva himself attempted to contribute to the telling, Deepak signed over him and once even physically swatted at his hands to interrupt his attempts.

Transcript 10

The transcript is in two sections. The first contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals) and an English translation. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). This portion is written in lanes that can be read top to bottom and then left to right. The lanes allow better representation of the use of signing space. Each transcript is numbered for comparison.

Deepak:

1. HE PAST HE GROWNG-UP HE WASN'T-IN-SCHOOL.

In the past, when he was growing up, he wasn't in school.

2. I SCHOOL GROWING-UP HELPED ME THEN WORKED FROM-THEN MET-PEOPLE TALKED-TO-OTHERS LANGUAGE BECAME-INDEPENDENT.

I went to school growing up, it helped me – then I worked from then on and met people, talked with them, and became independent in language.

3. HE GROWING-UP SAME BEGGAR SAME.

He was the same as a beggar growing up.

4. VILLAGE THERE VILLAGE PROJECT SIGN STUDY FINISHE MOVE-HERE.

In his village there was a village project where he studied sign language and then moved here.

5. MEET-PEOPLE WATCH-REPEATEDLY UNDERSTAND.

He met people, kept watching them, and came to understand.

6. FIRST SIGN TEACHER HE HE-TAUGHT-HIM WHO-HE

First, he was his sign language teacher who taught him, him over there.

Shiva: (tapping the Deepak's shoulder in an attempt to break into the discussion and being ignored)

7. Unintelligible unintelligible.

Unintelligible

Pitambur:

8. HIS-TEACHER I-TAUGHT-HIM 6-MONTHS HIS-TEACHER.

I was his teacher, I taught him for six months.

²⁹ I have changed the names of all participants.

9. BECAME-INDEPENDENT FINE TOO-OLD DIFFICULT SIGN FINE THUMBS-UP-TO-HIM.

He became independent but he's too old, it's difficult but his signing is fine, good for him.

10. HE WORK DOESN'T-HAVE SEARCHES HE WORK SEARCHES DOESN-T HAVE.

He doesn't have a job so he searches for work but hasn't found any.

Shiva:

11. SEARCH

Search.

Deepak: (interrupting by moving between the Shiva and the camera)

12. HEY HOUSE HIS-OWN HEY HOUSE!

Hey – he has his own house – hey- house!

Shiva:

13. Unintelligible unintelligible

Unintelligible

Deepak: (Physically interrupting by swatting at Shiva's hands)

14. YOU-WON'T UNDERSTAND-EACH-OTHER.

You won't understand each other.

(Deepak searches for the name tag Shiva wears around his neck and shows it to me.)

Shiva:

15. NAME I WRITE I.

I can write my name.






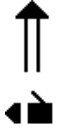






Deepak: 16. A-LITTLE SIGN

He can sign a little.



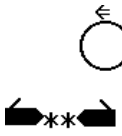









17. (To Shiva) LET'S-GO LET'S-GO-TOGETHER

Let's go, let's both go.


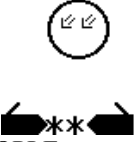






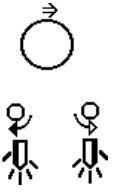



Transcript 10: Sutton SignWriting

 <p>(Deepak) 1A. HE</p>	 <p>2A. I</p>
 <p>1B. PAST</p>	 <p>2B. SCHOOL</p>
 <p>1C. HE</p>	 <p>2C. GROWING-UP</p>
 <p>1D. GROWING-UP</p>	 <p>2D. HELPED-ME</p>
 <p>1E. HE</p>	 <p>2E. THEN</p>
 <p>1F. WASN'T-IN-SCHOOL</p>	 <p>2F. WORKED</p>



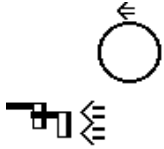
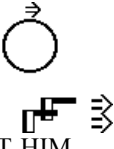

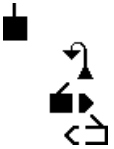

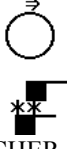
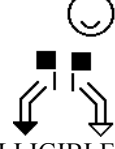



Transcript 10: Sutton SignWriting

 <p>2G. FROM-THEN</p>	 <p>3B. GROWING-UP</p>
 <p>2H. MET-PEOPLE</p>	 <p>3C. SAME</p>
 <p>2I. TALKED-TO-OTHERS</p>	 <p>3D. BEGGAR</p>
 <p>2J. LANGUAGE</p>	 <p>3E. SAME</p>
 <p>2K. BECAME-INDEPENDENT</p>	 <p>4A. VILLAGE</p>
 <p>3A. HE</p>	 <p>4B. THERE</p>



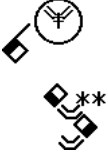









Transcript 10: Sutton SignWriting

<p>4C. VILLAGE</p> 	<p>5A. MEET-PEOPLE</p> 
<p>4D. PROJECT</p> 	<p>5B. WATCH-REPEATEDLY</p> 
<p>4E. SIGN</p> 	<p>5C. UNDERSTAND</p> 
<p>4F. STUDY</p> 	<p>6A. FIRST</p> 
<p>4G. FINISH</p> 	<p>6B. SIGN</p> 
<p>4H. MOVE-HERE</p> 	<p>6C. TEACHER</p> 



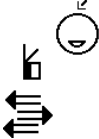


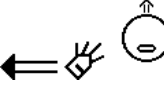

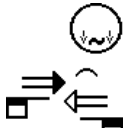
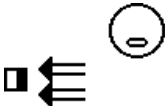

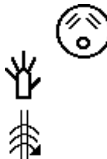

Transcript 10: Sutton SignWriting

<p>6D. HE</p> 	<p>8A. (Pitambur) HIS-TEACHER</p> 
<p>6E. HE-TAUGHT-HIM</p> 	<p>8B. I-TAUGHT-HIM</p> 
<p>6F. WHO-HE</p> 	<p>8C. 6-MONTHS</p> 
<p>(Siva) 7A. UNINTELLIGIBLE</p> 	<p>8D. HIS-TEACHER</p> 
<p>7B. UNINTELLIGIBLE</p> 	<p>9A. BECAME-INDEPENDENT</p> 
<p>7C. UNINTELLIGIBLE</p> 	<p>9B. FINE</p> 

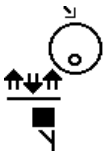




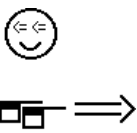
Transcript 10: Sutton SignWriting

 <p>9C. TOO-OLD</p>	 <p>10B. WORK</p>
 <p>9D. DIFFICULT</p>	 <p>10C. DOESN'T-HAVE</p>
 <p>9E. SIGN</p>	 <p>10D. SEARCHES</p>
 <p>9F. FINE</p>	 <p>10E. HE</p>
 <p>9G. THUMBS-UP-TO-HIM</p>	 <p>10F. WORK</p>
 <p>10A. HE</p>	 <p>10G. SEARCHES</p>

Transcript 10: Sutton SignWriting

 <p>10H. DOESN'T-HAVE</p>	 <p>12E. HOUSE</p>
 <p>(SHIVA) 11A. SEARCH...</p>	 <p>(SHIVA) 13A. (unintelligible)</p>
 <p>(DEEPAK) 12A. HEY!</p>	 <p>13B. (unintelligible)</p>
 <p>12B. HOUSE</p>	 <p>(Deepak) 14A. YOU-WON'T-UNDERSTAND-EACH-OTHER (locates Shiva's name tag and fingerspells his name to me)</p>
 <p>12C. HIS-OWN</p>	 <p>(Shiva) 15A. NAME</p>
 <p>12D. HEY</p>	 <p>15B. I</p>

Transcript 10: Sutton SignWriting

 <p>15C. WRITE</p>	 <p>16B. SIGN</p>
 <p>15D. I</p>	 <p>17C. LET'S-GO</p>
 <p>(Deepak) 16A. A-LITTLE</p>	 <p>17D. LET'S-GO-TOGETHER</p>

While Shiva was the principle of this utterance, he was only infrequently permitted to serve as author or animator. Though his sign language teacher characterized Shiva's signing as "OK" and "INDEPENDENT", he also acknowledged that Shiva is "TOO OLD", which made the language acquisition process difficult. At the same time, Deepak insisted that Shiva's signing is unintelligible, and indeed, I was unable to parse many of his utterances, though it's not clear if this is at least partially because he was repeatedly cut off mid-sign. In fact, when Shiva was permitted to complete a sentence he employed standard forms, if shakily. Both the meta-linguistic commentary and the conversational dynamics in this transcript highlight the fact that Shiva's status as a *bahiro* individual able to use the standard forms himself is ambiguous.

Laxmi and Madhu: Emplacement story 2

If many homesigners are only able to produce standard forms in concert with their interlocutors or are simply signed for, does this mean that they have can have no active

role in or authority for their use of standard forms? In fact, close analysis of another telling of an emplacement story shows that homesigners' stories can be told cooperatively with other signers in a manner that constructs them as active, authoritative participants. However, this requires subtle cooperation on the part of their interlocutor, as illustrated in the following example.

At the time I recorded this conversation, I had an 8-year relationship with deaf signers in Nepal, and was well acquainted with most of the signers present at the deaf association that day. I was catching up with Laxmi, a friend who had also been my first sign language teacher, a woman seen as a highly competent signer of standardized NSL. Suddenly an old man with very white hair walked into the deaf association sitting room, where we had all gathered to chat. I was taken aback when he greeted everyone with manual gestures and inarticulate vocalizing: he was the first elderly deaf man I had ever met within deaf social networks in Nepal. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, elderly participants in deaf social life are rare.

Noticing and understanding my surprise, my companions quickly explained what they knew about his life. This homesigner, they said, had no family that they knew of and lived at the Pashupatinath temple, the most important Hindu temple complex in Nepal. To make a living he set out from the temple grounds each day carrying mud from the riverbed on a leaf. He would then offer to put *tikka* on the heads of passersby – in other words, to smear a bit of the mud on their forehead with the third finger of his right hand. This passes blessings to the recipients, who were then expected to offer him a small financial reward (the act of giving the money also allows the recipient to accrue merit and so is beneficial to both parties). In the course of his perambulations of the city, he had

encountered a young deaf woman, who encouraged him to include the deaf associations on his daily route. Both of the two major deaf associations in Kathmandu had become daily stops, where he put *tikka* on all those present, received some money, and then stopped a while to socialize.

On the day that I first met him, in addition to generally chatting, I had been videotaping the emplacement stories of several members of the association. One of my companions suggested that we invite the elderly homesigner to tell his life story. When Laxmi asked this man if he would like to answer questions about his life, he enthusiastically agreed – but only on the condition that she be the one to question him and to translate his home signed replies into Nepali Sign Language and/or written Nepali (since she had a pen and paper). He then entered into a dialogue with Laxmi about his life. A close analysis of this interaction lets us examine how a homesigner can have an active role in utilizing standard sign forms in constructing a story and, through the support of an interlocutor, be construed as unifying the three participant roles I have discussed in his or her person - even if he or she is unable to produce standard forms independently. In analyzing this dialogue I focus in particular on a phenomenon I call “mirroring” wherein a home signer engages with an interlocutor by mirroring back his or her gestures in addition to (and in some cases rather than) introducing new forms into the conversation. In order for a homesigner to be read as the author of his or her own words in such a conversation, he or she must both use prosody effectively and enjoy the subtle cooperation of his or her interlocutor.

Mirroring

I first noticed this phenomenon among home signers who had not entered into deaf social life, while traveling through Mustang, a relatively remote mountainous region in the north of Nepal. Walking from village to village I sought out local deaf people, in order to investigate deaf life in Nepal outside of the deaf institutions. I was interested in the formal properties of local homesign systems, among other things. As I encountered deaf individuals throughout the region however, it soon became apparent that if I was to view and record local forms it was essential that I myself not communicate manually at all. For I discovered that whatever signs or gestures I employed were immediately mirrored back to me. When I say mirrored, I mean precisely that; it was not that the deaf person in question echoed back or copied my signs – rather they were replicated in reverse, like a reflection in a mirror. If, for example, I was to move my right hand across my body and point to the left, my deaf interlocutor, facing me, moved his left hand across his body to his right. In most cases this was not supplemented with forms of their own: so long as I persisted in communicating manually, they mirrored my movements and handshapes. This did not appear to have any semantic content, but seemed to serve something more like a phatic function.

