Announcement

- MIDTERM EXAMINATION next Friday in Lecture
- through second syntax lecture (Files 6.4-6.5 covered Monday)
Today

- Myths vs. facts about sign language
- Structure of ASL

Readings: 13.1 - 13.3
Background

- 1 in 1000 babies born deaf
- 2 million profoundly deaf people in the U.S.
- 15 million Hearing-impaired people in the U.S.
- 90% of deaf babies are born to hearing parents
- 100,000-500,000 ASL users in the U.S.

Is (American) Sign Language a ‘true’ language?
Yes. Like spoken languages, signed languages are:

1. naturally-occurring (not invented)
2. complete and expressive
3. rule-governed (there is a “right” and “wrong” way to say things)
4. governed by the same kinds of principles governing spoken languages
5. not the same world-wide
6. not mere pantomime
7. not parasitic on spoken language
MYTH 1: Signed languages are not ‘true’ language because lack writing, speech

- Writing is a derivative of language
- Approx. 57% of the world’s languages are unwritten
- Historically, languages have been spoken long before they have been written down
- Main difference between spoken and signed languages is *mode of communication* (vocal-auditory vs. manual-visual)
MYTH 2:
Sign language is universal

- Many different signed languages
- They are mutually unintelligible

American Sign Language (ASL)

British Sign Language
MYTH 3: Sign language is purely iconic

- Some signs are iconic
  - “house”, “eat”, “cat”, “milk”, “sit”
MYTH 3, cont.: Sign language is purely iconic

- But, if all signs were iconic…
  - Non-signers would understand sign language
  - All deaf people would have same signs
  - Wouldn’t be able to sign abstract concepts

- Recall: Iconicity occurs in spoken languages to some degree (onomatopoeia)

- ASL has *dialects* (e.g. candy)
MYTH 4: ASL encodes spoken English into signs

- Manually Coded English (MCE)
  - translation of English in 1-to-1 encoding
  - used to teach English to the Deaf

- Fingerspelling
  - used for words for which there is no sign
MYTH 4: ASL encodes spoken English into signs, cont.

- Simultaneity vs. sequentiality
- English is sequential: phonemes (as well as morphemes and words in a sentence) are *linearly ordered*.
- In signed languages, meaning-bearing units are produced simultaneously
  - e.g., English noun-verb distinction:
    - *create* vs. *creation*  
    - *walk* vs. *walker* --word ending
  - ASL noun-verb distinction
Structure of ASL

- Phonology
  - Parameters (or primes): Discrete units of a sign...distinctive features
    - Handshape
    - Place (of articulation)
    - Movement
    - Palm orientation

http://www.lifeprint.com/
http://commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/browser.htm
Handshape

‘CANDY’  ‘APPLE’  ‘JEALOUS’

http://commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/browser.htm
Place

‘SUMMER’

‘DRY’
Movement

‘NAME’

‘SHORT’

‘EGG’
Palm orientation

‘WANT’  ‘FREEZE’