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# Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese: usage and prestige in the Japanese Deaf community

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“Je ne puis comprendre qu'une langue comme celle des signes, la plus riche en expressions, la plus énergique, qui a l'avantage inestimable d'être par elle-même intelligible à tous les hommes, soit cependant si fort négligée, et qu'il n'y ait, pour ainsi dire, que les sourds et muets qui la parlent. Voilà, je l'avoue, une de ces inconséquences de l'esprit humain, dont je ne saurais me rendre raison.”

“I cannot understand how a language like sign language – this richest in expressions, the most energetic, the most incalculably advantageous in its universal intelligibility – is still so neglected and that only the Deaf speak it, as it were. That is, I confess, one of those irrationalities of the human mind that I cannot explain.”

Pierre Desloges, *Observations d’un sourd et muet*, 1779

# ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to analyze the sociolinguistic domains in which Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese have been used, and the prestige accorded to them inside and outside the Deaf community throughout history, putting their evolution through the years in relation with historical events and subsequent changes of ideologies and politics in the Japanese Deaf community.

In particular, it aims to discover if the introduction of identity politics by D-groups first and the shift in politics and planning by the JFD afterwards led to a more widespread use and higher prestige of Japanese Sign Language, compared to the 20th century when Manually Signed Japanese was the dominant communication method.

This work will be comprised of four chapters: Chapter 1 will provide an overview of the history of the Japanese Deaf community, and illustrate the current situation of the community as a linguistic minority. Chapter 2 will describe Japanese Sign Language, Manually Signed Japanese and other sign form and variation used in Japan. Chapter 3 will delve into a sociolinguistic analysis of the usage of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese as reported in academic literature, while Chapter 4 will present the findings of a questionnaire administered to Deaf people in Japan, investigating the usage and prestige of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese.

# 要旨

本研究は、日本のろう者コミュニティーにおける日本手話と日本語対応手話の使い方と威信を明らかにすることを目的とする。

一般的に、日本のろう者コミュニティーは、世界の他のろう者コミュニティのように、手話のシステムを二つ使う： 日本手話とは、日本語と全く異なる文法があり、独自の体系を持つ言語である。空間的な言語であるから、例えば、口形、表情、眉毛の動きなどは、日本手話の文法的要素である。一方で、日本語対応手話とは、ベースは口話の日本語だが、日本語をしゃべりながら、日本手話の単語を日本語の文法にしたがって並べていくという人工言語である。

長い間、全日本ろうあ連盟は①ろう者が基本的に日本人であり、②日本手話は独自の体系を持つ言語ではなく、日本語のモードであり、そして③難聴は障害であるという見方を支持していた。こちらの障害フレームにより、日本のろう者が権利を取得すること実現されていたけれども、1990 年代から異論が出された。その時代に、活動家の新世代が現れた。「D グループ」は、アメリカのアイデンティティ政治からインスピレーションを取って、難聴を文化としてフレームした。観念形態の衝突は、言語的な分野にも移った。言語的な正統性を決したり、手話を定義したり、言語計画をしたりするのは、「言語的な戦争」に基本的なポイントになった。しかし、2000 年代から、全日本ろうあ連盟は主に障害フレームを使い続けているのに、日本手話を独自な言語として話し始めた。現在、全日本ろうあ連盟は手話言語法を制定ために推進している。

本研究の目的は、日本手話と日本語対応手話がどんな社会言語的な場面で使われるか、どのように威信を持っているかという話題を分析するのである。そして、使い方と威信の変化を歴史的な出来事とその後のろう者コミュニティーの観念形態や政治の変化との関係を考案する。取り分け、2000 年代からアイデンティティ政治の導入や全日本ろうあ連盟の政治のシフトは、日本手話の前より普及や高い威信につながっているかは研究課題である。

日本手話と日本語対応手話はどんな社会言語学的な場面で使われるか。どちらが日本のろう者コミュニティーの中及び一般集団においては威信を持っているか。使い方や威信は、近代の頃変更したか。

その研究課題を明らかにするために、まず日本のろう者コミュニティーの歴史と現代の状況を調べなければならない。第 1.1 章は、日本のろう者コミュニティーの歴史の概要を提示する。まず、日本のろう者に関する初期の典拠について述べる。その後、1878 年に日本の最初のろう学校の設立から、1990 年代の「日本手話発見」と現代までの主な出来事を説明し、どのようにこちらの歴史的な出来事が日本のろう者コミュニティーと日本のろう協会を形成したかについて説明する。

第 1.2 章は、ろう者の権利や日本の福祉制度を中心として、日本のろう者コミュニティーを言語的や社会的なマイノリティーとして見なして、現代の状況を述べる。

第 2 章は、矢沢国光氏の手話モデルをベースとして、日本手話、日本語対応手話、中間手話や他の日本で使われる手話の種類を定義する。日本で使われる手話をできる限り完全に説明するために、本章に日本手話の方言と村落手話も述べる。

第 1 章と第 2 章の背景に沿って、第 3 章は、社会言語学的な視点から日本手話と日本語対応手話の使い方を分析する。まず、家、職場、学校などのような社会言語的な場面でどんな手話が使われるかを分析する。述べられる言語的な現象は威信、ダイグロシア、コードスイッチングやコードミキシングを含めている。次は、社会言語学的な視点から日本のろう者コミュニティーとアメリカのろう者コミュニティーの手話の使い方を比べる。

第 4 章は、日本人のろう者を対象としている、日本手話と日本語対応手話の使い方、使用頻度と威信を取り調べる研究調査の結果を分析する。

最後に、結論とこちらの話題に関する更なる研究について述べる。

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........ 3
要旨 ........ 4
TABLE OF CONTENTS........ 6
TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS........ 8
LIST OF FIGURES ........ 8
LIST OF TABLES ........ 8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........ 10
INTRODUCTION........ 13
CHAPTER 1 ........ 17
1.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE DEAF COMMUNITY ........ 17
1.1.1 Early history of the Deaf in Japan........ 17
1.1.2 Schools for the Deaf and the origins of the Deaf Community: from the Meiji Revolution to 1945 ........ 19
1.1.3 Postwar period and streptomycin: from 1945 to 1970 ........ 22
1.1.4 Mainstreaming Era: from 1970 to 1990 ........ 25
1.1.5 The "Discovery of JSL": From 1990 to present times ........ 27
Summary ........ 32
1.2 DEAF PEOPLE IN JAPANESE SOCIETY ........ 33
1.2.1 Deaf population in Japan........ 33
1.2.2 Deaf people as a minority ........ 34
1.2.3 Deaf people in popular media ........ 35
1.2.4 Welfare system and JFD structure........ 37
1.2.5 Deaf rights........ 39
1.2.6 Deafness: disability, culture, identity? ........ 43
Summary ........ 45
CHAPTER 2........ 47
JAPANESE SIGN LANGUAGE AND MANUALLY SIGNED JAPANESE ........ 47
2.1 Defining Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese........ 47
2.2 Japanese Sign Variations and Yazawa Kuniteru's model ........ 49
2.3 Dialects of JSL and other Sign Languages used in Japan ........ 50
2.4 Evolution of Japanese Sign Language ........ 53
2.5 Contact with Japanese and influence on Japanese Sign Language ........ 55
2.6 Evolution of Manually Signed Japanese........ 60

2.7 “Confusion” over the distinction between Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese ... 61
Summary ... 62
CHAPTER 3 ... 64
USAGE OF JAPANESE SIGN LANGUAGE AND MANUALLY SIGNED JAPANESE ... 64
3.1 Signing at home ... 64
3.2 Signing at work ... 65
3.3 Signing in education ... 66
3.4 Signing in sign interpreting ... 71
3.5 The concept of diglossia and domains of language use ... 72
3.6 Code/mode-switching, mixing and blending ... 74
3.7 Contesting visions of JFD and D-Pro ... 75
3.8 Prestige of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese ... 77
3.9 A Comparison with American Sign Language and Manually Coded English(es) ... 78
Summary ... 82
CHAPTER 4 ... 83
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE ... 83
4.1 Information about the questionnaire ... 83
4.2 Section 1: Demographics and questions related to Deafness ... 84
4.3 Section 2: Usage and perception of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese ... 87
4.4 Section 3: Signing in media ... 95
4.5 Additional comments ... 97
4.6 Summary, limitations of this study and ideas for further research ... 99
CONCLUSIONS ... 101
BIBLIOGRAPHY ... 105
WEB SOURCES ... 115
TELEVISION DRAMAS, PROGRAMS, MOVIES AND ANIMATIONS ... 119
APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL APPROVAL ... 120
APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE IN JAPANESE ... 122
APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH ... 129

# TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Illustration of a deaf beggar on the Wakan Sansai Sue (Terajima, 1713) ....... 18
Figure 2: Yazawa model of Japanese sign variations (Yazawa, 1996, cited in Nakamura, 2006) ........ 49
Figure 3: Modern Japanese fingerspelling syllabary (Kanda, 1986) ........ 56
Figure 4: ASL fingerspelling alphabet (Abner, 2014) ........ 57
Figure 5: Furukawa's fingerspelling syllabary, 19th century (Kanda, 1986) ........ 58
Figure 6: Birth years of the respondents ........ 84
Figure 7: Gender of the respondents ........ 84
Figure 8: Identity terms chosen by the respondents ........ 85
Figure 9: Life phases when respondents became Deaf ........ 86
Figure 10: Cochlear implantation in respondents ........ 86
Figure 11: Presence of Deaf family members ........ 87
Figure 12: How often respondents interact with other Deaf people ........ 87
Figure 13: Frequency of use of Japanese Sign Language ........ 88
Figure 14: Frequency of use of Manually Signed Japanese ........ 88
Figure 15: Adequacy of using Japanese Sign Language in different domains ........ 89
Figure 16: Adequacy of using Manually Signed Japanese in different domains ........ 89
Figure 17: Characteristics of Japanese Sign Language ........ 91
Figure 18: Characteristics of Manually Signed Japanese ........ 91
Figure 19: Signing in movies and TV series ........ 95
Figure 20: Signing in TV programs ........ 96
Figure 21: Signing on social media ........ 97

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Mean values attributed to the adequacy of using Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese in different domains ........ 89
Table 2: Mean values attributed to characteristics of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese ........ 91
Table 3: Characteristics of Japanese Sign Language, arranged from highest to lowest score ........ 93
Table 4: Characteristics of Manually Signed Japanese, arranged from highest to lowest score ........ 94

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# INTRODUCTION

> 手話言語は音声言語と違う文法体系をもっています。手の形、位置、動きに 加え、表情や強弱などを用いて、意見や気持ちや考えを視覚的に表現し、伝えあう言語です。[…] 音声言語とは違う文法体系を持つ手話言語を使うろう者がいることを、社会 全体で理解することが大切です。
>
> Sign language has a different grammatical system than spoken language. In sign language, personal opinions, feelings, and thoughts are visually expressed and communicated using the shape, position, and movement of the hands, as well as facial expressions and degree of strength. […] It is important for society as a whole to understand that there are deaf people who use sign language which has a different grammatical system than spoken language.