Based on her study of language acquisition by homesigners in Nicaragua, Judy Kegl proposes several components of the language acquisition process, including an “awareness of one’s ability to copy certain language relevant stimuli and a tendency to attempt to copy such stimuli”(Kegl 2001:1). However, my research suggests that it is important to distinguish between copying and mirroring. While investigation into the language acquisition process has not been the focus of my project, I have noted a great deal of mirroring by homesigners whose linguistic and social isolation has been the most

complete, while younger deaf individuals recruited into deaf schools appear to rapidly switch from mirroring to imitation and subsequently to the ability to produce sign forms independently.

There may be some analogues between this phenomenon and the acquisition of “view-point dependent” constructions in spoken languages, which appear to be difficult for novice language users to learn. Example, children must first learn to identify the distinction between left and right from their own perspective long before they understand that this differs for interlocutors facing them (Piaget and Inhelder 1963). As Eve Danziger notes, this is partly a spatial problem: “since humans are symmetrical across the right-left axis, the problem involves distinguishing a true copy from a mirror-image, when the distinction must be made under 180 degrees of rotation” (Danziger 1998:49). The fact that those homesigners in my study whose linguistic isolation was most complete and of the greatest duration mirror rather than copy the signs of their interlocutors suggests that they have not been able to acquire the ability to make this distinction.

When homesigners mirror back the linguistic forms of their interlocutors, can these forms be considered instances of these symbols from a semiotic standpoint? From a Peircean perspective, the forms produced by the homesigners would rather be considered sinsigns – “signs that are an occurring event” made a signs only by the accidents of their existence (Parmentier 1994:23). It is a token rather than a type. This is in contrast to the same form as produced by a signer who has acquired NSL. Such a signer is producing a legisign, a sign whose physical instantiation is a token of a conventionalized type. Though what a mirroring homesigner produces might formally resemble the signer’s

legisign (though flipped backwards) because he or she produces that sign in response to the movements of an interlocutor rather than in reference to knowledge of the conventional sign, from a semiotician's perspective it is fundamentally different. This was certainly my perspective on the formal output of those isolated homesigners who mirrored my signs in Nepal.

However, when homesigners who have become a part of deaf social networks mirror the signs of their interlocutors this distinction is more complicated. As I will show in the transcript below, mirroring, like the copying in the classroom example, can allow a homesigner to produce standard NSL forms in concert with a signing interlocutor. If what a homesigner produces are actually sinsigns, they cannot be considered standard NSL signs from a Peircian perspective. However, while an individual must be semiotically competent to produce a legisign, to what extent can this competence be distributed across the participants in a conversation? While the homesigner in the example below animates and is the principal of his emplacement story, authorship of the sign forms emerges from subtle cooperation between himself and his interlocutor. I argue that a local semiotic ideology permits this shared authorship to define the homesigner's output as standard NSL and allows him to be considered *bahiro*.

The dialogic construction of *bahiro*

To illustrate these points I will now return to the conversation between Laxmi and Madhu. At the point in the conversation from which the transcription begins, Madhu's given name had been determined when he presented a card worn around his neck carrying that information (such cards are frequently worn by illiterate deaf people in

Nepal). His age was then estimated by his recollection that he was six at the time when the last major earthquake struck Kathmandu, in 1934 (Nepali calendar 1995). Because this conversation occurred in 2004 (Nepali calendar 2060), Laxmi deducted that he was 76 years old. She had then inquired about his relatives, most of whom, he reported, were now dead. The transcript opens as she begins to inquire about his relationship with a younger brother he had mentioned. She inquired about their medium of communication and, upon being told that they no longer meet or talk, shifted the time frame to their mutual childhoods, to investigate how they communicated then (Madhu had been born deaf). She finally concluded that the brothers had employed homesigns. After she looked to another member of the deaf association to confirm this assessment, she turned her attention to the sheet of paper in front of her and began to summarize Madhu's story in written Nepali. After a few seconds however, Madhu brushed her shoulder several times to get her attention, and then introduced a new topic: patting the wall of the association, through a series of homesigns he indicated that he had been cheated out of his inheritance.

It would be very easy to overlook the mirroring that appears in this transcript. In fact, while initially participating in this scene I did not see it, and also missed it during my first several viewings of the video I recorded of the event. It was only when I began the process of transcribing the interaction that I became aware of how pervasive the mirroring is. This subtlety is in marked contrast to the kind of immediately obvious mirroring I encountered in Mustang. Madhu mirrors Laxmi's signs at five points in the transcript. It is only possible to positively identify mirroring in a sign that involves a difference in orientation, handshape, or movement on one side of the signing space: a

perfectly symmetrical sign would look the same whether in is imitated or mirrored. Clear instances of mirroring appear in lines 4, 6 8, 12, and 19,

Given their placement in the dialogue, Madhu appears to be answering Laxmi's questions in the affirmative or negative, by restating the same sign without the non-manual question markers. Indeed, that is how his contributions function, a fact made possible by his ability to pragmatically attend to and deploy prosodic features appropriately and by the fact that Laxmi supports this by asking questions that can be successfully responded to by repeating the last word or two. She further supports his production of standard forms by flipping backwards the orientation of a sign in line 19, so that his mirrored response takes on the correct standard form.

Transcript 11

The transcript is in two sections. The first contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals) and an English translation. Points of overlap are marked with brackets. Points at which Madhu mirrors Laxmi's signs are in bold. The point at which Laxmi flips the orientation of her sign is in bold italics. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). Each participant's signing occupies a vertical lane and is marked by its position in the chronological unfolding of the dialogue. Overlaps are marked visually: when a sign occupies the same horizontal plane, overlap has occurred. The signs are written from the receptive viewpoint - Laxmi's signs are written as they appeared from Madhu's perspective, and Madhu's signs are written as they appeared from Laxmi's viewpoint.

1. L: YOU, HEY, YOU [YOUNGER-BROTHER YOU HE YOU-AND-HE-TALK WHAT?

You, hey, you and your [younger brother, do you talk together?

2. M: [YOUNGER-BROTHER
[younger brother

DARN

Darn. (no)

3. L: SIGN

Do you sign?

4. M: **SIGN NOT**

No, we don't sign.

5. L: YOUNGER-BROTHER YOU NOT-MEET NOT?

You and your brother, do you [not meet?

6. M: NO **NOT-MEET NOT**

No, We don't meet

7. L: PAST MUTUAL-CHILDHOODS YOU MUTUTAL CHILDHOODS

Before, when you were both young, you, when [you were both young

8. M: **MUTUAL-CHILDHOODS**

[when we both were young

9. L: BROTHER HE-YOU HEARING-YOU NOT YOU WHAT

Your younger brother was hearing and you were not – what did you do?

10. M: NO SPEAK-WHAT I-DON'T-SPEAK

[No

[How could we talk?

I can't speak

11. L: SORT-OF-SIGNED

You sort of [signed?

12. M: **SORT-OF-SIGNED** (MIRRORED)

[Sort of signed.

13. L: (to onlooker) HOMESIGN

Homesign.

14. M: (to onlooker) YES

Yes.

(pause while L writes)

15. M: (to L) HEY HOUSE CONTRACT TOOK I SIGNED-CONTRACT GIVE-ME MONEY NOTh

Hey, hey...house, signed/contract, took. I put-my-thumbprints-on-the-contract. They didn't give me money.

16. L: TOOK

They took it?

17. M: HEARING-PEOPLE-TALK GONE

I, hearing-people, gone.











18. L: YOU-NOT PORTION NOT-GIVE-YOU **NOT**

They didn't give you your portion?

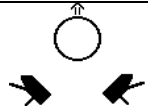
19. M: **NOT** (MIRRORED)

No.


Transcript 11: Sutton SignWriting

Laxmi	Madhu
<p>1A. YOU</p> 	
<p>1B. HEY</p> 	
<p>1C. YOU</p> 	
<p>1D. YOUNGER-BROTHER (in shorthand: the morpheme indicating gender is omitted. Mouths the corresponding Nepali word: <i>bhai</i>)</p>  	
<p>1E. YOU</p> 	<p>2A. (mouths the word <i>bhai</i>)</p>
<p>1F. HE (gaze shifts and head turns to signing space assigned to the brother)</p>  	
<p>1G. YOU-AND-HE-TALK</p> 	

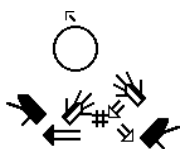
1H. WHAT?




3A. SIGN (done in exaggerated fashion – continues until he begins the same sign)



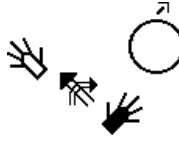
2B. Darn (gesture used by spoken Nepalis accompanying the word *hatteri*)

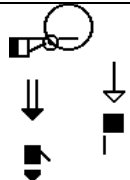


4A. SIGN (mirrored)



4B. NOT

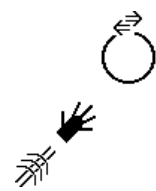




5A. YOUNGER-BROTHER (right hand)
YOU(left hand)



5B. NOT-MEET



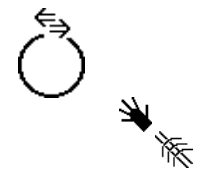
5C. NOT



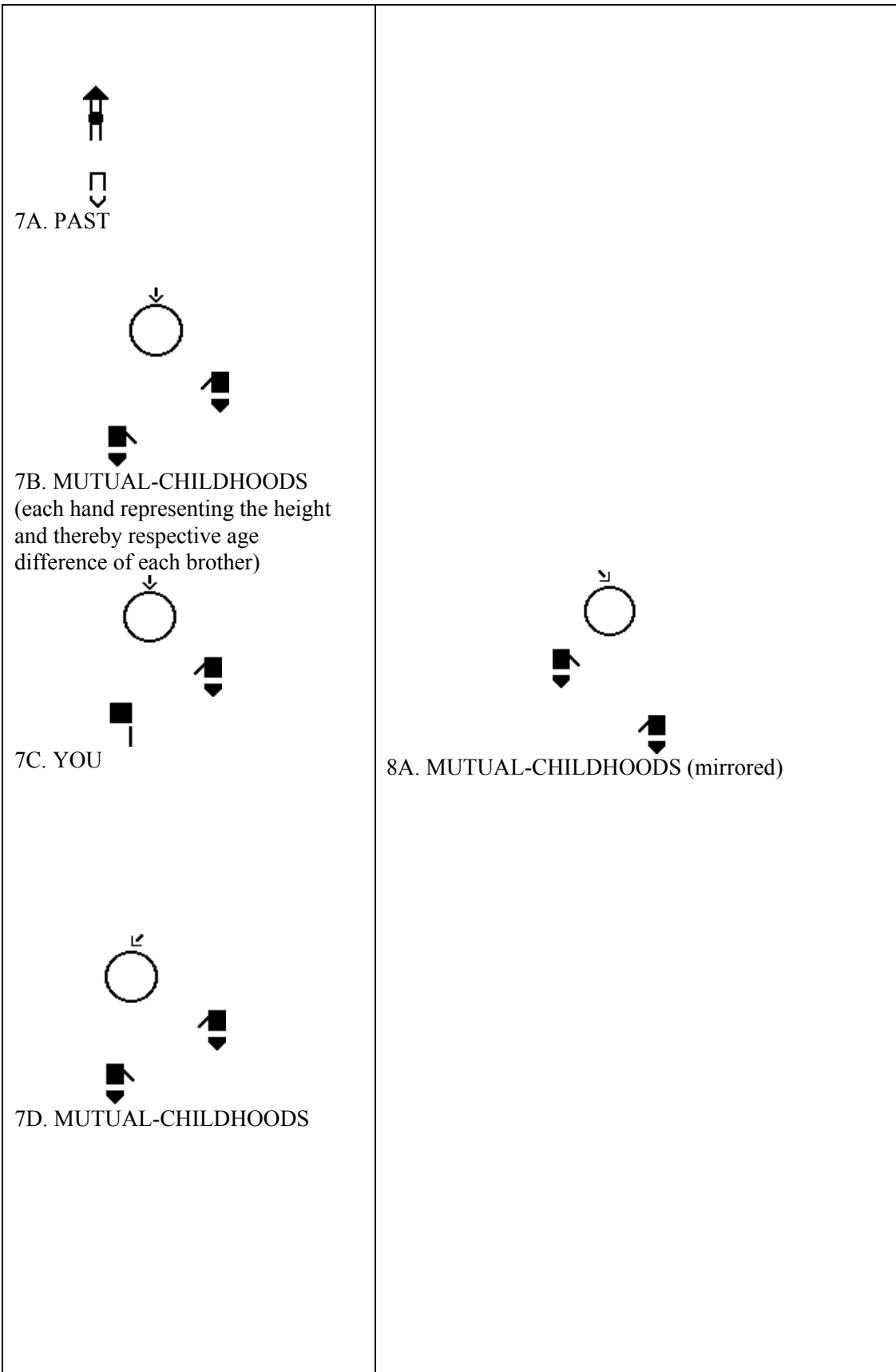
6A. NO



6B. NOT-MEET (mirrored)

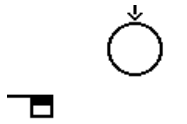


6C. NOT (mirrored)





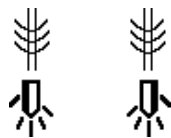
9A. BROTHER (right hand – shorthand: consists only of the gender morpheme, omitting those that indicate brother and age relationship)
you (left hand)



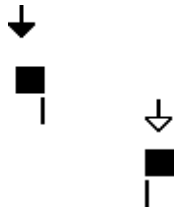
9B. HE(right hand)
YOU (left hand - held)



9C. HEARING (right hand)
YOU (left hand- held)



9D. NOT

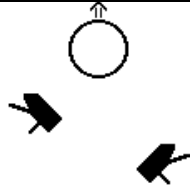


9E. YOU (both hands)

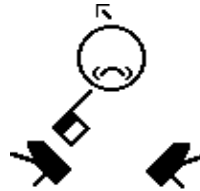
10A. NO



9F. WHAT



10B. SPEAK-WHAT



10C. I-DON'TSPEAK

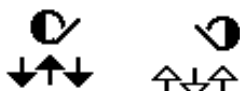


11A. HOMESIGN (tongue out and discombobulated movement communicate that she is referring to something awkward and less than fluent signing.



