## LIN 350 (41150)/ASL 326 (40975) Sign Languages/Signing Communities

Spring 2010, TTH 3:30-5:00, PAR 203

#### **Instructor:**

Dr. David Quinto-Pozos Office: Calhoun Hall 405

Email: davidqp@mail.utexas.edu (best way to reach me)

Phone: 512-441-9030 (this is NOT the best or fastest way to reach me)

Office hours: Tues/Thurs, 9-10:30am or by appointment

### **General description of the course:**

Sign languages of the Deaf are natural languages with their own grammars, and the grammars of these sign languages are largely independent of whatever spoken language is used in the same community. It is the case, however, that signed languages exist in tight relationships with ambient spoken and written languages. The existence of sign languages provides an important testing ground for many claims about the nature of human languages. By comparing the structure of signed and spoken languages, we can gain insights into how languages are shaped by the particular transmission modality in which they are used. To what extent are spoken languages structured the way they are because they are spoken and heard? To what extent are signed languages the way they are because they are signed and seen? And, lastly, to what extent are all languages, signed or spoken, structured similarly because they all draw on the same linguistic and cognitive capacities?

Among the issues that we will discuss are: 1) How have sign languages been viewed over the last 200 years? 2) How have sign languages developed? 3) Non-signers are often impressed by the pictorial and/or mimetic quality of many signs in American Sign Language (ASL). Does iconicity (and/or "mimeticity") impact the grammatical structure of sign languages? 4) How are the grammars of ASL and other sign languages structured? Do the structures of signed and spoken languages differ in interesting ways? 5) How are sign languages acquired by deaf children who are being raised in signing households?

The course will present important readings from linguistic research on signed languages. My lectures will provide background to those readings: for example, I may provide an overview of key linguistic concepts, including discussion of how those linguistic concepts play out in more familiar languages like English. My lectures will also build a broader context in which we can understand those readings. I will, in any case, expect that you have completed the reading before the assigned day in the course schedule.

#### Required Texts

A Journey into the DEAF-WORLD (a classic text in the field of Deaf studies)

Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister, and Ben Bahan (1996)

Publisher: Dawn Sign Press

Groce. 1988. Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language.

Other readings are available electronically on BlackBoard.

## **Course Requirements**

Requirements include active participation in class and interaction with the instructor (this includes completing required readings prior to the class sessions in which they will be discussed), three exams (including the final exam), and an oral presentation to the course based on a research article from the literature. The course grade will be determined by the following formula:

Participation	10%
Exam 1	20%
Exam 2	20%
Exam 3	20%
Article presentation	30%
Total	100%

## Grading scale:

All grades will be assigned on a percentage basis using the following scale:

97-100% = A+	94-96% = A	90-93% = A-
87-89% = B+	84-86% = B	80-83% = B-
77-79% = C+	74-76% = C	70-73% = C-
67-69% = D+	64-66% = D	60-63% = D-
helow $60\% = F$		

# **Special Accommodations**

If you have a condition, such as a physical or learning disability, which will make it difficult for you to carry out the work as outlined or which will require academic accommodations, please notify me during the first week of the course and every effort will be made to accommodate you.

### **Participation**

Active participation is among the requirements of this course. Your participation grade will be based on your attendance and your visible efforts to actively involve yourself in the learning process while in the presence of the instructor or any teaching aids. A total of 106 points can be generated for the participation portion of the course. Three (3) points will be given for every class date that you are in attendance. Absences that are accompanied by a letter from the emergency dean will be considered excused absences, and an absence for the observance of a religious holiday is also excused, but all other absences will result in the loss of 3 points per class. The remaining participation points (likely to be 16, but perhaps a somewhat more or less depending on any changes that may occur) will be awarded by the instructor based on your visible efforts to actively involve yourself in the learning process. This "active participation" can be accomplished by various methods such as: responding to questions in class (this is highly encouraged) or asking your own, interacting with the instructor or teaching aids during office hours, or by participating in other creative ways. You are expected to actively participate regularly throughout the semester. As noted, attendance alone will not earn you full points.

#### **Exams**

There will be three long exams, each of which will cover various units from the course (see schedule for exam dates). Make-up exams will not be administered without a written excuse from the Dean of Students that documents the reason for the absence. Some possible reasons may be the following: cases of serious illness, a death in the family or other family emergency, or for observance of a religious holiday. Please contact the instructor immediately if one of these situations is known to exist, which will preclude you from taking an exam. The final exam will be administered during the final exam period.