These words can be read in the 2020 pamphlet campaigning for Sign Language Legislation written by the largest Deaf association in Japan, the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD). This statement might seem obvious to anyone having at least a basic familiarity with Sign Languages, but it would have been impossible to find it on any official JFD document just a few years prior.

Generally speaking, there are two main forms of signing used by Deaf communities: Sign Languages, which are natural languages with their own grammar and vocabulary that make use of spatial relationships, facial expression, and body positioning to convey meaning; and Manually Signed Languages, which are artificial communication systems used by speaking and signing at the same time, in simultaneous communication (Sim Com) or signed supported speech. They tend to be linear and purely manual systems, and follow the grammar of their correspondent oral language (Spencer & Glover, 2015).

However, this binary definition does not encompass the extreme variety of signing systems that are used by Deaf people all over the world, and this is surely true for signing in the Japanese Deaf community.

For most of its history, the JFD promoted the view that Deaf people were fundamentally Japanese, that Sign Language was a different mode of communication of spoken Japanese and not an independent language, and framed deafness as a disability to obtain welfare benefits for its members. The disability frame allowed them to accomplish important

rights for Deaf people in Japan, but it was contested starting from the 1990s, when a new generation of Deaf activists emerged. The so called "D-groups" were inspired by American identity politics and framed Deafness as a minority culture instead (Nakamura, 2006). This clash of ideologies translated into the linguistic realm as well: determining linguistic orthodoxy, defining Sign Language and doing language planning were all important stakes in the "Language Wars" between JFD and D-groups. However, starting from the early 2000s onwards, the JFD, while still moving mainly within the disability frame, started changing its official views on Japanese Sign Language and Deafness in general. They started presenting Japanese Sign Language as an independent language separate from spoken Japanese, and presenting themselves more as a repository of resources for Deaf people instead of focusing exclusively on social welfare. Currently, they are campaigning for Sign Language Legislation in Japan, in addition to advocating for social change and empowerment of Deaf people.

This thesis aims to analyze the sociolinguistic domains in which Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese have been used, and the prestige accorded to them inside and outside the Deaf community throughout history, and put their evolution through the years in relation with historical events and subsequent changes of ideologies and politics in the Japanese Deaf community. In particular, it aims to discover if the introduction of identity politics by D-groups first and the shift in politics and planning by the JFD afterwards led to a more widespread use and higher prestige of Japanese Sign Language, compared to the 20th century when Manually Signed Japanese was the dominant communication method.

There is vast research published by both hearing and Deaf scholars about Japanese Sign Language and the Japanese Deaf community, but research focusing specifically on Manually Signed Japanese is very scarce, especially sociolinguistic research. While not an independent language, Manually Signed Japanese is still a widely used communication method and a "bridge" between Deaf and hearing people, and Japanese and Japanese Sign Language. Understanding its use can give new insight into the Japanese Deaf community, its perceived boundaries and its ideologies. This thesis is an attempt to start filling this gap in research.

In which domains are Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese used? Which is more prestigious inside and outside the Deaf community? Has their usage and prestige changed in latest years?

To answer the research questions, it is first of all necessary to know how the Japanese Deaf community itself developed, and its current circumstances as a minority in Japanese society. For this reason, Chapter 1 of this work will start by providing an overview of the history of the Japanese Deaf community, and illustrate how this history shaped the views of Deaf associations over the years, leading to a decades-long dominance of disability politics over identity ones. The second part of this chapter will deal with the Japanese Deaf community as a minority, focusing on the "welfare system" enacted by the JFD and on Deaf rights.

Chapter 2 will firstly give the definitions of the several types of signing used in the Japanese Deaf community, using Yazawa Kuniteru's Japanese Sign Variations model. While it is important to repeat that these definitions are not and cannot be static and exact, it is also necessary to know them to understand linguistic discourse and linguistic politics in the Japanese Deaf community. To provide a view of the linguistic landscape of the Japanese Deaf community that is as complete as possible, Japanese Sign Language dialects and shared sign languages will also be briefly described.

With the backgrounds provided by the first two chapters, Chapter 3 will delve into a sociolinguistic analysis of the usage of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese as reported in academic literature, treating domains of use, prestige, and linguistic phenomena such as diglossia and code/mode-mixing. To end the chapter, a comparison will be made between the usage of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese in Japan, and that of American Sign Language and Manually Coded English in the United States.

To conclude, Chapter 4 will present the findings of a questionnaire administered to Deaf people in Japan, investigating the usage and prestige of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese. The data will be then put in relation with the change in ideologies and politics in JFD and D-groups starting from the early 2000s. The chapter will be followed by conclusions and ideas for further research.

As for the author's positionality: I am hearing and part of the autistic and disabled communities. I am aware of the biases I may bring due to my life experiences; however,

as an outsider to the Japanese Deaf community, I try to be mindful of how my biases might shape my research, and adopt a position of anthropological relativism.

# CHAPTER 1

## 1.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE DEAF COMMUNITY

### 1.1.1 Early history of the Deaf in Japan

Very little is known about deaf[1] lives in Japan before the early Meiji period. Deaf people have existed in all historical eras, as confirmed by texts related to deafness written long before 1878, the conventional date of birth of the Japanese Deaf community. However, historians took little note of deaf and other disabled people, and before education and literacy became widespread, deaf people rarely left written testimony of their experiences (Nakamura, 2006). This scarcity of documents makes it difficult to reconstruct the early history of the Japanese Deaf community.

In the 律令 *Ritsuryō*, the Japanese legal system enacted in 701 based on Confucianist values and beliefs, disabled people were classified into three categories depending on the severity of their condition. Deaf people were considered 残疾 *zanshichi*, the lowest level of disability, together with, for example, people who only had three toes (Nakamura, 2006). Why were deaf people in this category? According to the social model of disability, "impairment" is a characteristic of the individual which may affect the function of their mind and/or body, their appearance, etc., while "disability" is the disadvantage caused to individuals with impairments by the society in which they live (Thomas et al., 1997). When the *Ritsuryō* was enacted, Japan was an agrarian society, so it can be assumed that deaf people, who could contribute to manual labor in the fields without needing to communicate, were not excluded from society, but rather existed as members of their communities (Itō, 1998).

The attitude towards deaf people changed with the urbanization and economic development of medieval and early modern eras. They were regarded as having little to no productive value due to their communication disabilities, and were excluded by society. Especially in big commercial cities such as Edo and Ōsaka, deaf people were often abandoned by their families and forced to live on the streets and beg to survive. However,

[1] In this text, lowercase "deaf" will be used when referring mainly to the audiological condition of hearing loss, while uppercase "Deaf" when referring to the community, culture, language etc. of deaf people.

since beggars often gathered in groups, this living situation probably allowed deaf people to meet and interact with each other and start communicating through hand gestures first and a form of sign language after (Itō, 1998). By mid-Edo period, the association of beggars with deafness had solidified. The 和漢三才図会 *Wakan Sansai Sue*, the first illustrated Japanese encyclopedia, published in 1713 by Terajima Ryōan, reflects the negative attitude towards deaf people at the time. The definition of "mute" is accompanied by the picture of a beggar:

> ［瘖瘂］おふし　和名は於布之。瘖瘂とは言不能のことを言う。瘖瘂でしかも聾の者あり、哀れむべきの至りなり。また成長して後、徐々に言語をなす者もあり。　垂仁天皇の子、誉津別王（ホムチワケノミコ）は成長しても未だものを言わず、　歳三十にして鵠を見てはじめて言語を得る。

> 瘖瘂　*Ofushi*. The Japanese pronunciation is 於布之 *ofushi*. It refers to people who cannot use words. There are people who are not only mute, but also deaf, and they are very pitiful. Some of them will slowly develop speech after they grow up. Emperor Suinin's son, Homuchiwake no Miko, who still had never spoken even though he was an adult, spoke for the first time at 30 years old, when he saw a swan.[2]

*Figure 1: Illustration of a deaf beggar on the Wakan Sansai Sue (Terajima, 1713)*

[2] Translations are by the author unless otherwise specified.

This is the definition of "deaf" in the same text:

> ［聾］ つんぼ 俗に豆牟保と言う。聾とは耳が聞こえざることなり。聾は篭なり、蒙篭の内に在るがごとく聴いて察せざるなり。龍の耳、聴くを欠く、故に字、龍に従う。
>
> 聾 *Tsunbo*. Commonly called 豆牟保 *tsunbo*. Deaf people are not able to hear. They are trapped inside a cage of ignorance. The ears of dragons cannot hear, so the word [for deaf] contains 龍, "dragon".

While entries for other disabilities are generally positive, deaf people are described as ignorant and pitiful, and associated with beggars. This might be because deaf beggars were a more visible presence in Edo compared to other disabled people, so negative stereotypes towards them developed more easily.