12A. HOMESIGN (mirrored)





13A. HOMESIGNS (addressed to ratified onlooker)

(Laxmi pauses to write)



14A. YES (addressed to ratified onlooker)



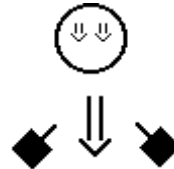
15A. HEY



(leans forward and taps Laxmi)



15.B HOUSE (leans back and taps on the wall)



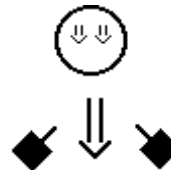
15C. CONTRACT (unclear grammatically and contextually if the contract or the act of signing via thumbprint is referred to here)




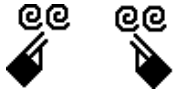
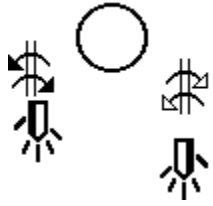
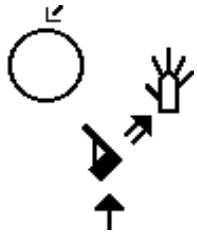



15D. TOOK (unclear grammatically or contextually who is the agent for this verb)

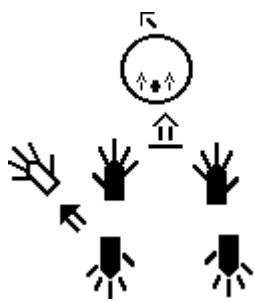


15E. I

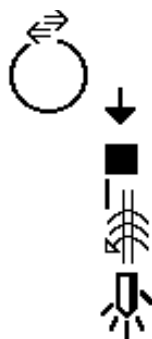


15F. CONTRACT

	 <p>15G. TOOK</p>  <p>15H. MONEY</p>  <p>15. I NOT</p>
 <p>16A. TOOK?</p>	 <p>17A. I</p>   <p>17B. HEARING-PEOPLE-TALK (mouth opens and shuts repeatedly)</p>



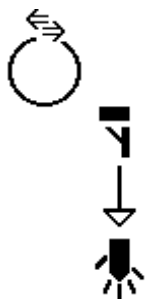
17C. GONE



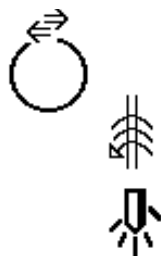
18A. YOU-NOT



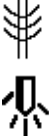
18B. PORTION



18C. NOT-GIVE-YOU



19A. NOT (mirrored)

 <p>18D. NOT</p>	
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Madhu's appropriate use of prosody in not mirroring the raised eyebrows, brow furrow, or head tilt that marked Laxmi's questions, allowed his mirrored lexical items to function as statements that affirmed or denied her questions. This suggests that though he is not able to produce these signs independently, his mirroring is not simply a phatic response to Laxmi's signing. In this respect, he can be considered at least a co-author of these utterance, actively contributing to the unfolding conversation, not only by introducing topics in his idiosyncratic homesigns from line 15 on, but also through the contextually appropriate appropriation of Laxmi's standard signs. However, his ability to do so hinges on her cooperation, as it requires that she set him up for success in the construction of her utterances. She does so not only by framing questions that can be replied to through the repetition of key words but also by reversing the orientation of her sign form in line 18. Her willingness to do this work is in marked contrast to the first emplacement story, in which the homesigner's attempts to contribute to the story were actively discouraged. In part, this difference may stem from the fact that Madhu, unlike Shiva, is elderly, in a Nepali cultural context in which it is important to honor elders and a deaf cultural context in which the elderly are rare and exciting.

Under such circumstances, are the standard forms Madhu produces legisigns? This is ambiguous from a Peircean standpoint, from which competence to produce legisigns seems to require the unification of the author and animator roles in a given participant. However, as the above examples have suggested, within this deaf social network the competence to produce forms that “count” as replicas of the standard NSL signs can be distributed across participants. Publicly animating the standard lexical items in classroom contexts or strategically employing the “voice” of an interlocutor all serve to construct homesigners as *bahiro* through the mediation of the standard forms. While the homesigners serving as the principals in these interactions may not be competent to produce the standard NSL signs independently, they must display other kinds of linguistic competence described by Dell Hymes; understanding at what point in a conversation a mirrored sign can function as a response or knowing when it is one’s turn to animate the sign forms in a classroom context, They must also display competence in their choice of communicative partner, as they must enjoy the cooperation of their interlocutors in giving them a platform to display this competence - cooperation that was denied in the telling of Shiva’s emplacement story.

Conclusion

All speech bears the traces of the voices of others. As Judith Irvine notes, “although an author may manipulate the evocations of other speakers, it is not clear that he or she may avoid them. So pervasive is this process that it puts in doubt the very possibility that a sentence might represent but a single subjectivity. Words, forms, and styles bear the traces of those who have used them in the past” (Irvine 1996:151). In this

chapter I have described extreme cases of this more general phenomenon in the copying and mirroring employed by homesigners in deaf social networks.

While the standard language ideologies surrounding NSL have less of a gate-keeping function than the ideological thrust of many spoken language standardization projects, homesigners who are unable to produce the standard lexical items push the limits of this inclusiveness. Above I have examined how, despite these linguistic constraints, they can be incorporated into a *bahiro* social life defined by the use of NSL. After considering the manner in which the category of homesigner itself highlights the fundamental nature of dialogic interaction in the emergence of both languages and speakers/signers, I argued that the interpretation of the forms homesigners produce in concert with signing interlocutors as instantiations of the standard NSL signs that mark their producers as *bahiro* depends on local semiotic ideologies about how signs can be produced and by whom. Attending to the distribution of participant roles across individuals (rather than assuming their unification in a single speaker/hearer/see-er) allows us to understand how homesigners can be considered authors or co-authors of the standard forms they produce only in concert with their signing interlocutors. The ability of any given homesigner to successfully engage in such dialogues, however, depends on both linguistic competencies that extend beyond a Chomskian definition of the term, and the support of their interlocutors.

CHAPTER 6: STANDARDIZATION BEYOND FORM

Introduction

In this chapter I will explore how the potentially infinite multiplicity of semiotic meanings that can be derived from sign forms relate to the standardization project being undertaken by Kathmandu's deaf schools and associations. How do institutional efforts to promote or impose standard language forms take on social meaning for individuals? To what extent do these social meanings vary from individual to individual? This chapter will examine these questions, demonstrating that in making the association's ideological position towards NSL explicit through meta-linguistic and meta-semiotic discourse, the leaders of the associations promote not only the standardization of the formal properties of language but also attempt to standardize the wider semiotic interpretations of those forms.

In so doing I consider the role of interdiscursivity in reducing the indeterminacy of semiosis. Many gestures are widely shared in Nepal and create links across contexts which create/reinforce linkages between forms and social meanings – however, without access to spoken discourse on the part of deaf (or to sign language on the part of hearing) this alone does not necessarily structure shared interpretations or pragmatic uses of these forms. As a result, while deaf institutional efforts to create and enforce a standardized NSL draw on shared cultural forms, certain kinds of discursive instructions on the part of

the deaf associations are required in the attempt to standardize semiotic interpretations of them. I describe how such instructions are conveyed in the associations.

I also note that interdiscursivity is not a process that is free of social positioning; certain actors are better positioned than others to make and promote particular connections across contexts. Sign language teachers are generally seen as authoritative figures who can validate certain such semiotic connections over others. However, certain kinds of linkages are given space for consideration, even if offered by a non-authority, because of their ideological resonance. In particular, multivalent indexical connections that can be read as supporting both the deaf school's and deaf association's framing of NSL are preferred. In this respect, just as the project to standardize NSL can accommodate a range of formal variation, efforts to standardize these wider semiotic interpretations also accommodates the coexistence of the distinct ideological positions adopted by each institution.

Standardization and semiotic mediation

Standard forms have power not only because they are promoted as the favored means by which reference is to be accomplished but because of their broader semiotic properties. These include the ways standard and non-standard forms may be linked to social evaluations of different groups and what these linkages are taken to convey about speakers (or signers as the case may be). As noted in Chapter 1, it cannot be assumed that individuals will notice the same kinds of indexical connections between the linguistic and the social or rationalize and justify them in the same ways. Rather, as Peircean semiotics makes clear, there is an unending chain of possible semiotic relationships between signs, objects, and interpretants (Peirce 1931-1959). Therefore, as Irvine suggests, it is

important “not to assume that the ‘likeness’ of iconicity is apparent, even in the absence of any directions, or even any interpretant...iconicity without such directions – similarity without a guiding principle for detecting it – is unconstrained. There is no limit to what a discourse could be said to be like. Instead we have to pick out the likeness that we deem to be relevant, within some discursive practice and some historical moment. The same is true of indexicality” (Irvine, 2005:74). Hence, just as I take diversity in linguistic practice as a given and the production of a shared or standardized code as that which requires explanation, the same can be said for semiotic systems more broadly. The rest of the chapter then will examine how the “infinite reach of indexical possibility” of signing practice is narrowed within the context of deaf institutions in Nepal (Bauman 2005:146).

Interdiscursivity and semiotic modalities

First, it is important to consider the role of interdiscursivity in reducing the indeterminacy of semiosis. As Asif Agha notes, “anyone who effectively engages in a given discursive encounter has participated in other before it and thus brings to the current encounter a biographically specific discursive history that, in many respects, shapes the individual’s socialized ability to use and construe utterances (as well as footings, stances, identities, and relationships mediated by utterances) within the current encounter” (Agha 2005:1). In this way people’s particular histories and experiences come to bear on the way that they use and interpret signs. The relevance of these personal histories is extremely apparent in the case of the deaf associations and schools’ membership, who have diverse backgrounds, not only in terms of ethnicity, class, or regional background, but also in terms of their access to the spoken discourses that circulate among their hearing families and in broader society. Hence, in this case it is

particularly important to consider the roles of different modalities of semiosis in “establishing continuities across social encounters” (Agha, 2005:1).

