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Co-construction of Signing Space Motivated by an Actual Environment

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic studies on Deaf community sign languages clarified that Deaf people express various linguistic information by using “signing space” (e.g. Klima & Bellugi 1979), which is a space in front of signer’s body. Examples of such linguistic use of signing space include pronominal pointing to “referential-loci” (e.g. Lillo-Martin & Klima 1990). These are the abstract and syntactic locations in a signing space associated with a referent. Referential-loci are also used in verb agreement. Previous studies, however, analyzed the construction and use of a signing space from an individual cognitive and syntactic point of view. There is so far hardly any previous study that clarifies how Deaf people co-construct and co-use the signing space in a multi-party sign language interaction. This paper analyzes an actual environment that surrounding signers use. It plays an important role in the co-construction and co-use of the signing space during multi-party sign language interaction. However, previous studies on the Deaf community sign languages basically focused on sign language interaction or the signing expression itself. Little is known about the mutual relation between a sign language interaction and the actual environment surrounding the signers.

This paper discusses how Deaf people in Fiji co-construct and co-use the signing space in a multi-party Fiji Sign Language (FSL) interaction within an actual environment that includes various sociocultural meanings. I have been conducting field research on the Deaf community and sign language in Fiji since 2013. Through this anthropological field research, it was revealed that Deaf people in Fiji share background knowledge, such as each other’s home village and the actual environment surrounding them. It was also revealed that the sociocultural situation and daily bodily experience give various meanings to the actual environment surrounding Deaf people. Through a comparison such an extra-linguistic information with the use of space in multi-party FSL interaction, I clarify that (1) Deaf people in Fiji co-construct a “signing interaction space” that cannot be reduced to an individual signing space by co-constructing the referential-loci during the multi-party FSL interaction, and (2) the actual environment surrounding signers helps and motivates co-construction of the signing interaction space.

REFERENCES

- Klima, E. & U. Bellugi. 1979. *The Signs of Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
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