### 1.1.2 Schools for the Deaf and the origins of the Deaf Community: from the Meiji Revolution to 1945

Research and case studies conducted in several countries, such as Ireland (Le Master 2003), Nigeria (Schmaling, 2003), Nicaragua (Senghas, 1994, Senghas, 2003) and Indonesia (Palfreyman, 2017), show that schools and pedagogical language policies are fundamental in the formation and shaping of Deaf communities and coherent sign languages.

There is no evidence of systematic schooling for the deaf in Japan before the Meiji period. Some private temple schools (寺子屋 *terakoya*) had deaf pupils: according to research published in 1929 by Ototake Iwazō, who interviewed over 3,000 elderly people who had attended temple schools during the Edo period, 8.6 percent of the temple schools the interviewees had attended had disabled students, and the majority of them were deaf. However, most deaf people had no opportunity to attend schools, and remained uneducated (Nakamura, 2006).

Before the Meiji Revolution of 1868, several progressive Japanese scholars traveled to Europe to "learn how to create the social and industrial frameworks needed to modernize

(at once Westernize, militarize and industrialize) the nation" (Nakamura, 2006 p.40). Of these scholars, two are particularly relevant in relation to the establishment of education for the deaf in Japan: Fukuzawa Yukichi and Yamao Yōzō. Fukuzawa traveled to Europe in 1862 and visited schools for the Deaf in England, France, and the Netherlands. He observed that all these schools used fingerspelling and oral methods, such as speech training and speechreading, and published the results of his observations in a book called 西洋事情 *Seiyō jijō* (The Situation of the West) in 1866. Yamao traveled to the United Kingdom with Itō Hirobumi in 1863, tasked with learning about British shipbuilding techniques. In Glasgow, he visited some shipyards and marveled when he saw hearing and deaf people working together. After returning to Japan, where he started a career in the Ministry of Construction, in 1871 he wrote a petition to the government, appealing for the creation of a school for deaf and blind students (Nakamura, 2006).

The first school for the Deaf in Japan was opened in Kyoto in 1878 by Furukawa Tashirō. He was a young teacher, son of the head of one of the most important *terakoya* in the country, with around 3,000 students. Some years before, he had been arrested for forging documents to aid peasants during a revolt, and from his prison window he saw two deaf children being heavily bullied. This episode deeply moved him, as his testimony in his prison notes proves:

> 凡そ人生の不幸は聾唖に如くものなし。啻に其身不憫なるのみならず動もすれば常人に凌辱嘲弄せられ、猶廃棄物として人類中に配せざる如き状あり、実に悲むべく憫むべきの極みと云ふべし。 造物者何ぞ斯く偏するの甚だしきやと独り歎じて止まず。 然りと雖も動物中最高なる人体を有する限は必ずしも人たるの行なくんばあらず。 又為さしめざるべからず。是啻に聾唖者の教育を受けざるの不幸のみならず又教育をなさゞる者の罪なり。 苟も行常に列行せば何ぞ人に軽蔑せらるゝことなく、又心事に恥づることあらんや。
>
> There is nothing as unfortunate in life as the deaf-mute. For not only is their physical condition miserable, but by the very movement of their body they cause normal people to despise and make fun of them. Treated as the unwanted waste of humankind, theirs is truly a sad situation that compels our deepest concern. I contemplate, with some resentment, why the Creator would do such an unjust

> thing as this. Possessing human bodies, the highest form of life on this world, all humans must live as such and be able to receive the fruits of such an existence. To not be able to receive an education and fully live their lives as human beings must be the cruelest punishment of all. And it is a crime for us to withhold such an education from them. If the deaf were able to do the same things as normal people, then they would not face the discrimination and shame that they do now. (Translation by Karen Nakamura)

Furukawa started teaching deaf children in 1876, in an elementary school in Kyoto, and after developing a pedagogical method for teaching deaf children, he established his school for the Deaf in 1878. Other schools followed in the following years, first in Tokyo and then in other large prefectures. The schools received some public funding from the Meiji government, which was eager to establish more modern institutions in all fields, including education. However, students still had to pay for their expenses, and many parents considered educating their deaf children a waste of money, so only rich families could afford to send their deaf children to school (Nakamura, 2006).

At the very beginning of Deaf education in Japan, signing and fingerspelling were used in classrooms, but this soon changed after the Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf in 1880, commonly known as the Milan Conference. Several resolutions were passed during the Congress, declaring the superiority of the oral method over signing. The first two are of particular note:

I. The Congress — Considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society, and in giving him a more perfect knowledge of language, Declares — That the Oral method ought to be preferred to that of signs for the education and instruction of the deaf and dumb.

II. The Congress Considering that the simultaneous use of speech and signs has the disadvantage of injuring speech, lip-reading, and precision of ideas, Declares — That the Pure Oral method ought to be preferred.

No Deaf people were involved in preparing or voting on the resolutions. The result was the abolishment of sign instruction in almost all countries (Moores, 2010). Japan followed this trend as well. Two scholars who had observed the Oral method in the United States, Isawa Shūji and Kawamoto Inosuke, introduced it to Japan (Yamauchi, 2017).

In the *American Annals of the Deaf* of 1905, Professor Hall of Gallaudet College[3] reported that by 1904 there were 19 schools for the deaf and blind in Japan, with a total of 1,063 pupils, and that many young deaf graduates were able to make a living practicing the profession they learned at school. He concludes by commenting, "all in all it seems beyond a doubt that the education of the deaf in Japan is already at such a stage that we may draw help and inspiration from our far eastern neighbors as well as send help and encouragement to them".

In 1891, graduates of these schools started to form alumni associations, which became a central core around which deaf communities developed. In 1906, the Tokyo School of the Deaf Alumni Association sponsored the first national conference of the Deaf, and in 1915, leaders from various alumni associations created the Japan Association of the Deaf (日本聾唖協会 *nihon rōa kyōkai*). Yamao Yōzō, the politician who in 1871 had petitioned for the creation of a school for the deaf, was elected president. The Association held annual meetings and in 1931 it started publishing a monthly newsletter. After Japan entered World War II, the JAD was pushed by the government to become a registered social welfare association. It was dismantled in 1944, but it laid the foundation for the work of the postwar Japanese Federation of the Deaf.

### 1.1.3 Postwar period and streptomycin: from 1945 to 1970

Deaf people and Japanese society in general greatly benefited from the end of the Pacific War in 1945. The most important change for the deaf community was the institution of free compulsory education for all citizens. This right was first established into the new Constitution of Japan, which came into effect on May 3rd, 1947:

> 第二十六条すべて国民は、法律の定めるところにより、その能力に応じて、ひとしく教育を受ける権利を有する。すべて国民は、法律の定めるところにより、その保護する子女に普通教育を受けさせる義務を負ふ。義務教育は、これを無償とする。

[3] Now Gallaudet University, the only higher education institution in the world in which all programs are designed for deaf and hard of hearing students and conducted in sign language.

> Article 26. All people shall have the right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided by law. All people shall be obligated to have all boys and girls under their protection receive ordinary education as provided for by law. Such compulsory education shall be free.

It was made effective by a mandate of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (General Douglas MacArthur) at the beginning of the following fiscal and academic year, on April 1st, 1948. The institution of equal education access, together with the postwar baby boom, greatly boosted enrollment in schools for the deaf. However, there was also another factor that influenced the demographics of the deaf population in Japan, and later shaped the Japanese Deaf community and its values.

The massive internal migration of families moving from the countryside to urban areas, paired with a still-devastated state of the medical system, caused several potentially lethal illnesses to spread. Infections like pneumonia, tuberculosis, spinal meningitis, and typhoid fever were especially dangerous for children, and until the 1960s, an antibiotic called Streptomycin was used to treat them. Streptomycin was very effective against most bacterial infections, but it is also ototoxic: it damages the eighth cranial nerve, causing irreversible cochlear and vestibular dysfunction (Mudd & Jones, 2021). Most children deafened by streptomycin were between the age of two and eight when they lost their hearing, so they were post-lingually deaf. Spoken Japanese was already their primary language, and those who learned Sign Language learned it as a second language.

In contrast, in other industrialized countries deaf "bubbles" (large cohorts of deaf people in the same age groups) were often caused by rubella outbreaks. When caught by a pregnant woman, rubella may cause damage to the auditory nerves of the fetus. Therefore, children deafened by rubella are pre-natally or pre-lingually deaf, and if they attend schools for the Deaf, Sign Language is their primary language (Nakamura, 2006). This is one of the reasons why Deaf identity developed differently in Japan compared to, for example, the United States.

Okinawa constituted an exception in Japanese Deaf history of that period: in 1964, there was a massive rubella epidemic on the islands of Okinawa Prefecture, probably brought by the American military personnel stationed there. Between the fall 1964 and the spring of 1965, around 500 "rubella children" were born, and the majority of them were deaf or hard of hearing. They were the largest "deaf bubble" in the history of Japan. They were

initially mainstreamed, but so many of them, being pre-lingually deaf, struggled academically that the prefectural school board decided to build a school for the deaf exclusively for them, the Kitashiro School for the Deaf. Most of the students lived in the school dorms. Because of its unique situation, the Okinawan deaf cohort "have a shared experience of deafness and deaf identity that would be lost in the generations that followed them" (Nakamura, 2006, p.69). The Kitashiro School for the Deaf was shut down in 1983, when the "rubella children" graduated[4].

Schools for the Deaf in Japan shared the same curriculum as hearing schools (as they do nowadays as well). The Ministry of Education opposed (and opposes) the use of any language other than Japanese in schools, and Sign Language was not recognized as a valid medium of instruction. Teachers were not required to have any training in deaf pedagogy or signing, and gave their lectures orally as they would in any other school.

In this environment, post-lingually deaf and/or hard of hearing students, who had a base of Japanese on which they could build speaking, lipreading and writing skills, had a tremendous advantage over pre-lingually deaf pupils. Students with the strongest command of the Japanese language rose to the top of the school system, and later formed the core leadership of the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (Nakamura, 2006).