The study of discourse focuses on communicative events in which linguistic and non-linguistic signs are co-deployed (Agha 2005:1) and interdiscursive links are forged between instances of talk, images, activities, and events. However, as Jane Hill and Bruce Mannheim have pointed out, there is “no prima facie way to identify certain behaviors – or better, certain forms of social action – as linguistic and others cultural” (Hill and Mannheim 1992:382). What the authors call the “most identifiably nonlinguistic, unconscious parts of behavior – the timing of body movements and gestures” (Ibid 1992:382), are deeply interwoven with spoken language and have been suggested by theorists of gesture and body movement to be themselves highly structured (Kendon 1997; McNeill 1985; Birdwhistell 1970). As in many other documented cases, homesigners and their interlocutors in Nepal draw on gestures used by hearing individuals around them in their attempts to communicate (Morford and Kegl 2000). Similarly, as previously outlined, Nepali Sign Language (NSL) derives from the signing practice of deaf children who surreptitiously used homesigns together in deaf social institutions. As a result, many aspects of signing practice in Nepal are grounded in the broader cultural repertoire of gestural practice, particularly in what are known as emblematic, or quotable, gestures (Kendon 1997). These are those gestures that have “stable forms and meanings, can be used independently of speech, and can be quoted like words or phrases in spoken language” (Brookes 2004:186).

For example, the NSL sign “NOT/NO” which corresponds to the Nepali word

chaaina (no/isn't)³⁰ is derived from such an emblematic or quotable gesture. I had formally learned this sign in the deaf associations long before I noticed its ubiquitous use among hearing Nepalis in Kathmandu. One day as I approached an army petrol pump on my scooter I found myself confronted by a soldier wearing army fatigues vigorously making what I understood as the NSL sign “NOT/NO” to indicate, over the roar of my motor, that there was no petrol available that day. At first I was taken aback and wondered if the soldier might know NSL as well, but soon thereafter I realized that this gesture accompanied the speech of most hearing individuals with whom I interacted in Kathmandu – I had simply not noticed before as the speech and physical movement were so interwoven as to be taken for one.

To gauge the extent to which these sorts of gestures matched up with signing practice I asked several hearing individuals with whom I was acquainted to perform manual versions of various simple sentences, to the best of their ability. Certain emblematic gestures often appeared which did in fact correlate with the NSL signs for those referents. These included “NO/NOT” *chhaina*, “GOOD” *raamro*, and “WOMAN” *aaimai*. As one of my hearing informants pointed out by noting the wide range of spoken Nepali structures the gesture for *chhaina* can represent, each of these gestures, depending on the context of its deployment, can take on a range of functions – serving as a statement, directive, or question. This is less true of the gestures’ instantiations as signs in

³⁰ Note that in linking this sign with a Nepali word I am not suggesting that NSL and Nepali are interchangeable. However, there are two lexical items in both NSL and Nepali for is/isn't: *chha/chhaina* versus *ho/hoiina*. In NSL these take the form of an open palm held up (or shaken in the negative) versus an index finger held horizontally to the floor (also shaken in the negative). The latter word and sign are existential copulas. The two copulas are kept distinct in both Nepali and NSL, and this presumably reflects contact between the two languages.

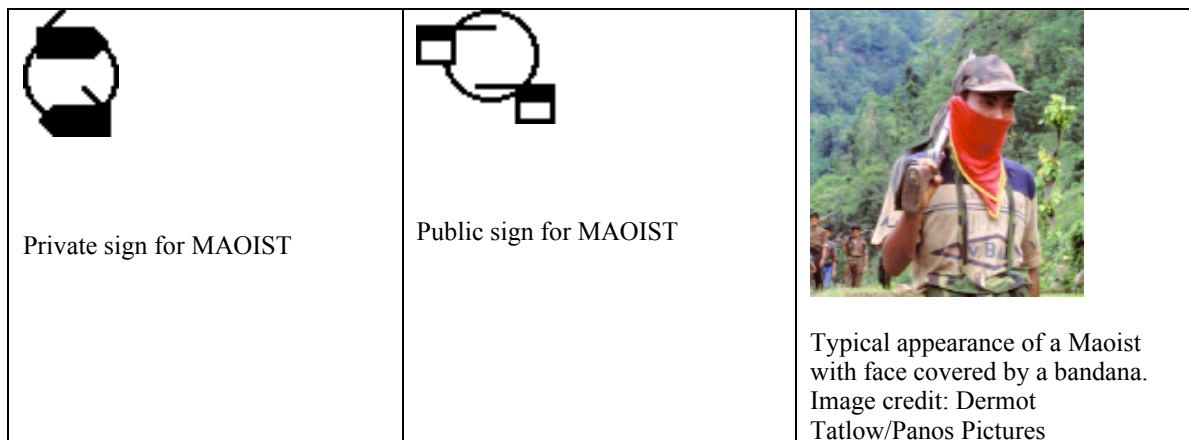
NSL however, where various grammatical constructions can distinguish between their various meanings. Indeed, sign language researchers have suggested that this grammaticalization is one of the watershed distinctions between homesign and sign systems (Kegl 2002). However, while I acknowledge this point, I also suggest that this difference has been somewhat exaggerated, as some scholars do not pay enough attention to the role of pragmatics, which “allow us to say less than we think” in actual signed or spoken communication (Levinson 1997: 7-8). In other words, while signed languages can be highly explicit in a way that gesture systems cannot, the importance of pragmatics in social communication allows signed communication to rely on context in important and pervasive ways as well.

While some quotable gestures are part of a widely shared cultural repertoire, in other contexts they can serve as a “secret” or “anti-language” for particular social groups. For example, Brooke describes how young men in urban South Africa have developed quotable gestures for words they would not utter in front of adults. Use of these gestures allows them to discuss potentially offensive topics such as witchcraft in front of uncomprehending observers (Brooke 2004). The formal properties of these gestures are changed to maintain their secrecy if they become widespread enough to be transparent to outsiders (Brooke 2004).

NSL is by no means intended to serve as a secretive argot, although in a few cases signs have been altered, in a way similar to what Brooke describes, to make them less transparent to outsiders. For example, given Nepal’s political climate at the time of my fieldwork, deaf Nepalis, accustomed to walking down the street signing freely without concern about what passers-by (who tend to stare) might pick up, suddenly became

concerned about how certain political groups, the Maoists in particular, might respond if they thought they were a subject of such discussions. Therefore, while being cautioned in 2004 (a particularly tense period in the People’s War) by old friends about changes in the social scene since my last visit (don’t walk through the fields at night, etc), I was taught two signs for “MAOIST”, one for use within the walls of the deaf association and one for public usage. The former was more readily linked, in the broader population’s interdiscursive experience, with images of masked Maoists that abounded in public newspapers and the Internet (or the experience of encountering Maoists directly).

Figure 13: Public and private signs for MAOIST



Such attempts to make signs less transparent are rare, for several reasons. First, while some signs (such as those discussed above) can be accessible to hearing Nepalis, the bulk of NSL communication is not. While it is a common language ideology both in the U.S. and Nepal that sign language is universal (and universally transparent) due to the relatively high frequency of iconic motivation, sign languages are neither universal nor transparent to non-signers. Even those signs that are highly motivated iconic images (in the Peircean sense) are not necessarily readable by even those non-signers who share a

common cultural background. In fact, in his “History of the Deaf Community in Nepal,” Kiran Acharya notes that the hearing public misreads many standard NSL signs. In particular, they find iconic connections between the form of the signs and gestures read as vulgar, which in turn leads them to make a rhemic connection between that vulgarity and the deaf population they see as employing them (Irvine and Gal 2000). Acharya identifies several signs that lead to this problem, including the fingerspelling for the Devanagari letters “ka”, “ra”, “pa”, and “nya” along with the signs "TO-JOKE," "AMERICA," "CANADA”, “ICE CREAM”, and “INTERVIEW”. He proposes that, “to find the solution to this problem and to get rid of these suspicions, hearing people should learn Sign Language” (Acharya n.d.). This problem reinforces the point that iconic relationships are not natural or inherent.

Indeed, from the productive rather than receptive side, while non-signers can reproduce with reasonable accuracy some simple signed sentences grounded in emblematic gestures, non-signers are not able to draw on such a broadly shared repertoire to produce more complex manual communication that could be understood as sign, or even produce gestures similar to homesign. So, although many gestures are widely shared in Nepal and create interdiscursive links across contexts which instill/reinforce certain meanings, without access to spoken discourse on the part of deaf persons (or to sign language on the part of hearing), these alone do not necessarily structure shared interpretations or pragmatic uses of them. As a result, while deaf institutional efforts to create and enforce a standardized NSL draw on shared cultural forms, including but not limited to the quotable gestures discussed above, certain kinds of discursive instructions are required in order to standardize semiotic interpretations of them. The remainder of

this chapter will examine those institutional efforts.

Institutions and interdiscursivity

While the publication of the Nepali Sign Language Dictionary has been lauded as an important step in the standardizing project, many sign language teachers in Nepal have deemed its black and white sketches of the desired linguistic forms insufficient for instruction. In particular, they noted that they had difficulty helping their students make the desired iconic and indexical connections between the target forms and their referents, as these connections were not transparent to all students. The role of iconicity in promoting retention of linguistic forms has been noted in many contexts: as Bruce Mannheim notes in an overview of iconicity, “bringing distinct cultural and linguistic structures into structural alignment enhances their cognitive retention by individuals... as a form of structural alignment, iconicity is important in both the transmission and persistence of cultural forms.” (Mannheim 1999:103).

To make these connections more available in order to increase retention of the standard forms, Pratigya Shakya, a prominent deaf artist, was recruited to create posters that would visually highlight the forms’ motivations. While highlighting the desired linkage between a given sign’s form and its referent, however, these posters also work to forge an indexical connection between the standard signs and Nepali nationalism. For, while the deaf associations differ from the deaf schools in their framing of NSL as a language distinct from spoken Nepali, the national language, the importance of governmental approval of their activities (as noted in Chapter 3) requires that they work to frame NSL as a language that can reflect nationalist sentiment as defined by the state. As discussed in chapter 1, the markers of this nationalism are largely drawn from upper

caste Hindu cultural practice. Therefore, these pedagogical materials are meant not only to facilitate the students' abilities to link form and referent, but to encourage students to make that link through particular semiotic connections that reinforce the social meanings that the deaf associations wish to reinforce.

However, deaf students who come from a variety of social backgrounds (including Buddhist, low-caste, and rural) may, and often do, interpret the social significance of the standard signs differently. A good portion of the population of deaf signers in Nepal come from social groups, such as the Newaris or Sherpas, in which women do not (indeed, in some cases must not) wear nose rings. Therefore, someone growing up in such a social group need not automatically read that particular connection in the standardized sign for "MOTHER."

Figure 14: "MOTHER" from Pratigya Shakya's NSL "KINSHIP" poster.



This is, of course, not to suggest that such visible social distinctions cannot be salient to deaf signers. For example, one afternoon I was walking through some rice fields, chatting with a young deaf women who lived on the outskirts of the Kathmandu

Valley. As we crested a small hill she pointed to a settlement in the distance and noted that its inhabitants were dirty and poor. Herself of an upper caste, she then attempted to indicate that the settlement was inhabited by a social group other than her own. Not knowing the standard sign for Newari (for it was a Newari village), she repeatedly indicated that nose-rings were not worn there, while indicating her own nose stud. Because she lived in near proximity to a Newari village, she was able to observe the social distinctions marked by symbols such as jewelry, spatial segregation (close but visibly separate villages), and differing house form. For similar reasons, the connection between mothers and nose-rings may be all the more unavailable to a deaf person from such a Newari village, who may firmly associate such a symbol with ‘the other’.

These differences may not be as salient to those deaf individuals living in smaller, less multi-ethnic, or more isolated villages. Without the direction of deaf teachers, for example, such a student may assume that the sign simply points to the nose, and may furnish his or her own idiosyncratic or culturally informed indexical explanation for this association. For example, Irene Taylor reports that a deaf Sherpa from the Solo Khumbu region who studied in a deaf school before the sign language posters had been produced had not been aware that, in addition to referring to “mother,” the standard sign form could be read as connoting “Hindu-ness”. He became aware of this link only after having returned home for a visit, when his attempt to use the sign in reference to his actual mother caused affront to the family (to whom the link was quite salient), who felt he was becoming “Hinduized” and less Sherpa (Taylor 1997).

The Nepali Sign Language educational poster’s representation of the sign ‘MOTHER’ elaborates only one possible reading of the potential iconic and indexical

features that might be locatable in the sign, the associations that are explicitly promoted by the deaf schools. In their illustration a Hindu mother, identified by her dress (bright red shirt rather than the maroon associated with rural Buddhist groups – another non-linguistic sign that may be widely accessible to the deaf) and wearing a nose ring, is portrayed as both performing and embodying the sign. The elaboration of this association in the poster, through the depiction of the “mother’s” clothing, is one of the ways that deaf schools and associations attempt to direct attention to this particular indexical link.

