SLCN workshop 3: Annotation
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Yoshimoto in Berlin:
Some everlasting questions about glossing

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Wikipedia: **Fukuzawa Yukichi** (福澤 諭吉, January 10, 1835 – February 3, 1901) was a Japanese author, writer, teacher, translator, entrepreneur and political theorist who founded Keio University. (...) He is regarded as one of the founders of modern Japan. (...) 

In 1862, he visited Europe as one of the two English translators in bakufu’s 40-man embassy, the First Japanese Embassy to Europe. (...) The information collected during these travels resulted in his famous work **Seiyō Jijō** (西洋事情, “Things western”), which he published in ten volumes in 1867, 1868 and 1870. The books describe western culture and institutions in simple, easy to understand terms, and they became immediate best-sellers. (...)

Koji Yoshimoto, Humboldt-University Berlin, April 29th, 2005
Participants: 16 professional sign language interpreters from 8 countries

Module 1.2: “Signing in transnational contexts I”

One of the module assessment tasks comprised the transcription of a two-minute clip from the Yoshimoto video, applying Johnston & Schembri’s 2007 notation conventions.

On International Sign:
Conventions for sign notation
(Johnston & Schembri 2007)

- **Fully-lexical signs**
  - SIGN, SIGN-SIGN, SIGN^SIGN

- **Partly-lexical or non-lexical signs**
  - PRO-, POSS-, PT+: A-B-C-D ... CL:G-PERSON-PASS-BY CA:WINK

- **Manual modifications**
  - +f, +c, +lf, +rt, +dn; +rept; +exh, +mult; +fast, +slow; +hold; +gen

- **Non-manual behaviour**
  - br, bf; hs, hn, hb, ht, htf, htb; fl, rl, ll; mm, oo, th; gr, cs; !; rs:__
Glossing as identification

- Identification I: **Segmentation**
  “Is there some meaningful activity?”

- Identification II: **Comprehension**
  “What is it? What does it mean?”

- Identification III: **Classification**
  “What is it in terms of the notation conventions?”
• Generally, competent signers will confidently identify sequences of meaningful activities.

• While the identification of peaks of meaningful activities is generally straightforward, there is no easy way of determining beginning and end points of a given meaningful activity (i.e. distinguishing between transitional and meaningful activity).

• Segmentation partly depends on the quality of the video.

• Typical difficulty: Brief pointing signs.
Identification I: Segmentation, example I

...
Identification I: Segmentation, example 2
Comprehension involves attribution of linguistic (lexical) units and/or deciphering of iconic or indexical forms.

- Iconicity implies resemblances between form and meaning: Resemblance to what?
- Comprehension crucially depends on contextual information.
Identification II: Comprehension, example 1

CA: TAKE PHOTO
CA:?

SUBTITLES
Identification II: Comprehension, example 2

CA: PULL-ROPE
CA:?
COMES WITH
Selected issues in the application of glossing conventions:

(a) Identifying lexical (or, in the case of International Sign, quasi-lexical) signs

(b) Dealing with constructed action (‘mime’)

(c) Dealing with classifier signs and role-shift
Identifying lexical signs

Context:
Yoshimoto reports how hearing people may become sign language interpreters in Japan. In contrast to Germany, sign language is not taught at universities in Japan. Rather, hearing people may come across adverts in a newspaper and decide to join a local sign language class.
Identification III: Classification (a)

HEART
SIGN
TEACH
LEARN?
PT+
HERE?
UNIVERSITY
NO
HEART
SUPPORT,
HELP
Identification III: Classification (b)

Dealing with constructed action

Context:
Yoshimoto shows a Japanese Newspaper with the television programme. He draws a Japanese symbol followed by a dotted line on the board. In the newspaper, this indicates the availability of subtitles.
Identification III: Classification (b)

[a kind of] PT+

PT+

QUOTE

CA:SING+microphone
KARAOKE
VOICING

CA:PULL-ROPE
CA:? COMES WITH

[a kind of] PT+

SAME

PT+
Dealing with classifier signs and role-shift

**Context:**
In 1915, the Japanese Deaf Association was founded. At the time, it had a hearing president.
Identification III: Classification (c)

PT+ HEARING HEAD, CHIEF, BOSS, HEAD-PERSON, CHAIRMAN

dea association members

classifier sign depicting a hierarchical relationship between one (top) and many (bottom)

deaf

classifier sign depicting a hierarchical relationship between one (top) and many (bottom)

PT+ HEARING
Summary

Glossing a sign language video text is a process of identification that involves:

- **Segmentation**, ie. the detection of stretches of meaningful activity (a fairly straightforward process – but you may not be sure about these brief pointing signs!)

- **Comprehension**, ie. the attribution of meaning to identified segments (and you may not be able to recognize a quote or a baseball player when you see one!)

- **Classification**, ie. the application of categories inherent in notation conventions (fine if you feel sure about the lexicon of the sign language and know how to deal with non-lexical signing activity such as ‘imitating a singer or a baseball player’, ‘showing a hierarchical relationship’, or ‘displaying a submissive attitude’).
Conclusions

(1) I agree with Johnston 2010: Given the availability of digital multi-media annotation software, there is no need for transcriptions in the sense of a written substitute for a signed (video) text. Still, even if a gloss transcript is taken to be an annotation to a video in the sense of Johnston 2010, certain basic issues and problems remain.

(2) Any attempt at glossing/annotation presupposes basic processes, here called ‘segmentation’ and ‘comprehension’, involved in any act of making sense of a given stretch of sign language. Such processes crucially depend on native or near-native language competence. (And good video quality helps, too.)

(3) The glossing/annotation process itself depends on (a) a clear notion of the lexicon of a given sign language, and (b) a clear conception of non-lexical, or partly-lexical, sign language activity such as ‘classifier/depicting signs’ (including ‘manipulator’ signs), ‘constructed action’, and ‘role-shift’.

(4) Beyond this, differences in (basic) glossing/notation conventions seem comparatively minor, though harmonizing such conventions will be useful.