Postwar Japan was characterized by a shared sense of euphoria, a strong work ethic and a desire to rebuild the nation. Minorities like the Deaf and the *burakumin* were part of this rhetoric as well, and wanted to reassert their status as full Japanese citizens, even though societal prejudice against them remained. It was in this context that the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (財団法人全日本ろうあ連盟 *Zaidan hōjin zen-nihon rōa renmei*, from this point on JFD) was founded in 1947, resuming the work of the defunct Japanese Association of the Deaf. In the early years, the leadership were politically inactive. The JFD calls this period お願いの時代 *onegai no jidai*, the "Era of Pleading": since Deaf rights besides education were not established yet, to obtain resources, services, or anything else they might need, JFD leaders had to go to government offices and plead for them, relying on the pity of individual bureaucrats.

[4] In 1981, the school baseball team, whose sixteen players and five managers were all deaf, participated first in the local tournament and then reached the prefectural intramurals. The story gained popularity and was adapted into various media, including a comic book and a movie.

This situation ended in the 1960s, when a new generation of leaders, influenced by the political landscape of that decade, brought the JFD into a new era of social activism. These activists were generally well-educated and late-deafened, and greatly valued inclusion: everyone was considered deaf, regardless of the extent of hearing loss and how much they signed.

The activism of the JFD during those years first took place in courtrooms (for more details, see Section 1.2.5). However, they soon realized that real change could only come from changing the legal framework itself, and activism moved to the political and administrative realms. The 日本聴力障害新聞 *Nihon Chōryokushōgai Shinbun* (Japanese Hearing Impairment Newspaper, the monthly newspaper of the JFD) of January 1st, 1969 read: "The courtroom trial is a weapon in our fight […]; but however important that weapon is, you cannot change the law through the courts. The only way to change the law is through the Diet" (cited in Nakamura, 2006).

Another important episode in Deaf history of those years is the Kyoto School for the Deaf protests. In 1965, high school students at the Kyoto Prefectural School for the Deaf decided to strike in protest against the favoritism shown to post-lingually deafened and hard of hearing students. Their boycott and demand for a more egalitarian education only resulted in minor changes, and only in their school. However, the story was picked up by major newspapers and by the JFD news outlet, bringing some of the issues deaf people faced into the public eye.

### 1.1.4 Mainstreaming Era: from 1970 to 1990

In the 1970s, several factors impacted the Deaf community. The first one was the plummeting birthrate: in the 1960s, the fertility rate had stabilized at around 2.00 children per woman. It began a downward trend in the 1970s, dropping to 1.54 in 1990. This tendence continues today as well, with the birthrate down at 1.30 in 2020, the sixth lowest in Asia (data from the World Bank Data Catalog). Combined with advancements in medicine which made illnesses like rubella a lot less common, this meant that fewer deaf children were born compared to the postwar period.

Moreover, the practice of mainstreaming deaf children into regular schools instead of sending them to schools for the Deaf gained popularity from the 1970s onward, making enrollment in the latter fall dramatically. Let us take Kyoto Prefectural School for the Deaf, where the 1965 student strike took place, as an example. Its peak enrollment was in 1956, when it had (Nakamura, 2006):

- 11 kindergarteners
- 164 elementary school students
- 107 middle school students
- 35 high school students

As students progressed through grades, the enrollment in high school peaked at 87 students in both 1966 and 1970. However, the loss of students became substantial in the years immediately after. By 1977, numbers had already dropped dramatically (Nakamura, 2006):

- 47 kindergarteners
- 39 elementary school students
- 26 middle school students
- 37 high school students

The lower number of students in elementary school compared to kindergarten (not even counting that kindergarten has three grades while elementary school has six) shows the influence of mainstreaming practices. As Nakamura (2006) reports, in 1967 only 17 percent of pupils transferred from the pre-school for the Deaf associated with the Kyoto School for the Deaf to a regular school. In 1970, the percentage peaked at 100 percent, then stabilized around 50-70 percent in the later years. It was mostly post-lingually deafened and hard of hearing students who could mainstream, since they had a base of written and spoken Japanese on which they could build. This created a self-fulfilling prophecy: as students who did well academically moved to regular schools, the prejudice that schools for the Deaf were academically worse got stronger, and as students who struggled stayed in schools for the Deaf, the curriculum shifted to meet their needs (Nakamura, 2006). It is important to reiterate that students who had difficulties keeping up with schoolwork were often pre-lingually, profoundly deaf children who were not less intelligent than mainstreamed students, but had to learn with methods that were not effective for them. The curriculums shifted, however schools kept using the oral method

and Total Communication, while signing remained prohibited (for more details, see Section 3.3). The higher number of high school students compared to those in elementary and middle school is indicative of the beginning of two phenomena that will become even more prominent in later years, and for this reason will be explained in depth in the next section: U-Turn and L-Turn.

Through its activism, the JFD was able to obtain important results in the 1970s and 1980s, first and foremost more inclusion for Deaf students. However, this paradoxically caused further loss of Deaf identity, in a country where such a concept had already been struggling to establish itself. The reason for this can be ascribed to several factors: the composition of Deaf leadership, the framing of deafness as a disability by the JFD to obtain welfare benefits for Deaf people in Japan, and most importantly, according to Nakamura (2006), the lack of a powerful ethnic minority and multiculturalism frame to build Deaf identity upon (for more details, see Section 1.2.6)

People who mainstreamed often identify as hearing (健聴者 *kenchō*), hard of hearing (難聴者 *nanchōsha*), or hearing-impaired (聴覚障害者 *chōkaku shōgaisha*), not as Deaf (ろう者/ろうあ者 *rōsha*/*rōasha*). Many do not know how to sign or learned only after graduating, avoid associating with Deaf groups, and choose not to get a disability ID card (Nakamura, 2006). It is important to point out once again that this was mainly the experience of post-lingually deafened people, who often had some residual hearing and had the opportunity to succeed academically after mainstreaming to regular schools, not of the whole Deaf community. Still, this group were the more visible, active part of the community, and their experiences shaped the activities of the JFD in those decades. In the 1990s, a new Deaf association would appear, and challenge the JFD's view of deafness.

### 1.1.5 The "Discovery of JSL": From 1990 to present times

Enrolment in schools for the Deaf kept dropping through the 1990s. By 1998, Kyoto Prefectural School for the Deaf had (Nakamura, 2006):

- 29 kindergarteners
- 17 elementary school students

- 8 middle school students
- 49 high school students

Let us compare the data with the ones from 1977. It can be seen that the number of elementary and middle school students fell dramatically; however, the number of high school student shows an opposite trend. This is due to two tendencies in deaf education: U-Turn and L-Turn. “U-Turn Deaf” refers to students who were in schools for the deaf in kindergarten, then mainstreamed into regular schools and returned (U-Turned) to schools for the deaf in middle school or high school. L-Turn is a similar phenomenon, in which students who have been mainstreamed from the start of their education then transfer to schools for the deaf or special education programs in middle school or high school (Nakamura, 2006). There are several reasons why students choose to return or transfer to schools for the deaf. Firstly, school becomes much more difficult at middle school level, and even more at high school level. Students in Japan are promoted even if they do not complete the previous year, so pupils with academic difficulties get further left behind each year. Secondly, private middle and high schools have entrance exams, so it makes sense to turn at these junctions to avoid having to go through them. Other students, however, do not turn because of academic struggles, but purely out of choice, because they find schools for the Deaf to be a better environment and a less lonesome experience (Nakamura, 2003). Leaving mainstream spaces for minority ones can bring benefits to Deaf students, such as mitigating their sense of otherness and creating opportunities to form meaningful connections (McGuire, 2020).

Another trend of those years is the “Deaf Shock” (デフショック *defu shokku*). Deaf youth who integrated throughout their whole education are called インテ *inte*, and they constitute between 50 and 70 percent of deaf youth. Mainstreamed youth who grew up in signing families are not considered *inte*, because they had access to signing from an early age even if not at school (McGuire, 2020). *Inte* usually discover their Deaf identity as they become adults, when they start university or even when they have already started working. They usually get invited to Sign Language Circles and here they start meeting other Deaf people, using sign language, and gradually forming an idea of themselves as Deaf. The name “Deaf Shock” derives from the feeling of shock that comes with the realization that Deafness can be seen as a cultural and linguistic minority (Nakamura, 2003).

The 1990s were a pivotal moment in the history of the Japanese Deaf community, so much so that Yamauchi (2017) states that JSL was truly "discovered" in this period. In 1991, the JFD hosted the 11th World Congress of the Deaf in Tokyo, and the first Japanese board member of the World Federation of the Deaf was elected (JFD website). This event made Sign Language more visible and pushed more Deaf people to activism, including Deaf leader, interpreter and educator Kimura Harumi. Soon after, D-groups started to appear. These are associations of the Deaf that, contrary to the JFD, cater mainly to young people who are interested in cultural Deafness and identity politics, taking the way Deaf identity is organized in the United States as a model. The most prominent of these groups was D-Pro, founded in 1993. Their views differed substantially from those of JFD: they made distinctions between Deaf and hard of hearing, believed Deaf children of Deaf parents (the "Deaf-of-Deaf") should be the core of Deaf communities, and signed without mouthing or voicing. Their vision statement affirms:

> 私たちは、ろう者を、日本手話という日本語とは異なる言語を話す言語的少数者であると考えています。私たちは、ろう者がろう者としてろう者らしく生きていくことのできる社会、および日本手話とろう者の文化が日本語や聴者の文化などと同等に扱われ、尊重される社会の実現をめざします。
>
> We believe that Deaf people are a linguistic minority group that uses Japanese Sign Language, a language that is different from Japanese. We seek to realize a society that respects Deaf culture and JSL and treats them with equal status as Japanese language and culture, a society in which Deaf people can live as Deaf in a Deaf-like manner.