“Have you seen this?”: interdiscursivity in sign language classes

The posters do not do their work alone, however. While, as I mentioned, deaf teachers appreciate such visual aids especially when first working with deaf children or homesigners with whom they do not share a common linguistic code, the posters’ use is typically embedded in signed discourse. To illustrate, I give an example of their use in the Swedish Sewing Project I described in Chapter 4, where teenaged deaf girls recruited primarily from rural areas come to live together in a student hostel to study signing and sewing. During each group of girls’ first month of study, their teachers focus on the inculcation of very basic NSL and Nepali literacy skills. At this time, the NSL posters are heavily utilized, as teachers attempt to forge specific interdiscursive associations between the sign forms, their referents, and the girls’ particular experiences. The following transcript is derived from an NSL class at the Swedish Sewing Project.

Figure 15: Scene from Swedish Sewing Project class

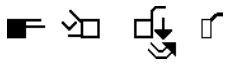










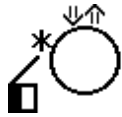


Transcript 12

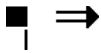

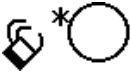







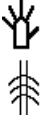
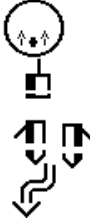
The following transcript is in two sections. The first section contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals) and an English translation. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). Each transcript is numbered for comparison.

1. (fingerspelled) H A Nasalization S WHAT?
Translation: H-A-Nasalization-S spells what?
2. DUCK.
Duck.
3. HAVE-NOT-SEEN-YOU? NOT-SEE YOU? (points to duck on NSL poster)
Haven't you seen them? You haven't seen them? (points to duck on NSL poster)
4. IT EGG WHITE, BIG-EGG.
It has white eggs, big ones.
5. UNDERSTAND YOU-PL?
Do you-all understand?
6. EGG WHITE BIG-EGG.
White eggs, big ones.
7. RED ISN'T.
They aren't red.
8. WHITE BIG-EGG.
They are big white eggs.
9. SAME IT.
It's the same as that.
10. UNDERSTAND?
Do you understand?
11. RIVER WATER-SURFACE PADDLES IT.
On the river, on the water's surface it paddles.

Transcript 12: Sutton SignWriting

 <p>1A. ha-a- nasalization-s</p>	 <p>3D. YOU</p>
 <p>1B. WHAT?</p>	 <p>4A. IT</p>
 <p>2A. DUCK</p>	 <p>4B. EGG</p>
 <p>3A. NOT-SEEN</p>	 <p>4C. WHITE</p>
 <p>3B. YOU-PL</p>	 <p>4D. BIG-EGG</p>
 <p>3C. NOT-SEEN</p>	 <p>5A. UNDERSTAND</p>

Transcript 12: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>5B. YOU-ALL</p>	 <p>8A. WHITE</p>
 <p>6A. EGG</p>	 <p>8B. BIG-EGG</p>
 <p>6B. WHITE</p>	 <p>9A. SAME</p>
 <p>6C. BIG-EGG</p>	 <p>9B. IT</p>
 <p>7A. RED</p>	 <p>10A. UNDERSTAND?</p>
 <p>7B. ISN'T</p>	 <p>11A. RIVER</p>

Transcript 12: Sutton SignWriting continued

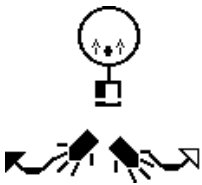


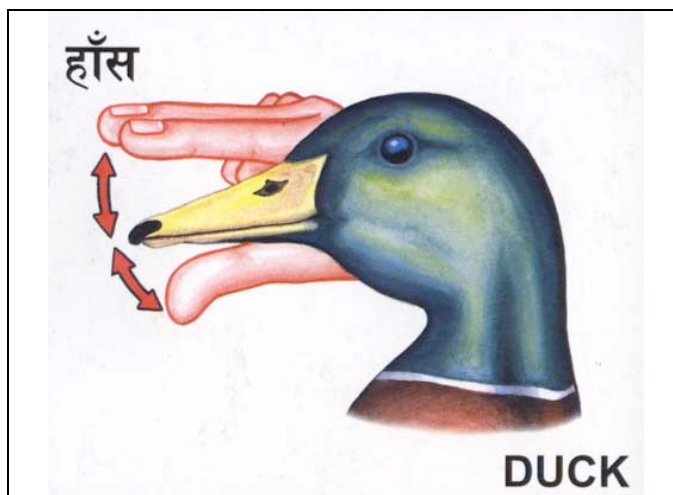
 <p>11B. WATER-SURFACE</p>	<p>11D. IT</p> 
 <p>11C. PADDLES</p>	

Figure 16: “DUCK” from Pratigya Shakya’s NSL “BIRDS” poster.



In this class, the deaf instructor was teaching the girls to both recognize and fingerspell Nepali words, while linking them to standard NSL lexical items. When the class did not immediately respond to the standard sign form with recognition and expressions of understanding, the teacher worked to describe the meaning of the sign more thoroughly. In this case, the form of the sign, which represents a duck’s bill, did not elicit any particular response from the students, so the teacher pointed to the “DUCK”

image on the NSL poster (excerpted above). However, as this illustration, that attempts to make explicit the connection between the form of the sign and the duck's beak, did not result in the students' recognition of this particular animal, the teacher attempted to find interdiscursive links between the sign and the girls' past experiences. Asking, "Haven't you seen this?" she elaborated of possible ways the students might relate to such an animal, describing both its eggs (which are eaten) and the activity it is typically engaged in (paddling on a river), in an attempt to forge a connection between the sign and contexts in which village girls may have related to ducks. In this way, just as it is necessary for students in the deaf schools to have experience with spoken and written Nepali to access the ideological stance towards NSL embedded in the hearing teachers' discourse, students in the deaf associations draw on past experiences in linking the standard forms with their referents. Of course, the success of this effort depended on the girls' being able to understand the other signs used, such as "EGG" and "RIVER". However, by introducing multiple (any of which are only perhaps partially grasped) statements concerning the duck, the teacher's hope is that the juxtaposition of the different signs will work to make all of them clearer by association. In this way, there are different scales of interdiscursivity at play in the teacher's explanation.

The field of interdiscursivity

The previous example dealt with discursive efforts to link the form of a standard sign with its referent, but as mentioned above, another important part of the deaf institutions' standardizing project is to create and reinforce particular kinds of indexical connections between the linguistic and the social. However, it is not only indexical extensions of the standard signs that are at stake in this project. As Judith Irvine notes, "a

sign and its object are both “like” and not – the construal of “likeness depending, fundamentally, on a construal of relevant oppositions and their scope” (Irvine, 2005:76): semiotic forms have meaning because of their contrastive placement in a field of alternatives (as in the Saussurean concept of value). When homesigners who have developed functional homesign systems are integrated into the larger signing community in Nepal, the field of interdiscursivity is therefore expanded for all involved; each person who enters into institutional deaf social life brings in a range of signs or gestures that broaden the contrastive field for NSL. The deaf institutions in turn attempt to “fix” the semiotic extensions of both the standard and the non-standard signs,³¹ to control for this expansion of meaning. Hence the standardizing project seeks not only to standardize the social interpretations of standard forms, but of non-standard alternatives as well.

For example, sign language teachers frequently identify the non-standard signs for mother and father as vulgar and inappropriate. Individuals who have been socialized by such teachers to view such homesigns in this light often take it upon themselves to put an end to their use within a family or community. In the transcript below, a graduate of the deaf school and member of the deaf association describes his efforts to make a deaf family member understand the shameful sexual overtones he now associates with the sign her Newari family uses to refer to their mother.

³¹ These include both homesigns and signs used among deaf signers in the deaf social institutions that are alternatives to signs included in the dictionaries.

Transcript 13

The transcript is in two sections. The first contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals), the spoken Nepali channel (in italics), and an English translation. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). Each transcript is numbered for comparison. The script is written from the receptive viewpoint and in vertical lanes that better show the use of signing space.

1. HER-OWN HOMESIGN UNDERSTAND IS

She had a homesign of her own that she understood.

2. (standard sign for) MOTHER NOT DIFFERENT

Her sign was different than the standard sign for “mother”

3. SAME WOMAN WITH...

It was the same as women have...

4. I...I...SHY/ASHAMED

I'm ashamed (to say).

5. MAYBE YOU-PL I YOU-SEE-ME SURPRISED

Maybe you'll see me (making this sign) and be surprised

6. HERE NEPAL CULTURE...

Here Nepali culture...

7. HOMESIGN SAME (pause) m-i-l-k SAME HOMESIGN

The homesign was like, um, the same as milk

8. I SCARED

I'm scared (to say it)

9. UNDERSTAND YOU

Do you understand?

10. BREASTS BREASTS

Breasts, breasts!

11. SHE OWN MAN HOMESIGN PENIS SAME

Her own homesign for man was like a penis

12. UNDERSTAND

Understand?

13. NEED-TO-URINATE

(like in the sign for) “Need to urinate.”

14. I SAW-THIS OK WRONG IS

I saw this and (told her) OK, this is wrong.

15. PAST LANGUAGE NONE

In the past she had no language.

16. NOW SWITCH

Now she has switched.

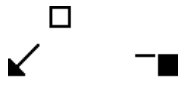
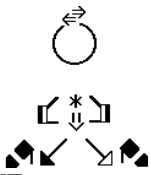
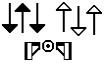



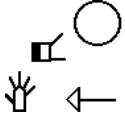



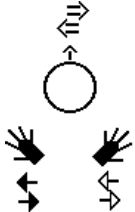

17. (I told her) NOT-GOOD (homesign for) MOTHER

(I told her the homesign for) Mother was not good.

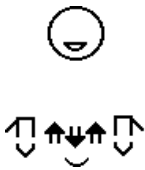




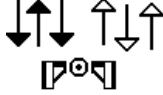



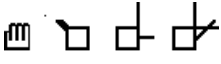


18. (standard sign for) MOTHER (standard sign for) MOTHER (standard sign for) MOTHER-IS-BETTER

(I told her the standard sign) Mother, mother, mother is better




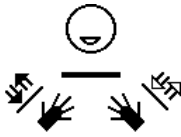



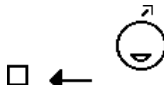


Transcript 13: Sutton SignWriting

 <p>1A. HER-OWN</p>	 <p>2C. DIFFERENT</p>
 <p>1B. HOMESIGN</p>	 <p>3A. SAME</p>
 <p>1C. UNDERSTAND</p>	 <p>3B. FEMALE</p>
 <p>1C. IS</p>	 <p>3C. WITH</p>
 <p>2A. MOTHER</p>	 <p>4A. I...I</p>
 <p>2B. NOT</p>	 <p>4B. SHY/ASHAMED</p>




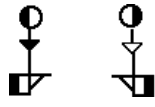




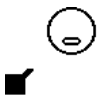

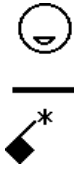

Transcript 13: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>5A. MAYBE</p>	 <p>6B. NEPAL</p>
 <p>5B. YOU-PL</p>	 <p>6C. CULTURE</p>
 <p>5C. I</p>	 <p>7A. HOMESIGN</p>
 <p>5D. YOU-SEE-ME</p>	 <p>7B. SAME</p>
 <p>5E. SURPRISED</p>	 <p>7C. m-i-l-k (fingerspelled in English)</p>
 <p>6A. HERE</p>	 <p>7D. SAME</p>

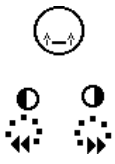
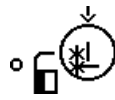
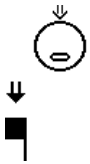



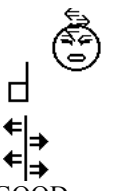


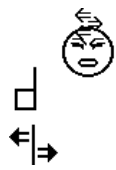
Transcript 13: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>7E. HOMESIGN</p>	 <p>10A. BREASTS</p>
 <p>8A. I</p>	 <p>10B. BREASTS</p>
 <p>8B. SCARED</p>	 <p>11A. SHE</p>
 <p>9A. UNDERSTAND</p>	 <p>11B. OWN</p>
 <p>9B. YOU</p>	 <p>11C. MALE</p>

Transcript 13: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>11D. HOMESIGN</p>	 <p>13B. SAW-THIS</p>
 <p>11E. PENIS</p>	 <p>13C. OK</p>
 <p>11F. SAME</p>	 <p>13D. WRONG</p>
 <p>12A. UNDERSTAND</p>	 <p>13E. IS</p>
 <p>13A. NEED-TO-PEE</p>	 <p>14A. PAST</p>
 <p>14A. I</p>	 <p>14B. LANGUAGE</p>

Transcript 13: Sutton SignWriting continued

 <p>14C. NONE</p>	 <p>16D. (STANDARD SIGN FOR) MOTHER</p>
 <p>15A. NOW</p>	 <p>16D. (STANDARD SIGN FOR) MOTHER</p>
 <p>15B. SWITCH</p>	 <p>17A. (STANDARD SIGN FOR) MOTHER-IS-BETTER</p>
 <p>16A. NOT-GOOD</p>	 <p>18A. I-TAUGHT-HER</p>
 <p>16B. (HOMESIGN FOR) MOTHER</p>	
 <p>16C. NOT-GOOD</p>	

By attempting to convert students' understanding of the semiotic associations of this sign for mother from one linked with "nurturing" to one that is shamefully sexual, this project can have various social consequences: for one thing, it defines the two signs relative to one another, the standard associated with a powerful social group and with

propriety, and the non-standard sign associated in opposition with both vulgarity and the signer's personal family background. This manner of framing non-standard signs for "MOTHER" has posed difficulties for those individuals whose mothers, belonging to social groups in which women must not wear nose-rings, object to being referred to by the standard sign. Several such individuals have reported that they must persist in using homesigns to address their mothers, but that has discouraged them from inviting deaf friends to their homes, as they would be embarrassed if this practice were witnessed.