Attendance at exams and allowable excuses for late assignments: Any student who, for reasons of illness, family emergency, or religious holiday, is unable to turn in an assignment on the scheduled date should let me know before the start of class. You can notify me by sending me an email. You may be allowed to turn in your assignment at an agreed upon date without a penalty if this condition has been satisfied. Make-up exams will only be given in special circumstances such as for reasons of family emergency or for the observance of a religious holiday.

#### **Article presentation**

You will present the findings of a recent journal article (that has been approved by the instructor) to the class. The article must be about signed language, and it must be from a peer-reviewed journal (the instructor will ensure that these conditions are met). There are several steps to this project, and the presentation will occur close to the end of the course. More details about this assignment will be provided in class.

# Tentative schedule for lectures and readings (Schedule subject to change; updates will be announced in class and posted on BlackBoard)

Tu 1/19: Orientation to the course, Why should we be studying signed languages and Deaf communities?

#### General section: The development of sign languages and signing communities

Th 1/21 Topic: The Deaf Community & ASL in the United States; Reading: Chapters 1 & 2, Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan (hereafter LHB)

T 1/26 Topic: The History of ASL; Reading: Chapter 3 of LHB (pp 51-63); Topic: Martha's Vineyard; Reading: Groce pp. 1-49.

Th 1/28 Topic: Discussion of History continued, Reading: Groce pp. 50-110

Tu 2/2 Topic: Village Sign Languages and other signing communities; Reading: Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (Sandler et al, 2005).

#### How do we know that something is or is not a language?

Th 2/4 Topic: Topic: Design features of language; Reading: Hockett; Signing chimps. Film: First Signs of Washoe. Reading: Terrace et al.

Tu 2/09 Nicaraguan Sign Language; Reading: Senghas et al 2004, Siegal 2004

Th 2/11 Topics: What is a linguistic symbol? Arbitrariness & iconicity in speech. Iconicity and the nature of symbols in ASL. Readings: Saussure; Chapter 1 of Klima & Bellugi (1979).

Tu 2/16 Exam 1

Linguistic symbols and structure in sign and speech.

Th 2/18 Topic: Sublexical structure in signed language (phonological parameters) Readings: Klima and Bellugi (hereafter K&B): Ch. 2; Topic: Slips of the hand/slips of the tongue: Ch. 5 of K&B;

Tu 2/25 Topic: Historical change in ASL. Reading: Ch. 3 of Klima & Bellugi (1979).

Th 2/27 Topic: The creation of new signs in ASL. Compounding. Reading: K&B The ASL Lexicon. Reading: Brentari & Padden

Tu 3/4 Topic: Morphology, rate of signing, aspectual modifications, agreement. Reading: K&B chap 8, Sandler & Lillo-Martin (2006), Chapters TBA

Th 3/6 Topic: Syntax (word order, verb agreement, topic-comment). Reading: Sandler & Lillo-Martin (2006), Chapters TBA

Tu 3/9 Topic: Classifiers and constructed action. Reading: Sandler & Lillo-Martin (2006), Chapters TBA

Th 3/11 **Exam 2** 

Spring Break 3/17-3/19
Acquisition of ASL

Tu 3/25 Topic: Acquisition of ASL, Reading: Meier 1990

Th 3/27 Topic: bilingualism and language acquisition; Reading: Pettito et al. (2001)

Tu 4/1 Topic: Adult acquisition of ASL, Reading: Quinto-Pozos (2005)

Th 4/3 Topic: Home signing systems and gesture, Reading: Goldin-Meadow

Assorted other topics:

Tu 4/8 Topic: Tactile Sign Language, Reading: Collins & Petronio (Quinto-Pozos (2002)

Th 4/10 Topic: Signed language and neural activity; studies of Deaf aphasics, neuroimaging studies of signed language comprehension and/or production; Reading: TBA

Tu 4/13 Topic: Brief history of Deaf children and education, Reading: LHB Chapter 8 & 9

Th 4/15 Topic: Bilingual and Bicultural education, Reading: LHB Chapter 10, Cochlear implants, LHB Chapter 14

Tu 4/20 Topic: Other Deaf communities of the world, Reading: LHB Chapter 6, Gerner de García,

Th 4/22 Article presentations

Tu 4/27 Article presentations

Th 4/29. Article presentations

Tu 5/4 Topic: The Future of ASL; Reading; Padden & Rayman (2002)

Th 5/6 **Exam 3**