Their ideas have been harshly criticized by older deaf people and JFD members, and called "too American", "too radical", "too exclusionary", and even "right-wing" and "a cult" (Nakamura, 2006). On its official website, D-Pro responded to the criticisms by affirming that "D-Pro's philosophy is not based on 'exclusionism' nor 'Deaf nationalism'. It is not 'the doctrine of Deaf for Deaf's sake' either. D-Pro is only functioning for the liberation from the oppression by the majority, the hearing people." (D-Pro, 1999).

JFD's and D-Pro's views also diverge in regard to a new technology that started spreading from the mid-1980s and strongly impacted Deaf communities all over the world: cochlear

implants. Cochlear implants are an approved method of treatment for deafness, and consist of internal and external components. The external system consists of a microphone, a speech processor, a transmitter, and a magnet. It captures sounds, processes them, and transforms the auditory signals in electrical signals that can be transmitted to the internal system. The internal system has to be surgically implanted under general anesthesia and consists of a receiver, stimulator, electrode system, and magnet. It transmits the electric signals coming from the external system to the auditory nerve fibers in the cochlea (Hainarosie et al., 2014). Cochlear implants have generated backlash and outrage from the American Deaf community. Although even the most successful cochlear cannot restore full hearing, cochlear implants are considered threats to Deaf communities and identities. Many parents of children with cochlear implants, under the incorrect assumption that the surgery makes them fully hearing, do not teach them Sign Language, which may cause delays in language acquisition and even linguistic deprivation. Since 90 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents, Deaf culture is transmitted primarily through institutions instead of families. As cochlear implants will lead to a decline in Sign language users, there is a fear that they will also cause the disappearance of Deaf culture. This concern is present in Japan as well, and Japanese Sign Language is considered an endangered language by experts (Heinrich, 2012).

Moreover, many Deaf culturalists altogether rejected the notion that deafness is a disability to be cured and consider cochlear implantation as a form of minority oppression, some going as far as to call it a genocide (Cooper, 2019). In Japan, the first cochlear implantation on an adult was carried out in 1985, and the first one on a child in 1991. National health care started covering the implants in 1994, which accelerated implantations and their acceptance Cochlear implants have been framed by the JFD as a powerful hearing aid, and during the 9$^{th}$ JFD General Assembly in 2021, they expressed the resolution to promote exposure to Sign Language and opportunities to learn it to all deaf infants and their guardians, regardless of if they have a cochlear implant or not (Resolution for the Deaf Movement 2021). On the other hand, D-Pro tried to raise the issue of cochlear implants as genocide, but the discourse gathered very little interest. Implanted deaf people are still legally considered deaf in Japan, and are eligible for the disability ID card and the associated welfare benefits (Nakamura, 2006).

In the 2000s, the Japanese Deaf community has achieved significant milestones. In 2008, the first bilingual and bicultural school for the Deaf in Japan was established in Tokyo:

明晴学園 Meisei Gakuen is the only school for the Deaf that uses Japanese Sign Language as the sole medium of instruction, while Japanese is taught as a second language (for more details, see Section 3.3). It is worth noting that at Meisei Gakuen, the subject that teaches Japanese Language is called 日本語 *nihongo* (Japanese Language), instead of the usual 国語 *kokugo* (National Language), reinforcing the view that Japanese is not the first language for its students, and Deaf and Japanese cultures, while coexisting, are separate.

In 2011, following the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities was emended to officially recognize Sign Language and the right of disabled people to choose their preferred language or communication method. Article 3 (iii) of said Act recites:

> 全て障害者は、可能な限り、言語（手話を含む。）その他の意思疎通のための手段についての選択の機会が確保されるとともに、情報の取得又は利用のための手段についての選択の機会の拡大が図られること。
>
> All persons with disabilities are guaranteed the opportunity, insofar as possible, to choose their language (including sign language) and other means of communication for mutual understanding; and opportunities for them to choose the means of acquisition or use of information will be expanded. (Translation by the Ministry of Justice)

Sign Language recognition was a fundamental achievement for the Japanese Deaf community, but the JFD finds that existing Japanese laws, such as the aforementioned Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities, the Act on the Comprehensive Support for the Daily and Social Lives of Persons with Disabilities, and the Act for Eliminating Discriminations against Persons with Disabilities do not fully reflect the principles of the Convention. For the past decade, the JFD, aided by the Nippon Foundation, have been campaigning for new Sign Language legislation. Their main goals for a Sign Language Act are creating a society where Sign Language is readily available to anyone, to push Sign Language policies with clear and thorough guidelines about acquiring and using Sign Language, and to codify Sign Language as an independent language system. In 2016, a written opinion calling for Sign Language legislation received a 100% endorsement rate

from 1,741 assemblies from all the prefectures and municipalities of Japan[5]. In 2018 the Draft of the Sign Language Act was revised after first being announced in 2012, and as of December 24th 2020, 297 municipalities had enacted Sign Language ordinances, but a national Sign Language Act still has not been passed (JFD website).

## Summary

The first schools for the Deaf in Japan were built starting from 1878, and even though only two years later sign instruction was banned following the Milan Conference, these schools provided an unprecedented occasion for Deaf people to gather and start forming communities. Leaders of various alumni associations founded the Japan Association of the Deaf, which was rebuilt after the Second World War as the Japanese Federation of the Deaf. The presence of large "bubbles" of post-lingually deaf people deafened by Streptomycin influenced the composition of the Japanese Deaf community and especially of the JFD core leadership. From the 1960s onwards, these post-lingually deafened, well-educated and inclusivist leaders implemented a policy of social activism, framing deafness as a disability (not an identity) to obtain welfare benefits for Deaf people. In the following decades, the plummeting birthrate, advancements in medicine and mainstreaming caused further loss of Deaf identity. In the 1990s, D-groups interested in cultural Deafness and identity politics started to appear, but their ideas were considered too extreme by many Deaf people.

The history of the Japanese Deaf community described in the first half of this chapter is a necessary foundation to understand the current circumstances of the Japanese Deaf community as a minority and the context for the development of the "welfare system" and Deaf rights, which will be the subject of the following sections.

[5] It was the first time in the history of the constitutional government that the endorsement rate of a single bill by local assemblies reached 100%.

# 1.2 DEAF PEOPLE IN JAPANESE SOCIETY

## 1.2.1 Deaf population in Japan

Deaf people constitute a small percentage of the total Japanese population. It is estimated that around 1/1000-1/1500 children are born with some form of hearing loss (Sasaki, 2015), but the total ratio of Deaf people is slightly higher, since some people become deaf later in life. The 2013 edition of the White Paper on Persons with Disabilities issued by the Cabinet Office reports the following numbers:

- 343,000 people over 18 years of age with a hearing impairment, of which
  - 67,000 also have a speech impairment
  - 276,000 do not have a speech impairment
- 17,300 people under 18 years of age with a hearing impairment, of which
  - 1,500 also have a speech impairment
  - 15,800 do not have a speech impairment

Comparing the total of 360,300 people with a hearing impairment with the total population of Japan in 2013 (127,298,000 according to the Statistics Bureau of Japan), it can be said that deaf people constitute around 0,28% of the population. The Disability Information Resources of the Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (JSRPD) also state that people who hold a disability certificate for hearing impairment constitute 0,3% of the population.

Since not all people with hearing loss use JSL, and not all JSL signers have hearing loss, it is not simple to determine the number of JSL users in Japan. Moreover, some Deaf people who sign might use alternative signing forms, like Manually Signed Japanese or Contact Signing instead of JSL. Nakamura (2006) draws up a rough estimate of JSL signers in Japan based on the number of JFD members and total deaf people in Japan, stating that the number of JSL signers must be between 25.000 and 400.000 people. Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2019) reports an estimate of around 320.000 JSL signers. In 2001, Ichida et al. conducted a statistical study with the aim of finding a more precise estimate of the number of Deaf people who are native JSL signers. Their study was based on statistical data on the number of students enrolled in and graduating from schools for

the Deaf by year and estimated survival rates by age, calculated on the basis of national population estimates. The number was estimated to be around 57.000 people, excluding children under 12 years old and CODAs[6].

### 1.2.2 Deaf people as a minority

The Glossary on Migration of the International Organization for Migration defines a minority as "a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State and/or in a non-dominant position, whose members possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language." (Sironi, Bauloz & Emmanuel, 2019, p.141). According to the cultural view of Deafness, the Japanese Deaf community can be included in this definition. They have their own language (in the case of Japan, JSL), they constitute a very small portion of the total population, and they are a non-dominant group in a society dominated by hearing culture.

JSL can, in turn, also be considered a minority language. Spoken Japanese has dominant social and economic currency over JSL, and the conditions for language interference (Weinreich, 1953) as described by Thomason and Kaufman (1985) are verified: a proportionally small population size, extensive bilingualism (JSL and written/spoken Japanese) and an asymmetrical social standing in relation to the socially dominant group. These conditions produce a context where JSL, while being an independent language, extensively borrows from written and spoken Japanese (George, 2011). The consequences of this process on the development of JSL will be explored in Section 2.5.

As is typical of minority language groups, Deaf people do not exist as a separate group apart from mainstream Japanese citizenry, but reside at the intersection of hearing and Deaf cultures. This social context fosters shared communicative practices with the dominant hearing culture along with communicative practices distinctive to Deaf identity.

[6] (Hearing) Children of Deaf adults.

In their daily life, Deaf people interact in social contexts dominated by the hearing both in private and public spaces.

While after the 1995 "Declaration of Deaf Culture" (ろう文化宣言 *rōbunka sengen*) by Kimura and Ichida the view of Deafness as a cultural minority started to spread inside the Deaf community and among some scholars and professionals, it is still almost unknown outside of the community, where the pathological/medical model, which situates Deafness as a disability to be corrected or circumvented, is dominant (Shibuya, 1998). The JFD itself promotes the view of deafness as a disability over the cultural one. This model tends to feed the social construction of a minority group affected by language discrimination, along with wage and educational inequities (George, 2011).