This relative reframing is part of a larger interdiscursive process in the residential deaf schools, where deaf children, especially girls, from rural areas (such as those studying in the Swedish Sewing Project) are taught to move, sit, walk, eat, and sign in the more restrained ways favored in the city, and to see the gestures and physical habits of rural/Buddhist farming communities as free and immodest. However, it is important to note that this is not a simple binary process. Some non-standard signs are linked to semiotic forms that are read as desirable. For example, in the illustration below (taken from Pratigya Shakya's series of drawings meant to communicate to hearing parents the appropriate ways to behave towards their deaf children), the top panel shows a young deaf boy pointing to a photograph of his parents and performing a non-standard sign for father, which indicates his *topi*, or traditional hat. The parents are shown yelling angrily at him, attempting to force him to produce the spoken word for father, *bua*.

In the second panel, in which the parents are behaving in a way the association deems proper, the boy is performing the standard sign for mother, *aama*, while the mother performs it as well. In this scene the father is performing the non-standard sign for *bua* (indicating a *topi*) that appeared in the previous panel. Why is this sign permitted

to exist as a synonym with the “official” sign form for father in material produced by a deaf institution? I argue that this non-standard sign is positively represented in this illustration because of its association with the *topi*, a traditional hat that is a powerful sign of Nepali nationalism (for example, a *topi* must be worn by any man entering a government building). Hence this particular homesign is not treated as vulgar or defined negatively in opposition to the standard sign (which is meant to indicate a mustache). In fact, the Nepali Sign Language poster illustration of the formal sign highlights the man’s citizenship by showing that he wears the *topi*. Hence, the formal materials produced by the deaf institutions validate this sign, though it would still be deemed an incorrect answer in a sign language class.

Figure 17: Non-standard sign for “FATHER” in illustration by Pratigya Shakya



Figure 18: “FATHER” from Pratigya Shakya’s NSL KINSHIP poster



Authority and social positioning

Long standing members of the associations and graduates of the deaf school who have held alternative interpretations of the motivations for the standard signs sometimes protest when these differ from the official versions presented to them. The following section will explore the manner in which these disagreements are negotiated.

Interdiscursivity is not a process that is free of social positioning; certain actors are better positioned than others to promote certain connections across contexts. Sign language teachers are generally seen as authoritative figures with the social authority to validate certain such semiotic connections over others. However, as I will illustrate in the example below, certain kinds of linkages are given space for consideration even if offered by a non-authority, because of their ideological resonance.

One Friday afternoon in May 2004, several leaders for the Kathmandu Association for the Deaf, deciding that it was important to gauge participants' interpretations of the semiotic logic that motivated the formal properties of the standardized signs, called all present members together, packed them into the main room, and held a workshop in which these interpretations were discussed. In general, the purpose of this exercise was to declare which interpretation was "correct" when more than one was offered.

It is not always the case that varying interpretations of symbolic forms within a group must be deferred to one promoted by a group leader(s). For example, Penny Eckert describes a group of Detroit area teenagers who identified themselves as a "sub-culture" for whom a key symbol was the skull that they wore on their person in various forms. When she asked a group of the teenagers what the skull meant, "(one of the group) said, 'Death'. The others nodded their heads gravely in assent. After a pause, though, a

boy...looked confused and said, ‘But I thought it meant ‘pirates’” (Eckert 2000:37). Eckert then describes the fallout of this comment, which led to a discussion about the meaning of the skull that concluded with the consensus that both death and pirates represented opposition to the “norms for white middle class adolescents.” This allowed the dissenting boy’s “belief to be included...an explicit exercise of the norms of egalitarianism and mutual respect that informed (this group’s) practice”. Eckert notes that in a more hierarchical social network, the boy’s interpretation might have been declared wrong or might have forcibly replaced the previous interpretation (Eckert 2000:37) and indeed, that kind of dynamic characterized most of the Friday session at the deaf association described above.

However, there were some significant exceptions to this outcome. For example, at one point during the Friday seminar, the teacher leading the discussion asked, “FRIDAY WHAT?” meaning, “What is the motivation for the sign for “Friday”? Several people volunteered suggestions and these were initially rejected out of hand. Then the teacher supplied the “correct” answer as the institution saw it: that the sign for Friday is motivated by an iconic similarity to another sign, “COME HERE.” This, he explained, is because it is on Fridays that the greatest number of students come to socialize at the deaf institutions.

Indeed, Friday afternoons are always the busiest days at the deaf associations in Kathmandu. Throughout the week, those members who are unemployed spend their days in the clubs, chatting and participating in sign language lessons, playing carom or board games, and helping with association projects (such making as banners or buttons for upcoming celebrations or deaf pride marches). Those who are employed by the deaf

associations are also daily fixtures, making tea, preparing for teaching stints in remote villages, and/or meeting to discuss future and ongoing projects. Those deaf individuals who are elsewhere employed, who live on the outskirts of the Valley, or who are still enrolled in the deaf schools, however, are not able to socialize at the clubs every day. But on Friday afternoons, when many are able to leave work early, almost every member turns up. On such days, all the seats that ring the main social rooms are filled, and people stand chatting in the middle of the room, or spill out into the courtyard, stand by the busy street, and fill the surrounding tea shops.

The association between the signs for “FRIDAY” and “COME-HERE,” therefore highlights a central feature of deaf life in Kathmandu, the social significance of Fridays, the day of the week when most deaf cultural activities take place. However, before the leader of the workshop could transition to a different sign, another student spoke up, saying that he thought the sign for Friday was motivated by the sign for the god Krishna, an iconic image of the flute the god is often portrayed as playing. While all other suggestions had been routinely rejected, at this suggestion the teacher paused, admitted that he hadn’t heard that interpretation, and finally agreed to count both as correct.

Transcript 14

The transcript is in two sections. The first contains an English gloss of the manual channel (in capitals), the spoken Nepali channel (in italics), and an English translation. The second transcript conveys the formal properties of the manual channel using Sutton Signwriting (SSW). Each transcript is numbered for comparison. The script is written from the receptive viewpoint and in vertical lanes that better show the use of signing space.

1. FRIDAY WHAT?
What is the meaning of Friday?
2. NO.
No.
3. NOW MEET.
Now we meet.
4. FRIDAY COME SAME.
“Friday” and “come” are the same.
5. FRIDAY, CALL-TO-COME.

Friday (is like) calling to come.

6. WHAT?

What?

7. KRISHNA, INFORMED-YOU

You were informed (that it's based on) Krishna?


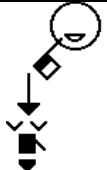




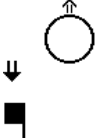

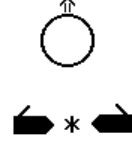




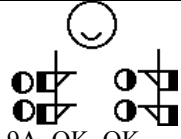
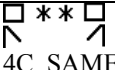



8. TOLD-NOT TO-ME

I wasn't told this.

9. OK, OK, INCLUDE-BOTH, OK.

OK, OK, we'll include both (interpretations), OK.

Transcript 14: Sutton SignWriting

 <p>1A. FRIDAY</p>	 <p>5B. CALL-TO-COME</p>
 <p>1B. WHAT? (pause)</p>	 <p>6. WHAT (pause)</p>
 <p>2. NO</p>	 <p>7A. KRISHNA?</p>
 <p>3A. NOW</p>	 <p>7B. INFORMED-YOU?</p>
 <p>3B. MEET</p>	 <p>8A. NOT</p>
 <p>4A. FRIDAY</p>	 <p>8B. TOLD-ME (pause)</p>
 <p>4B. COME</p>	 <p>9A. OK, OK</p>
 <p>4C. SAME</p>	 <p>9B. INCLUDE-BOTH</p>
 <p>5A. FRIDAY</p>	 <p>9C. OK</p>

Why was this interpretation validated along with that initially promoted by the representative of the deaf institution? In large part, I argue, because of its ideological resonance. Not only does its invocation of a Hindu god ally the sign with nationalist sentiment, but it also draws on an analogue with spoken Nepali, in the following fashion: According to Hindu astrology a particular deity is associated with each day of the week. Many of the Nepali language names for days of the week, including *Sombaar* (Monday), *Mangalbaar* (Tuesday), *Budhabaar* (Wednesday), *Shukrabaar* (Friday), and *Shanibaar* (Sunday) are made up of the name for a deity followed by *baar* (day).

The standard NSL signs for these days of the week are linked to Nepali words through varying, and sometimes quite complicated, semiotic processes. For example, the sign “MONDAY” is related to the word “*Sombaar*” through its use of initialization: the handshape for the sign is that used in the Devanagari fingerspelling system to represent the first letter in the Nepali word. The sign “TUESDAY” was designed to resemble an elephant’s trunk and in so doing to invoke Ganesh, a Hindu god with an elephant’s head. This is because though the word *Mangal* in *Mangalbaar* refers to a different god, Ganesh is often referred to as “*Mangal Murti*” or the auspicious deity. So in this case, the relationship of form of the sign to Ganesh is mediated by the iconic similarity of two spoken Nepali words. The sign for Wednesday, or *Budhabaar* is similar – the Nepali word refers to the god *Budhavaar*, who has nothing in particular to do with the Buddha. However, the Nepali sign is cupped hands in a Buddhist meditation pose. This is because of the similarity of the sounds and spellings of the two Nepali words.

Like the other Nepali words mentioned above, the word for Friday, *Shukrabaar*, is derived from the name of the Hindu god *Shukra*, a teacher of the *asuras* (or anti-gods).

There is no direct linkage between *Shukra* and Krishna. However, the deaf student's suggestion in the transcript above is based on an iconic relationship between the standard signs "FRIDAY" and "KRISHNA." The handshape and movement of the signs are the same, the forms of the signs differing only in orientation and location (compare the sign forms in the transcript in lines 1A and 7A). Hence, in this case the argument that the sign "FRIDAY" might be derived from the sign "KRISHNA" is because of the internal iconic similarity between the two signs, along with a diagrammatic iconicity with the general Nepali pattern of linking days of the week with Hindu gods.

The leader of the workshop accepted this alternate motivation for the sign "FRIDAY" because it not only resonated with attempts by leaders of the deaf associations to highlight semiotic links between the NSL signs and Hindu cultural markers but also recalled attempts within the deaf school to link NSL to the spoken Nepali language. It's important to note that both of these connections were only available to both the individual who offered them and workshop's leader because each had encountered deaf social networks while young enough to enter the deaf school, where they were exposed to written Nepali, Nepali influenced signing, and the deaf schools ideological position concerning the relationship between these codes. Subsequently having entered the deaf associations, such individuals have been exposed to both a wide range of forms as well as different ways of ideologizing the nature of NSL. As a result, they are well positioned to notice multivalent interpretations of the semiotic motivations for the standard forms that work to accommodate the coexistence of the distinct ideological positions concerning NSL adopted by each institution. Furthermore, it is those individuals who entered deaf social life at a young age who both initially generated

NSL within the deaf schools and now, as the leaders of the deaf institutions, are working to standardize these forms. Therefore, they have the authority to validate the semiotic connections that they find most salient, over those that might be noticed and proffered by, for example, homesigners.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the leaders of Kathmandu's deaf associations promote not only the standardization of the formal properties of language but also attempt to standardize the wider semiotic interpretation of these forms. These efforts have been undertaken because it cannot be assumed that individuals will notice the same kinds of indexical connections between sign forms and their referential and connotative aspects. Rather, individuals' particular life histories interdiscursively inform their interpretation of these forms. Education in the deaf associations however, can work to forge or strengthen particular such interdiscursive associations over others, hence reducing the indeterminacy of semiosis.

