Transforming Research into Sign Language and Identity Advocacy in the Community

Yutaka Osugi
Tsukuba University of Technology
Japan
Language planning of sign language in Japan (1969 – present)

Transformation

Research on construction of Japanese Sign Language database (2009 – present)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research on construction of Japanese Sign Language database (2009 – present)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No definition of official languages on the laws of Japan

• Japanese legislation does not recognize Japanese as an official language, due to historical context.
• Yet, Japanese holds official position as social fact. (Monolingual society)
• "Japanese" - "language" - "sign language" etc. are not defined.
Status of sign language in Japan

• Almost no legislation and no language policy for sign language as a language in Japan.

• Sign language tends to be treated with the viewpoint of welfare. (Compare to accommodations for hearing foreigners)

• Sign language planning has been promoted in Deaf communities.
General definition of language planning

• Language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes. (Cooper, 1989)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus Planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Status Planning in Japan

• Movement to promote Japanese Sign Language Act enactment by JFD, 2010.

• Five rights and recommendations
  - Right to acquire sign language
  - Right to learn in sign language
  - Right to learn sign language
  - Right to use sign language
  - Right to protect sign language
• Establishment of sign language ordinances by municipalities across the country.

• 25 out of 47 prefectures have enacted a sign language ordinance as of Oct 25, 2018

• Enactment of the JSL Act is still far away.
Sign Language Act in Korea

• Korean legislation had already defined Korean as an official language.

• UN encouraged Korean Government to recognize Korean Sign Language as an official language in 2014.

• The Korean Sign Language Act was enacted in 2015.
Acquisition Planning in Japan

• For the Deaf people
  • Deaf education network in 1989
  • Shift to sign language at existing Deaf schools in 1990s - current
  • Local Deaf communities started new schools and sign language acquisition support programs in 2000s
For the hearing people

• Sign language helper training curriculum by Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Civic-oriented programs) began in 1970.

• Sign language education at colleges is almost non-existent.
Corpus Planning in Japan

• Sign Language Research Committee under the Japanese Federation of the Deaf, 1969

• Vocabulary books, "Our Signs" series published, 1969-87
  • Writing system: illustration
  • Goal: National-wide standardization of vocabulary
Examples from “Our Signs”

"New Signs" series published, 1990 - present

- Writing system: illustration (+ moving image after 2015)
- Goal: Vocabulary enhancement
Examples from “New Signs”

FOUR -SEASONS

LIFE

FROM- BIRTH-TO- DEATH

Language planning of sign language in Japan (1969 – present)

Transformation

Research on construction of Japanese Sign Language database (2009 – present)
Academic training at University of Rochester in the US 1991 - 2000

Activities on advocacy in Japanese Federation of the Deaf 2000 - 2006

Research and education at Tsukuba University of Technology in Japan 2006 - present
Academic training at University of Rochester in the US 1991 - 2000

Life history study of a Deaf immigrant (1997 - 99)

Study of gestural systems on Amami Island (1993 - 99)
Life history study of a Deaf immigrant (1997 - 99)

• Historical facts shown in his storytelling:
  • Native acquisition and use of sign language during his childhood in the 1940s.
  • Discrimination in both Japanese and American societies in the 1960s.
Life history study of a Deaf immigrant (1997 - 99)

• Language expression:
  • Fluency in JSL and ASL
  • Still used vocabulary of JSL Osaka dialect from the 1940s
    ex. “SCHOOL”

• These findings help us to learn about the Osaka Deaf communities in the 1940s
Study of gestural systems on Amami Island (1993 - 99)
Study of gestural systems on Amami Island (1993 - 99)

• Historical facts:
  • Semi-remote communities using gestural systems existed on the island – 1993 field work
  • Deaf people did not attend school until the 1960s
Study of gestural systems on Amami Island (1993 - 99)

- Language expression:
  - Single gestures, multiple gestures with regularity
    
    ex 1. EGG
    ex 2. YEAR

- Lexicalization (Word formation process)
Multiple Gesture Names for the Concept of ‘EGG’

Table 5: Sequencing of gestures in multiple gesture names for the concept ‘egg’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gestures used by subject</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chicken’s wings</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1</td>
<td>1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an egg coming from chicken’s body</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shape and size of an egg</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>1 3 2 2</td>
<td>3 2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smashing an egg to crack</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>2 4 2 2</td>
<td>2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cracking an egg open</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Osugi et al. (1999).
Gesture for the Concept of ‘YEAR’

Killing pigs

Making rice cakes

PIG KILL

TEAR ROLL

PIG KILL TEAR ROLL
Language planning of sign language in Japan

Research and education at Tsukuba University of Technology in Japan
2006 - present

Research on construction of Japanese Sign Language database
(2009 – present)
Regional and generational variation in JSL vocabulary

- 94 Deaf informants from all 47 prefectures
- 2 informants from each prefecture, one aged 70-79, the other 30-39 years of age
- Both informants attended the same school
Early JSL database project (2009 - 13)


• 528 signs are described in Japanese text (No illustration)

• All signs were re-enacted and documented as video data
Early JSL database project (2009 - 13)

ex. number “100”
Colloquial corpus of JSL project (2011 - present)

• Data collection
  • Dialogue tasks (PI: Bono, Mayumi), lexical elicitation (PI: Osugi)
  • 121 Deaf informants from 7 prefectures
  • Age-balanced (30s to 70s) & gender-balanced
  • Enrolled at deaf schools for over 6 years
Colloquial corpus of JSL project (2011 - present)

• Each age group was divided into same-sex pairs during data collection session

• Database of language expressions of Deaf people who lived through the 60 years that sign language was forbidden in classrooms at deaf schools
This page is about Corpus Project in Colloquial Japanese Sign Language.

Corpus is a database that consists of many examples of the language. Our research team provides linguistic descriptions for each example in the database to facilitate linguistic analyses.

It is often said that Japanese Sign Language has many varieties depending on areas. How are they different? We visit many parts of Japan to collect regional varieties of Japanese Sign Language.

Click a region on this map.
Findings from research on construction of JSL database

- Regional variation (implies diversity of concepts in word formation)
- General variation (implies phonological change in time line)
- Analysis of diachronic and synchronic DBs reveal processes of word formation
Findings from research on construction of JSL database

• Some influence of language planning on lexical sharing phenomenon (Osugi, 2012)

• For non-sharing lexicon, the “improvisational signing” phenomenon can be observed in dialogue tasks (Bono, 2017)
Revitalizing heritage for sign language

• Humanistic framework for research on the history, spiritual value, and dialogue among Deaf individuals.

• Transform the research results into sign language advocacy in the community.
Transforming Research into Sign Language and Identity Advocacy in the Community
Research grants

• Research on the life history of a Deaf immigrant was supported by The TOYOTA Foundation Research Grant (PI: Osugi, Y.)

• Research on gestural systems on Amami Island was supported by National Science Foundation of the US (PI: Supalla, T.)

• JSL language atlas project was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant (PI: Osugi, Y.)

• Early JSL database project was supported by two JSPS KAKENHI Grants (PI: Kanda, K.)

• Colloquial corpus of JSL project has been supported by four of JSPS KAKENHI Grants (PI of three projects: Bono, M., PI of one project: Osugi, Y.) and President Leadership Fund, Tsukuba University of Technology (PI: Osugi, Y.)