### 1.2.3 Deaf people in popular media

Since Deaf people constitute such a small minority in Japan, the general populace usually gets very little exposure to Deaf people in their daily life, or even none at all. As such, they may form their images of Deaf people from representation in mainstream media content. Popular dramas 星の金貨 *Hoshi no Kinka* (1995, English title "Heaven's Coin") and オレンジデイズ *Orange Days* (2004) feature Deaf characters, but they are represented in isolation from the larger community, use very simple forms of sign communication and can lip-read without problems. The characters' Deafness is thus used to enhance the melodramatic qualities of the narrative, not to create representation for the Deaf community (George, 2011). Moreover, the sign communication used in this kind of drama is almost exclusively Sim Com ("simultaneous communication", speaking supported by signing) and the comprehension of what Deaf characters sign is dependent on subtitles or hearing characters repeating what was signed. This narrative gimmick fosters the stereotype that Sign Language corresponds to oral language and that it is not an independent language (Shibuya, 1998).

Internationally released and widely acclaimed anime movie 聲の形 *Koe no Katachi* (2016, English title "A Silent Voice") features a Deaf girl being so heavily bullied in school — among other things, she is shamed for her pronunciation and her hearing aids are forcibly ripped out of her ears — that she has to transfer. Later in the movie, she

attempts suicide after her love confession is misunderstood due to her speech impairment. While being a powerful portrayal of social isolation, the movie heavily focusses on the difficulties of being Deaf and does not provide an empowering representation of Deafness.

A notable exception is the 2024 anime ゆびさきと恋々 *Yubisaki to renren* (English title "A Sign of Affection"). The protagonist is a Deaf girl with cochlear implants who has limited hearing and cannot read lips well. Various aspects of her Deaf lifestyle (such as using a notetaking service at university) are shown and intertwined with the narrative. She uses a variety of communication methods, has meaningful connections with her peers and is not ostracized by them.

Media made in Sign Language by and for Deaf people, such as movies, plays, musicals, and *kyōgen* also exist in Japan. To counter stereotypes portrayed in mainstream media, they tend to be comedic and make use of black humor. They are also highly visual, and use Sign Language to its full potential: subtitles may be added later in case a hearing audience wants to see the movie, but to those who know it the Sign Language shown is already understandable by itself and the scene is never cut in points that would make it incomprehensible. However, the number of people watching Deaf media is very limited, and hearing people usually do not come into contact with them (Shibuya, 1998).

The scarce and stereotyped representation of Deaf people in mainstream media is not harmless: the lack of knowledge about Deafness in the general populace has serious implications, as over 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents (Sasaki, 2015) who then, usually without adequate information or resources, have to make crucial decisions about their child's education or lifestyle that will dramatically affect the child's future (George, 2011).

Moreover, for marginalized groups, especially youth, a lack of media representation can have a negative impact on both their individual self-esteem and on the overall view of their minority group. On the other hand, positive media representation can have a positive impact on the self-esteem of minority group members and assist in reducing stereotypes about underrepresented groups through exposure (Nadal, 2021)

### 1.2.4 Welfare system and JFD structure

Throughout its history, the JFD has been able to use the disability view of deafness to its advantage, working with the government to obtain benefits for its Deaf members. The JFD's assimilationist politics deemphasized differences between Japanese Sign language and spoken Japanese, while highlighting the social responsibility of abled Japanese people to help disabled ones (including Deaf people) through increased social welfare services, volunteerism and hiring quotas. This practice was termed "participatory welfare" (参加福祉 *sanka fukushi*) by a JFD leader, and consists in collaborating with the government to provide resources to the Deaf community through grants and contracts (Nakamura, 2006).

Moreover, thanks to a strategic splitting of their organizational structure, the JFD has been able to reap the benefits of cooperating with the government without losing its independence. To understand how, it is useful to briefly describe how the state can retain some control of disability and social welfare groups in Japan: incorporation (法人化 *hōjinka*) and allocation of funds for contract projects (委託事業 *itaku jigyō*). The state can create a nominally independent legal person (法人 *hōjin*) and issue a contract project to provide it with most of its founding. The *hōjin* remains under the supervision and administrative guidance of the ministry, and its board of directors is usually stacked with 天下り *amakudari*, ex-bureaucrats from the ministry who guarantee funds but are not familiar with running a non-profit organization and the needs of disabled people. Under this system, members of the targeted community lose control of how the organization is run (Nakamura, 2002).

The JFD was recognized as a Registered Social Welfare Organization in 1950, and is an incorporated foundation (財団法人 *zaidan hōjin*) under the Welfare Law. As such, it is a recognized legal person and can sign contracts, borrow money, rent property, etc. in its own name. Since by its own rules all members of the board of directors must be Deaf, the JFD does not have any *amakudari* board members. This choice was deliberate, as it grants them more fiscal and political independence, in exchange for receiving few contract projects and having to run on a very tight budget (Nakamura, 2002).

Despite these limitations, the JFD can continue to function thanks to its umbrella network of 47 prefectural associations of the Deaf. These are more entangled with the government

compared to the central JFD: they receive most of their funding from contract project funds, are generally located in buildings owned by the state and their support staff are prefectural employees. Moreover, these associations can also manipulate their organizational structure, creating new entities with the aim of obtaining a particular contract project (Nakamura, 2002).

Thanks to this system, the JFD can be assigned and run contract projects through its nominally independent prefectural associations. These grants include activities like interpreter training and dispatch, or sign promulgation, which are fundamentals tools to retain control of language planning. At the same time, the central organization can have more leeway to ask the government for changes, protesting unjust laws, etc.

Moreover, many prefectural associations were pressured by the state to include both Deaf and hard of hearing people as part of their population group in their corporate by-laws and to change their legal name accordingly (from ろうあ連盟 *rōa renmei*, ”Association of the Deaf”, as the original JFD, to the more general and less identitarian 聴覚障害者連盟 *chōkaku shōgaisha renmei*, "Association of the Hearing-Impaired"), even though the interests of the two groups do not always align and separate hard of hearing associations also exist (Nakamura, 2002). The reason for this was that when delegating contract projects, it is easier for the government to deal with a single organization. A similar stance was adopted for contract projects related to the *burakumin*, with the so-called "One Window Policy" (for more see Reber, 1999). To this day, most JFD contracts, activities and campaigns relate to signing (which people who identify as hard of hearing might not benefit from), but the Association maintains its assimilationist view and explicitly mentions hard of hearing people in its official documents, affirming that their identity and communication methods must be respected (JFD, 2021b).

The welfare system ensured good social benefits for Deaf people who carry a disability ID, such as a significant disability pension and discounts on various private and public services (Nakamura, 2006). However, barriers in education, employment and sign language access still persist, and there has been internal backlash against the welfare system: some Deaf people avoid registering for the disability ID and renounce its benefits, and Deaf activist Iwabuchi Norio openly criticized the system in his 1991 book "The Requirements for Independence: an Introduction to the Social Welfare for Those who Cannot Hear" (自立への条件—耳の不自由な人の福祉入門 *Jiritsu e no jōken: Mimi*

*no fujiyū na hito no fukushi nyūmon*). Iwabuchi thought welfare benefits prevented Deaf people from gaining true independence, and aspired to a system where discrimination is outlawed and access is equalized, but no welfare benefits are provided.

### 1.2.5 Deaf rights

Until 1979, all Deaf people in Japan were considered legally and financially quasi-incompetent under the Incompetence Law: they could not perform any legal act related to property, such as applying for housing loan and succeeding the family business, unless they obtained consent from a curator (JFD website). These and other fundamental rights for Deaf people were gained thanks to the efforts of the JFD, first in the courtrooms and then through campaigning in the political and administrative realms.

After some politically inactive years after the end of World War Two, a new generation of Deaf activists emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, with a new set of values based on human rights and fighting discrimination.

One of the first politically relevant court cases happened in 1965, the same year of the Kyoto school protests, and was dubbed the Janome Restaurant Incident. Two Deaf men were provoked into a brawl at a sushi restaurant by three hearing men who were making fun of their Deafness and signing. The owner of the restaurant intervened and struck one of the Deaf men in the face, who in turn shoved him to the ground, accidentally causing his death. No sign interpreters were present during police interrogations and most of the trial, and the policemen denied the defendants their right to consult with their lawyers in private if an interpreter was present (Nakamura, 2006). The Deaf community rushed to help the two defendants with a fund-raising campaign to cover their defense costs, but struggled to find a law firm willing to represent two Deaf defendants, and interpreters familiar with legal language. These obstacles made them realize that they would not have to fight only against injustices within the legal system, but also larger social and institutional prejudices against Deaf people (Kawai, 1991). After the two men were declared guilty and sentenced to years of imprisonment and hard labor, the JFD decided to support the appeal. This time, the defense was led by Matsumoto Masayuki, Japan's first Deaf lawyer (Nakamura, 2006).

Matsumoto lost his hearing in his third year of elementary school and was thus transferred to Osaka School for the Deaf, where he succeeded academically and learned signing (Matsumoto, 1997). After elementary school, he mostly attended regular schools, but remained in close contact with his Deaf friends. He graduated in Law at Kyoto University and registered with the Osaka Bar Association in 1966, taking the appeal to the Janome Restaurant Murder sentence as his first case (Nakamura, 2014).

Due to the absence of interpreters and the functional illiteracy of the defendants, there was doubt over whether the two men had been able to understand their rights and the proceedings. The Appeals Court affirmed the sentence of the lower court, only slightly reducing the sentence from five to four years of hard labor. Moreover, one of the defendants was found to have diminished mental capacity because of his functional illiteracy, even though he showed intelligence and full comprehension when communicating in Sign Language with his Deaf lawyer (Kawai, 1991). Kawai, who was involved in the case, reports that the lawyers were disappointed by the treatment reserved to the defendants, and the lack of disability awareness by the judges.