Leaders in the deaf associations generally share the experience of entering the deaf school at a young age and then moving into leadership positions in the deaf associations. This trajectory has exposed them to a wide range of signing forms and to different ways of ideologizing the nature of NSL. As a result, the indexical connections they notice and/or validate are often those that can index both the major deaf institutions' means of relating NSL to the broader Nepali national context. In this respect the standardization project, even as it seeks to reduce variation in the semiotic interpretations of the standard forms along with the forms themselves, also works to facilitate the coexistence of these different ideological positions.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I have explored the relationship between the formal and ideological aspects of language standardization through an examination of the project to standardize Nepali Sign Language. In this final chapter I will briefly summarize the relevance of my conclusions for the linguistic anthropological understanding of language standardization in particular and language ideologies more generally, while outlining future research projects suggested by this work.

First I have argued that, though most current definitions imply otherwise, a language without a written form can be subject to the process of standardization. I propose that while standardization projects involve the objectification of some level of linguistic form, this need not be through writing per se. In the case of Nepali Sign Language this has occurred through pictorial images of lexical items found in the NSL dictionaries. I further argued that while lacking a written form does not preclude a standardization project, it can have certain effects on its formal and ideological thrusts. In the case of NSL, the fact that standardization efforts are focused on the level of the lexicon has limited the project's gate-keeping potential by allowing a wide range of signing practices to count as standard.

Given that no other sign language has a widely written form at present and that many deaf institutions worldwide similarly attempt to standardize their sign languages through the production of dictionaries, attention to other of these projects is warranted to

determine whether my findings are applicable in other socio-linguistic contexts. Relevant questions include: Is there variation across these projects in the manner in which the pictorial representations of the formal properties of sign languages affect the level of form available to standardization processes? Is this mediated by other local language ideologies? How does the particular level of form attended to in such projects relate to their ideological motivations and effects? Addressing these questions through the study of other sign language standardization projects can further clarify the role that the objectification of linguistic form plays in standardization more generally.

Another important difference between projects to standardize written and unwritten languages is that unwritten languages cannot extend into all of the same domains occupied by written standard languages, a fact that I suggest contributes to the relatively low-status position of sign languages (and that of their users) in most sociolinguistic contexts. In Chapter 2 I argued that this state of affairs is not due to the formal properties of sign languages but rather to pervasive ideological perspectives about the nature of language that are grounded in formal linguistic theory that is based on the study of spoken languages and which privileges alphabetic writing. I demonstrated this through a comparison of two major attempts to develop scripts for sign language notation, ultimately arguing that Sutton Signwriting, a script that was originally developed to record dance choreography (and did not draw on preexisting ideas about language or writing in its development) is most successful in capturing the visual grammatical constructions that characterize sign languages. By using this script to create the transcripts that appear in this dissertation I have attempted to contribute to the elaboration of the functional domains in which sign languages can participate, a practice

that, if taken up by more interested writers, can ultimately raise the status of sign languages.

As a result of this choice, this dissertation represents one of the very few efforts within linguistic anthropology to carefully record and present the formal properties of natural signed communication (see Farnell 1995 for an earlier attempt using the Labanotation script). By virtue of this alone, this work contributes to the discipline in several important ways. As I noted in Chapter 2, both linguistics and linguistic anthropology are concerned with exploring the variation within and across linguistic systems. The study of sign languages offers a chance to uncover what aspects of language can be considered universal and which are dependent on modality of expression. However, while broad statements about what constitutes spoken language can be grounded in the enormous amount of descriptive linguistic work that has gone into outlining and comparing different languages from around the world, this has not been the case for sign languages. Lack of a writing system to record and analyze visual grammatical constructions may help account for why there has been insufficient descriptive and comparative work on sign languages. By recording and presenting the formal properties of signed interactions in Nepal then, this dissertation contributes material to the wider disciplinary cannon for future comparative projects.

In addition, the creation of these transcripts has benefited my particular research project in important ways, by allowing me to present a close analysis of the manner in which the formal properties of communication in Kathmandu's deaf institutions relate to different ideological framings of Nepali Sign Language across institutional contexts. In Chapter 4 I was able to closely trace the formal differences in the signing practices of

hearing teachers in the deaf school and deaf teachers in the association classes, showing how these different grammatical forms both reflect and perpetuate distinct ideological perspectives about the nature of NSL, while co-existing within a single standardization project. I was also able to examine the grammatical forms produced by the student bodies in each institution and, by showing how these differ from the forms promoted by their teachers, contribute to work on language socialization that attends to cases in which the process has unintended outcomes.

The ability to produce transcripts that clearly reflect the formal properties of signed communication also made it possible to analyze the subtle interactional dynamics between homesigners and their signing interlocutors in Chapter 5. This allowed me to explore the relationship between linguistic form and the semiotic ideologies that determine the social status of homesigners who are constrained in their acquisition of new forms in a deaf social life that revolves around the use of standard NSL. Attention to the manner in which homesigners and full signers interact within deaf social networks is an important contribution to anthropological studies of Deaf culture, as these relationships are both fundamental to deaf social life and underrepresented in the literature. Additional research in other contexts is called for to consider the different ways local semiotic ideologies may frame relevant definitions of competence, assign participant roles, and mediate between language use and membership in deaf social networks.

Finally, the production of these transcripts facilitated my analysis of the manner in which the formal properties of both standard and non-standard signs are taken up in deaf institutional efforts to standardize the their member's semiotic interpretations of the

signs' motivations and connotations. This informed my ultimate conclusion that the linguistic anthropological understanding of language standardization projects must include the manner in which these semiotic connections are themselves subject to standardization processes, as leaders within powerful institutional contexts produce and enforce particular interdiscursive connections between forms and social meanings through a wide range of semiotic media. I argue that the processes I have described are not limited to contexts involving sign languages as, while certain semiotic properties (such as iconicity) attract a great deal of attention in the study of sign language, these are important processes in spoken language contexts as well. For example, it is important to attend to the manner in which a speaker of a non-standard form of English in the U.S. might imbibe from educational institutions ideas about his or her speech, such as the idea that African American Vernacular English is "lazy" and indicates "laziness" in its speakers. Therefore, the research and conclusions I have presented here have broad relevance for the study of language standardization projects in a wide range of institutional contexts.

The arguments I have offered in this dissertation about language standardization, itself an ideological process, also contribute to the discipline's understanding of language ideologies more broadly by highlighting the multiplicity of linguistic forms, ideological perspectives, and ways of creating and reinforcing linkages between the two in a given social context. I have also demonstrated how these multiple linguistic forms and ideological perspectives interact, competing or coexisting within and across institutional contexts. In particular, I detailed the manner in which both linguistic forms and semiotic

interpretations of those forms can simultaneously and multivalently participate in different ideological frameworks.

While above I have mentioned several possible future lines of scholarly inquiry suggested by this dissertation, below I outline the particular future projects that I plan to subsequently pursue. First, this dissertation is part of a continuing research project concerning the standardization of NSL. As I complete this work I have been in contact with the members of Nepal's deaf institutions for ten years. I hope to remain so indefinitely and therefore to produce future work on this topic that is informed by an increasingly long-term perspective. Such a perspective is very important in this context – NSL has only been arising from the communicative interactions of deaf children since the first deaf schools were established 1960s and it was this initial cohort of deaf graduates who went on to found and run Nepal's deaf associations. Subsequent cohorts of students have been the first to enter a deaf social life in which a language existed for them to both acquire and to change. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, these events are directly linked to changes in the broader political scene in Nepal. For example, the deaf schools were only founded after the Nepal began to welcome foreign individuals and institutions after the fall of the Rana regime in 1951. The goals and practices of those institutions have changed in accordance with changes in international approaches to deaf pedagogy – for example, the shift from oralism to the Total Communication approach – and the ways in which the deaf institutions have represented deafness and sign language is also greatly influenced by the language politics of the Nepali state. As these international, national, and local contexts continue to shift, for example, as a result of the Maoist People's War and the second Jana Andolan which removed the King from power,

I intend to trace their affects on the standardization project. For example, if the Nepali state ceases to ground it's conception of Nepali nationalism in Hindu cultural symbols, how will this affect the formal properties of Nepali Sign Language and/or the manner in which the associations attempt to regiment the interpretations of the sign forms?

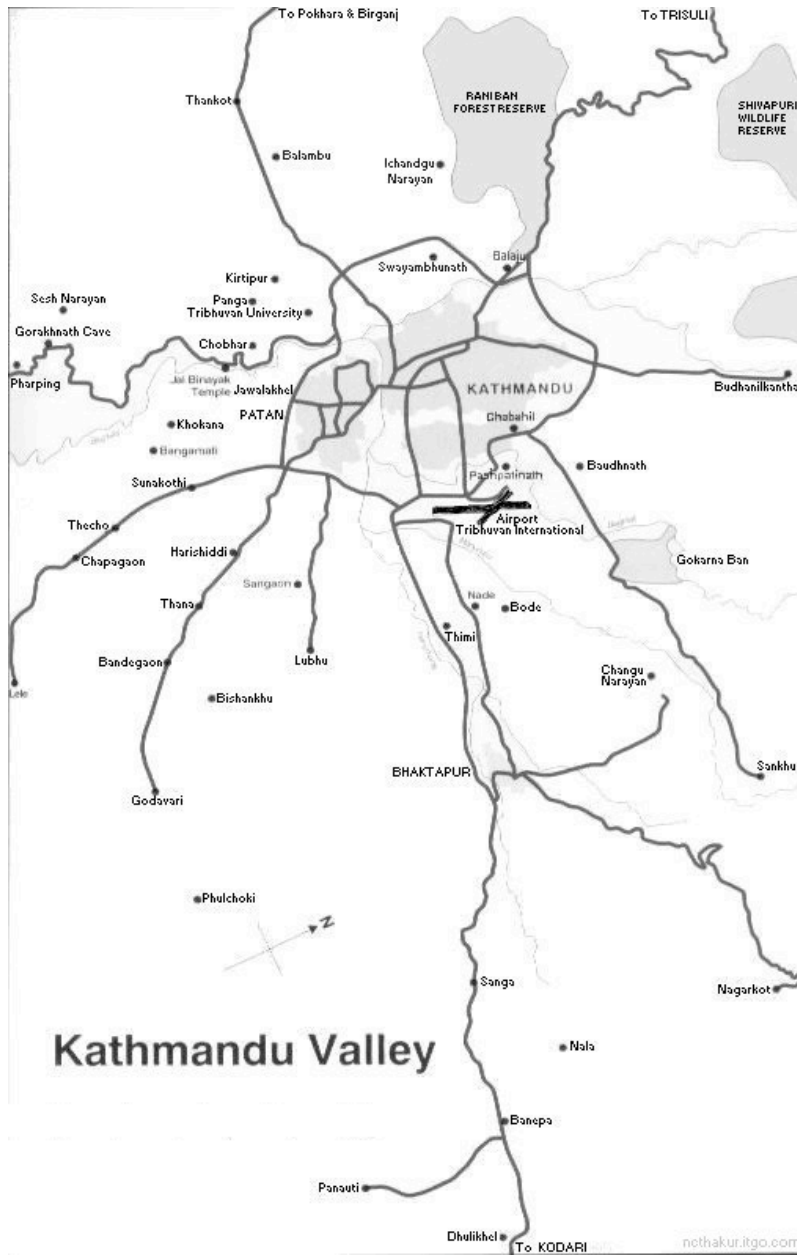
In addition, I plan to more directly study the international community of deaf and hearing individuals who have taken up the project to write sign languages using Sutton SignWriting. Such a project provides additional angles from which to explore the themes of this dissertation, as the process of applying a still developing script to previously unwritten languages brings different kinds of meta-linguistic and meta-semiotic awareness into sharp relief. In addition, as SSW is currently being employed by small groups of signers in 38 countries across six continents, the study of this emerging sign language literacy provides an excellent opportunity to explore both the formal variation across and within sign languages and the ideological variation that attends them across inter- and extra-international contexts.