After the Kyoto school protests and the Janome Murder Incident trials, the first discussion forum for Deaf youth was held in Kyoto in 1966. The participants had a public debate about discrimination and violations of Deaf rights, and following these discussions the Youth Section of the JFD was formed (JFD website). Young Marxist-influenced leaders from Kyoto, including Matsumoto, steered the JFD onto a new course, which in 1967 was officially dubbed "The Era of Fighting for Our Rights" (Nakamura, 2014).

One of the major JFD campaigns of this Era was the one to give Deaf people the right to obtain a driver's license. Even though regulations were updated in 1961 to allow Deaf people to obtain licenses if they passed a visual and auditory examination (Nakamura, 2014), the Japanese Deaf News (the monthly newspaper of the JFD) reported that local area offices did not allow Deaf people to take these tests, or if they did, they did not let them wear their hearing aids, causing them to fail. As of 1965, only 13 Deaf people in Japan had a driver's license (JDN, 1965).

The landmark case for this issue was that of Toishita Mitsuo, who was represented by Matsumoto. Toishita could hear and communicate fairly well with hearing aids, but since he was not allowed to wear them during the hearing exam for the driver's license, he had failed the test twice. Since he had to travel around the city to meet clients for his job, he

drove a motorcycle without a license and was fined numerous times before being arrested in late 1967. In early 1968, he filed a claim arguing his innocence and calling for the invalidation of the law (Nakamura, 2014). The defense made several arguments, including that if people were allowed to wear glasses during examinations, they should also be allowed to wear hearing aids, that the definition of “deaf person” was not clearly defined in the law in terms of audiological abilities, and that prohibiting all Deaf people from driving was unconstitutional since it conflicted with the right to employment and equal treatment under the law (JDN, 1968-1969). The JFD got involved in the case, organizing both a support group and a fundraising campaign. In 1969, Toishita was sentenced to six months hard labor, and his team immediately filed an appeal. At the appeal trial, sixty-five Deaf people showed up in support of Toishita, and the court accepted Matsumoto’s request to provide Sign Language interpretation of the trial so that this Deaf audience could follow the proceedings, a first in Japanese history (JDN, 1969). The court once again ruled against Toishita, but the case had gathered enough media attention that the Police Agency changed its guidelines: applicants were now allowed to wear hearing aids during examinations, and if they could understand a conversation and hear a car horn from ten meters away, they would be considered “not deaf” and allowed to take the examination (Nakamura, 2014). The law remained, but the administrative definition of deafness and the examination procedures changed so that most Deaf people could obtain a driver’s license.

Toishita obtained both a motorcycle and an automobile license in 1974, and even if that same year the Supreme Court ruled that driving with hearing aids was dangerous, at that point the new administrative practice was already established. This landmark case, combined with the rise of the aforementioned new generation of young Deaf activists, made the JFD realize the power of social and political attention on Deaf rights, and the importance of mass mobilization of the Deaf community. The fight for Deaf rights thus moved from the legal to the administrative and political realms.

This new strategy proved successful, and the 1970s were a successful decade for JFD campaigns. In 1975, the president of the JFD addressed the Diet for the first time (Nakamura, 2014). In 1976, the Act on Employment Promotion of Persons with Disabilities was amended, converting the responsibility of private employers from obligation to make effort to employ persons with disabilities to obligation to employ them and raising the legally-prescribed minimum employment rate for persons with disabilities

(Hasegawa, 2010). Moreover, as a result of the amendment, job opportunities for Deaf people were expanded (JFD website). In 1979, after the JFD challenged the Incompetency Law, Article 11 of the Civil Code was amended: Deaf people were now considered legally competent, and permitted to perform acts related to property (JFD website).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the JFD perfected its “cooperative welfare” strategy as described in Section 1.2.4. In 1989, after a nationwide campaign for the establishment of a “Sign Language Interpreting System”, the official “Sign Language Certification Examination” was created, with accreditation by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. The following year, Article 33 of the Physically Disabled Persons Welfare Act stipulated the establishment of “Information Centers for the Deaf”. These centers provide services such as communication support (interpreting or notetaking), materials in Sign Language and/or with subtitles, and consulting. In 1998, the JFD campaigned for the abolition of the discriminatory laws that still prevented Deaf people from accessing professions that require a license, such as doctor or pharmacist. As a result, the discriminatory clauses were eliminated three years later (JFD website).

Even though it was not the direct result of any JFD campaign, it is important to mention another milestone in disability rights in Japan. In 1996, the Eugenic Protection Law, established the forced sterilization of disabled people and was in a few cases applied to Deaf people, was repealed (Kato, 2009).

As anticipated in Section 1.1.5, following the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, Sign Language was recognized in Japanese law for the first time in 2011, and several laws protecting the right of Deaf people were passed. Among them (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2022):

- The Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (2013, amended in 2021), obligating public and private businesses organizations to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities;
- The Act on Facilitation of the Use of Telephones for the Persons with Hearing Impairments (2020), which introduced a national telephone relay service;
- The Act on the Promotion of Measures Concerning Acquisition and Use of Information and Communication by Persons with Disabilities (2022).

The Japanese Deaf community has been acquiring important rights in the past decades, but both legal and societal discrimination remain. In their 2022 report on Japan, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities indicated several areas of concern regarding the application of the 2006 Convention, including the lack of harmonization of disability-related national legislation and policies with the human rights model of disability by pertaining a paternalist approach to persons with disabilities, perpetuation of medical model of disability across legislation, regulation and practice, and the use of derogatory terminology and discriminatory legal restrictions.

In addition to its campaign for Sign Language Legislation (see Section 1.1.5), the JFD recently started following court cases again. In particular, lawsuits by victims of forced sterilization under the former Eugenic Protection Law, whose claim for state compensation were rejected for exceeding the statute of limitation, and the case regarding a student of the Osaka Prefectural Ikuno Elementary School for the Deaf. The girl was run over by a construction vehicle and subsequently lost her life in 2018. In 2020 her parents filed a civil lawsuit seeking compensation for damages, but the defense argued that the compensation should be only 40% of that of a regular woman because of the victim's disability (JFD, 2021c).

In 2021, the JFD declared the beginning of a new era through an official document, one characterized by an increased intersectionality, the adherence to the social model of disability, the elimination of discrimination, prejudice and social barriers, and the will to build "a society where no one is left behind, where each individual's dignity and rights are protected and where deaf people can live with pride using sign language".

### 1.2.6 Deafness: disability, culture, identity?

The cultural view of Deafness never fully took roots in Japan. Nakamura (2006) ascribes this to the lack of a multiculturalism frame for the Deaf community to leverage and build upon. In the United States, where the ethnic multiculturalism frame is well-established, not only is it easier for new immigrant groups to be recognized as part of this frame, but the same is true for non-ethnic minorities as well, such as the LGBTQ+ community or the Deaf community. In Japan on the other hand, it has been difficult to establish a similar

frame, not because of the lack of minority groups, but due to the government actively subduing said groups (such as Ainu and Okinawans) in the name of national unity. Similarly, the view of Japan as a monolingual country also hindered the framing of Japanese Sign Language as a language separate from Japanese.

D-groups introduced the cultural view of Deafness in the 1990s and had some popularity among young Deaf, but were met with harsh criticism by members of the more influential JFD. Moreover, cultural Deaf leaders were also aware of the problematic nature of framing themselves as an ethnic minority. While considering Deaf culture and Sign Language as separate from Japanese ones, in the 1995 "Declaration of Deaf Culture" the authors also note: "perhaps some people will find some resistance to the term 'ethnic group'; instead we could say that the Deaf are a 'linguistic minority'." (Kimura & Ichida, 1995, cited in Nakamura, 2006).

Nevertheless, there are institutions that openly support a cultural view of Deafness, such as the aforementioned Meisei Gakuen, which explains in its official website:

> 視覚で情報を得るろう者には、聴者とは異なる言語や思考、価値観、歴史、芸術、生活様式などがあり、それらをろう文化とよびます。
>
> Deaf people, who receive information visually, have different language, thoughts, values, history, art, lifestyle, etc. from hearing people, and these are called Deaf culture.

Another institution that shares the same values is the Non-Profit Organization "Bilingual-Bicultural Education Center for Deaf Children" (特定非営利活動法人バイリンガル・バイカルチュラルろう教育センター *Tokutei hiei rikatsudō hōjin bairingaru baikaruchuraru rō kyōiku sentā),* whose mission includes providing support to Deaf children and their parents, carrying out research on bilingual/bicultural education for Deaf children, and developing new educational materials (BBED website).

In the general populace, the prevalent model of Deafness is still the medical/pathological one (Shibuya, 1998), and it is present inside of the Deaf community as well (JFD, 2021b). As for the JFD, for decades they deemphasized the differences between Japanese Sign Language and Japanese (claiming one was the manual form of the other), and framed deafness as a disability, claiming welfare benefits and rights not as a cultural/linguistic minority but as a disabled one. At the same time, interaction between JFD leadership and

other disability groups (excluding deaf people with multiple disabilities, such as deaf-blind people) has been limited until recently (Nakamura, 2006).

Nowadays, the JFD openly adhere to the social model of disability for Deafness, as stated in their official documents published after their 9th General Assembly (72nd total) of 2021. They now affirm that Japanese Sign Language is a language separate from Japanese, but also claim that distinguishing Japanese Sign Language from Manually Signed Japanese would lead to discrimination. They also call for the elimination of eugenic thought based on the medical model, as "imposing value judgments based on eugenic thought without respecting the identity and will of people who are deaf or hard of hearing takes away our dignity and human rights" (JFD, 2021b). In their 2020 document campaigning for Sign Language Legislation, "Towards Sign Language Legislation - Let's GO with Sign Language! (Part 3)", the frame used to call for legislation is one of disability, civil and human rights, while the "linguistic identity of the Deaf community" is only mentioned once in the law draft. In the past few years, the JFD has also started framing itself as part of a larger disabled community. When writing about the student of the Osaka Prefectural Ikuno Elementary School for the Deaf case, they claimed that the sentence was offensive not only for Deaf and hard of hearing people, but to the dignity of all persons with disabilities. They have also been making frequent mentions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since it was promulgated in 2006, and write that it "demonstrates how to build an environment and an inclusive society where both people with disabilities and those without disabilities can live happily together with hope" (JFD, 2021c).