Appendix 1: Map of Nepal



(www.himalayan-imports.com/nepal-map.jpg)

Appendix 2: Map of the Kathmandu Valley






www.nctakur.itgo.com




Appendix 3: Sutton SignWriting Key

Below I provide the basic information needed to read the transcripts that appear throughout this dissertation. For a more detailed guide to reading Sutton SignWriting, please visit: <http://www.signwriting.org/lessons/lessonsw/lessonswweb.html>











1. **Viewpoint:** The transcripts included in this dissertation are written from the receptive standpoint.
2. **Color-coding:** Dark coloring indicates the back of the hand, while light coloring indicates the palm.

The back of the hand faces the viewer.	The palm of the hand faces the viewer.	The side of the hand faces the viewer.
		

3. **Vertical and horizontal planes:** When the lines indicating the fingers connect directly to the body of the hand (as above), this indicates that the hand is viewed from the vertical plane. When there is a gap between the fingers and the body of the hand (as below) the hand is viewed from the horizontal plane.

The back of the hand as seen from above.	The palm of the hand as seen from above.	The side of the hand as seen from above.
		

4. **Handshape:** There are ten basic handshapes, from which any position the hand might take can be derived. They are handshapes that involve the fingers after which they are named. For a full inventory of handshapes (derived from a wide range of sign languages) please see: <http://www.signwriting.org/lessons/lessonsw/025%20Hands.html>

The index finger		The baby finger	
The index-middle fingers		The ring finger	
The thumb-index-middle finger		The middle finger	
Four fingers		The index finger- thumb	
Five fingers		The thumb	







5. **Contact:** When hands come into contact with one another or another part of the body, the nature of this contact is marked in the following way:

Touch	*
Grasp	+
In-between	+
Strike	#
Brush	⊙
Rub	@



6. **Finger movement:** Movements of the fingers are marked in the following way:

Middle finger joint closes	●
Middle finger joint opens	○
Knuckle joint closes	^
Knuckle joint opens	∨




7. **Straight movement:** Arrows with a double stem indicate movement on a vertical plane while arrows with a single stem indicate movement on a horizontal plane. Black arrowheads indicate movement by the right hand, white arrowheads indicate movement with the left hand, and open arrowheads indicate movement with both hands. See examples below.

Right hand moves up	
Left hand moves down	
Both hands move to the right	
Left hand moves back	
Right hand moves forward	
Both hands move to the left	

8. **Curved movement:** The principles listed above apply.
9. **Axial movement:** This includes rotation of the forearm and flexing of the wrist. See examples below:



Forearm twists to the left	
Wrist flexes down	

10. **Circular movement:**

Right hand circles to the left	
Right hand circles forward	
Wrist turns to the left	

11. **Facial expression:** Eyebrow movement, eye movement, eye gaze can be represented along with nose, mouth, cheek, and tongue movement.





12. **The head:** A double stemmed arrow indicates that the face turns in the direction of the arrow, while a single stemmed arrow indicates that the face remains forward as the head itself moves in the direction of the arrow. See examples below.

Head nods back, so that face is lifted up	
Head moves back while face remains looking forward	

13. **The body:** Shifts in body movement can be represented. See example below:

Shoulders tilt to the left	
----------------------------	--

14. **Dynamics:** Speed and coordination can be represented. See examples below:

Hands move simultaneously	
Hands move in simultaneously in opposite directions	
One hand moves while the other remains still and then the reverse	
Tense movement	

15. **Writing in vertical lanes:** Throughout this dissertation, the transcripts are written in vertical lanes. This allows the representation of spatial shifts to the left or right, which often have grammatical meaning.

Appendix 4: A Brief Description of Nepali

The language currently referred to as Nepali is an Indo-European language, closely related to Hindi and Pahari, primarily written using the Devanagari script. However, the name Nepali originally referred to the Sino-Tibetan language of the Newars who occupied the Kathmandu Valley (which was itself the original referent of the term Nepal). After Prithvi Narayan Shah, from the Gorkha region, conquered the Valley, the Indo-European language then called Gorkha Bhasa became the language of the state. Since 1930 this is language that has been referred to as Nepali (Acharya 1991:2).

The most recent census conducted by the Nepali government records around 20 million Nepali speaker and shows that roughly half of the country's population reports that Nepali is their mother tongue. The census also reflect a great deal of linguistic diversity in Nepal and the most recent Ethnologue Report lists 122 other languages spoken in the country, from the Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian, Indo-European, and Sino-Tibetan families (Gordon 2005). However, throughout this dissertation I have focused on the relationship between Nepali Sign Language and Nepali, rather than closely considering any of these other languages. This is because Nepali is the official language of Nepal and its exclusive use in schools, courts, and government offices has been imposed by the state. As schools are a primary site for deaf social life, deaf students are therefore typically exposed to spoken and written Nepali rather than to other languages spoken by the hearing population. As a result, Nepali has had the greatest contact with NSL as a whole (though the situations of individual deaf people can vary, such as in the cases of those deafened after acquiring another spoken language, such as Newari).

Many mutually intelligible varieties of Nepali exist throughout the country, indexing speakers' regional and social backgrounds. Below I have provided examples of regional variants collected by DR. C. M. Bhandu (Toba, Toba, and Rai 2005:11).

Region	Nepali	English translation
Dandeldhura	Ham aunya hunu	We don't come
BaitaDi	Ham nain auna	We don't come
Dhoti	Ham naiaunya hun	We don't come
Palpa	Hami aunnan	We don't come
Kathmandu	Hami aundainnaun	We don't come
Ilam	Hami aundouna	We don't come

The variety of Nepali that most influences NSL is that which appears in printed educational materials. This variety is derived primarily from the Nepali that is spoken by the Brahman and Chetri social groups in Central Nepal (see the example of Kathmandu Nepali above) (Acharya 1991:6). However, even within this particular social and regional area there are differences between the way the language is written and is generally spoken. For example, written Nepali often distinguishes between singular and plural determiners. Thus in writing, the word “yo” is used for “this” referring to a singular object and “yi” for “this” referring to more than one object, while “yo” is generally used for both singular and plural referents in spoken contexts. In addition, written Nepali often has grammatical gender, while this appears in only the most formal speech. Finally, written Nepali borrows more frequently from Sanskrit.

Despite this variation between regions and modalities, it is possible to generalize about Nepali grammar as a whole. Like other Indo-European languages, Nepali is

agglutinative. It is also inflectional. It is a head-final language with a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order in which words are typically modified with postpositions rather than prepositions. Some of these postpositions work like case, though the nouns themselves are not inflected. For example, the post-fix *le* (discussed in Chapter 4) is ergative in the past tense, but instrumental in the present tense. Nepali has singular and plural numbers and nominative and oblique cases. There are imperfective and perfective aspects and the indicative, imperative and optative moods. Nepali has a system of classifiers, which distinguish between persons and things - a feature it shares with Nepali Sign Language. Unlike Nepali Sign Language however, Nepali has a highly developed system of honorifics. Nepali's verb system is similar to that in Hindi, although Nepali differs in its use of a presumptive future tense. In some varieties of Nepali, verbs agree with nouns in gender and number. Outside of Kathmandu, however, many speakers of Nepali as a second language do not inflect verbs in this way.

Appendix 5: A Brief Description of Nepali Sign Language

Since 1966, Nepali Sign Language (NSL) has been emerging from the communicative interactions of deaf students brought together in deaf institutions. Those individuals who were members of the first cohort of students in Nepali schools for the deaf report that though signing was actively discouraged during the schools' early oralist period, a pidgin was formed from the homesigns (systems of gestural communication that arise between deaf individuals and their interlocutors in the absence of a sign language) and emblematic gestures employed by the students. They further report that over the next several cohorts of incoming students, this pidgin was creolized. Signing practice in Nepal has further expanded through contact with deaf signers using other sign languages (including American Sign Language, Indian Sign Language, Pakistani Sign Language, British Sign Language, Norwegian Sign Language, and Swedish Sign Language) and contact with spoken and written languages such as Nepali and English.

While the most recent Nepali census reports that 5,743 people call NSL their mother tongue, this does not necessarily mean that there is one uniform sign language within the country. Rather, as this dissertation shows, the term Nepali Sign Language covers a wide range of signing practices. While any form of manual communication was considered an instantiation of Nepal Sign Language for the purpose of the census, within deaf social networks signing practice is only given this name if it includes standardized lexical items, though these may be deployed grammatically in a variety of ways that can be influenced by Nepali, spatial grammatical constructions common to other sign languages, and/or local homesign systems. It is not the purpose of this description to

suggest whether the diversity of signing practices within Nepal constitute distinct dialects or separate languages but simply to note that this variation is present.

A related question concerns the relationship between NSL and sign languages in India and Pakistan. Based on his comparison of lexical items from each these sign languages, James Woodward suggests that the sign languages found in urban centers in India, Pakistan, and Nepal are distinct but closely related (Woodward 1993). Ulrike Zeshan, on the other hand, based on her analysis of the grammatical constructions of signing practice in urban centers in India and Pakistan, concludes that the sign language varieties in these cities constitute a single language with the same grammar (Zeshan 2003). Her description of what she calls Indo-Pakistani Sign Language (IPSL) also describes the signing of those non-homesigner adults in Nepal whose³² linguistic output is not heavily influenced by Nepali:

“Sentences are always predicate final, and all of the signs from the open lexical classes can function as predicates. Ellipsis is extensive, and one-word sentences are common. There is a strong preference for sentences with only one lexical argument. Constituent order does not play any role in the marking of grammatical relations. These are coded exclusively by spatial mechanisms (e.g., directional signs) or inferred from the context. Temporal expressions usually come first in the sentence, and if there is a functional particle, it always follows the predicate (e.g., YESTERDAY FATHER DIE COMPLETIVE — "(My) father died yesterday") (Zeshan 2003:158-159).

However, signing that is heavily influenced by Nepali varies from this description in several ways. For example, while the NSL of some signers resembles IPSL in that “modification within a referential expression is coded as simple apposition (e.g., “I

³² In saying, “whose linguistic output is not influenced by Nepali” I don’t mean to suggest that varieties of Nepali are distributed only across persons. There is also situational variation, such that a given individual may sign in a way that is heavily influenced by Nepali in some contexts, but not in others.

FATHER” for “my father”) (Zeshan 2003:159), other signers (or the same signers in different contexts) more closely follow Nepali in signing “MY FATHER” from “*Mero bua.*” As I show in Chapter 4, the signing of deaf teachers in the associations resembles IPSL in including highly productive morphology with “classificatory stems consisting of a handshape morphemes (that) can combine with a large number of movement specifications to refer to the position and movement of entities in discourse” (Zeshan 2003:159). In addition, in such signing the “marking of basic syntactic relations always involves the grammatical use of space...word order does not play any role here. Sometimes there is no overt marking of syntactic relations, in which case interpretation of the clause depends on pragmatic inferencing” (Zeshan 2003:170). This does not describe the Nepali influenced signing promoted in the deaf schools, where teachers sign using Nepali word order and morphological constructions, utilizing post-fixes rather than spatial relationships to mark grammatical relations (it is possible that Zeshan has edited out similarly spoken-language influenced signing from her account of IPSL, as many linguists would not consider signing that is highly influenced by spoken language a part of the actual sign language).

In her master’s thesis, Shilu Sharma (a sign language interpreter serving the Nepali deaf institutions) considers the range of grammatical constructions included in actual NSL signing practice. For example, she notes that nouns can be inflected for number by reduplication but that pluralization can also be accomplished through the use of the post-fix “PLURAL” which is borrowed from the Nepali post-fix “*haru*” (Sharma 2003:76). She also notes that NSL is sometimes signed in SOV order, as is Nepali, though like ASL and IPSL it also often follows a topic-comment structure. However,

even the most Nepali influenced forms of signing differs from spoken and written Nepali in significant ways. Unlike Nepali, NSL does not have a system of honorifics, and verbs do not generally inflect for tense (though Nepali influenced signing can include a post-fix “HAPPENED” which follows a Nepali pattern). Generally an additional sign, such as “PAST”, “FUTURE”, or “NOW” provides the tense. Finally, NSL employs a much more extensive use of classifiers than is found in Nepali.

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