However, the fact that Deafness is mainly considered a disability does not mean it cannot, at the same time, be an important part of Deaf people's identities (as is true of other disabilities as well).

## Summary

Deaf people account for around 0.3% of the Japanese population. They are a very small minority and do not exist separately from mainstream citizenry, but reside at the intersection of both hearing and Deaf cultures. Media representation of Deafness is scarce

and often stereotyped, with negative consequences on the general populace understanding and acceptance of Deafness. The disability view of Deafness is prominent in Japan, and the JFD has been able to use this frame to its advantage to claim rights and welfare benefits for its members. Due to the lack of a powerful multiculturalism frame in Japan, these milestones would have been harder to achieve using a cultural frame for Deafness like that proposed by D-groups, and the cultural model of Deafness is still virtually unknown outside of the Deaf community.

With both the history of the Japanese Deaf community and its current standing as a minority in Japan, the next chapter will describe the languages and sign forms used by this community, focusing on JSL and Manually Signed Japanese.

# CHAPTER 2

# JAPANESE SIGN LANGUAGE AND MANUALLY SIGNED JAPANESE

## 2.1 Defining Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese

The term 手話 *shuwa* is used broadly to encompass several signing forms, including 日本手話 *nihon shuwa* (Japanese Sign Language or JSL) and 日本語対応手話 *nihongo taiō shuwa* (Manually Signed Japanese) (Kakuta, 2010).

Japanese Sign Language is a natural language with a visual-gestural modality. Since it is an independent language, with its own vocabulary and grammar system separate from Japanese, activists have recently proposed to rename it 手語 *shugo*, to maintain the -語 *go* suffix regularly used for language in Japanese, instead of the unusual -話 wa (Kimura, 2011). Other names used to indicate Japanese Sign Language throughout history are 手勢 *shusei*, 手真似 *temane*, 手動 *shudō*, 伝統的手話 *dentōteki shuwa* (Traditional Sign Language), 聾者的手話 *rōshateki shuwa* (Deaf-style Sign Language) and ろう語 *rōgo*. Deaf scholar Takada Eiichi proposed コミュニケーション手話 *komyunikēshon shuwa* (Communication Sign Language) as an alternative name (opposed to ステージ手話 *sutēji shuwa*, "Stage Sign Language", for Manually Signed Japanese), but among all alternatives 日本手話 *nihon shuwa* remains the most widespread (Kimura, 2011).

Japanese Sign Language is related to Korean Sign Language and Taiwanese Sign Language, and the three constitute the Japanese Sign Language family. They still share many similarities today, due to the spread of Japanese Sign Language under the Japanese colonial administration of Korea and Taiwan. JSL and Taiwan Sign Language share approximately 60% of their vocabulary, and their grammar is also very similar, to the point that users of the two languages have little difficulty communicating with one another. Korean Sign Language actually predated the Japanese occupation, but it was so influenced by JSL that nowadays they share many lexical and grammatical features (Fischer & Gong, 2010).

Japanese Sign Language has no particles, and in the Japanese context, this leads people to believe it has no grammar. This is of course not true: JSL has a complex grammar system, where non-manual signals such as head movement, eye/eyebrow movement and mouthing have important grammatical roles (Kakuta, 2010). Non-manual signals do not have the same role as body language and facial expressions in spoken languages; rather than providing additional information, they are fundamental to understand the full meaning of Sign Language utterances, and a change in non-manual signals can drastically change the meaning of signs and sentences (Aran et al., 2009).

Being a minority language surrounded by oral and spoken Japanese, the conditions for language interference (Weinreich, 1953) as described by Thomason and Kaufman (1985) are verified for JSL: a proportionally small population size, extensive bilingualism (JSL and written/spoken Japanese) and an asymmetrical social standing in relation to the socially dominant group. Thus, JSL has been influenced by Japanese both linguistically and pragmatically. Research on American Sign Language (ASL) showed that sign languages are more iconic than spoken ones (Emmorey, 2002), and the iconicity of *kanji* in the Japanese Writing System eased the borrowing process. Many JSL are iconic representations not of the thing itself, but of the correspondent *kanji*. This is true not only of tangible objects, but also of abstract concepts and name signs (Morgan, 2006).

On the other hand, Manually Signed Japanese is an artificial language, a manually coded form of the Japanese language. It follows Japanese grammar with JSL vocabulary, does not use Non-Manual signs and is signed simultaneously to spoken Japanese. Nowadays it is mostly called 日本語対応手話 *nihongo taiō shuwa* (literally "signing that corresponds to Japanese"), but it was also called 同時法的手話 *dōjihōteki shuwa* ("simultaneous signing") in the past (Kimura, 2011). Despite it not being a widespread term, in her work 日本手話と日本語対応手話（手指日本語）：間にある「深い谷」 *Nihon shuwa to nihongo taiō shuwa (shushi nihongo): Ma ni aru "fukai tani"* ("Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese (Manual Japanese): The 'deep valley' between them"), Deaf scholar Kimura uses the term 手指日本語 *shushi nihongo* ("Manual Japanese"), to emphasize that it is more a form of Japanese than it is a proper Sign Language. She also expresses her wish for the term to become more widespread, even though the other has a longer history. The term シムコム *shimukomu* (Sim Com, short for "simultaneous communication") can also be used for Manually Signed Japanese,

but it indicates in general any form of signing done while speaking, so the two concepts do not always correspond.

Even though they are useful to understand linguistic discourse and linguistic politics in the Japanese Deaf community, these binary definitions are not static and exact. There exist both internal variation inside these categories and signing methods outside of these categories.

## 2.2 Japanese Sign Variations and Yazawa Kuniteru's model

In his 1996 article 同化的統合から多様性を認めた共生へ *Dōkateki sōgō kara tayōsei wo mitometa kyōsei e* ("From assimilation towards a symbiotic recognition of diversity"), Yazawa Kuniteru, a hearing educator in schools for the Deaf, proposed a model of Japanese sign variation still used today to classify the several signing methods used in Japan. His model can be exemplified by the following picture:

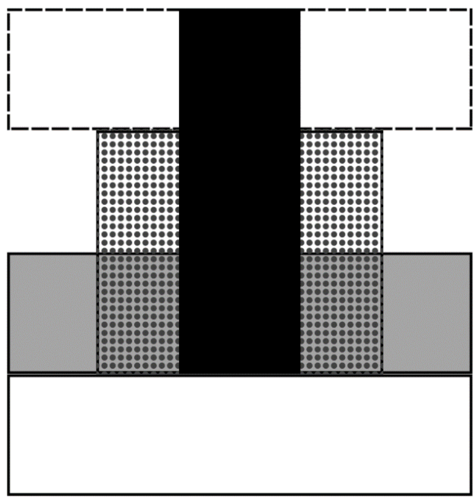

*Figure 2: Yazawa model of Japanese sign variations (Yazawa, 1996, cited in Nakamura, 2006)*

日本語 *nihongo* (Japanese)

日本語対応手話 *nihongo taiō shuwa* (Manually Signed Japanese)

中間手話 *chūkan shuwa* (Contact Signing)

伝統的手話 *dentōteki shuwa* (Traditional Signing)

手言葉 *tekotoba* (Manual Conversation)

"Traditional signing" usually indicates the kind of signing, very visual and free of Japanese grammatical influence, used by pre-war generation Deaf people and by younger generations who want to recover these traditions (Nakamura, 2006). However, Yazawa makes the political choice, in line with the views of the JFD, of using this word to indicate a very wide range of sign variations, from Manually Signed Japanese, the form of signing closer to the Japanese language, to purely gestural communication. On the other hand, Kanda (1989), a Deaf scholar and activist, commented that, while he was aware of the usage of the term "Traditional Signing" in opposition to "Simultaneous Signing", he thought Japanese Sign Language (日本手話 *nihon shuwa*) was the most appropriate term to refer to the various forms of signing used in the Deaf community.

Contact Signing can also be called Intermediary or Pidgin Signing. Messing (1999) defines it as a kind of signing used when there is language contact between different signers and/or different hearing signers, while Knight and Swanwick (1999) describe it as a communication mode existing in between sign languages and spoken and written languages. Defining this kind of signing is complicated, as it is a continuum of variations between Sign Language and spoken languages, and there is no clear distinction from manually coded forms of languages (Kakuta, 2010).

## 2.3 Dialects of JSL and other Sign Languages used in Japan

Despite the JFD's efforts to standardize and homogenize Sign vocabulary, Japanese Sign Language is still a diverse language system with regional variations even in basic signs. Regional differences are not limited to vocabulary, but encompass grammar and syntax as well. However, these variations generally remain mutually intelligible (Nakamura, 2006).

An exception is Tochigi prefecture, whose dialect differs more noticeably from other sign variations. The vocabulary is relatively consistent with other regions, but the grammar diverges. This dialect, as most Sign dialects, emerged from a school, the Tochigi Prefectural School for the Deaf. In the 1980s, a hearing teacher called Tanokami Takashi introduced in the school his 同時法 *dōjihō*, a method of signing and speaking simultaneously based on the principle of Total Communication (for more details, see

Section 3.3). As a consequence, the Sign Language used in Tochigi still has a strong Japanese grammatical influence: it uses a sequential syntax and there are signs for conjunctions, and postpositional and topic particles, while other varieties of Japanese Sign Language drop both particles and pronouns (Nakamura, 2006). Despite its closer adherence to Japanese grammar, Tochigi dialect is still a natural language developed by Deaf people in Tochigi, influenced by contact, so it is considered a form of pidgin Sign, not a manually coded version of oral Japanese (Kimura, 2009). Deaf people from other regions complain that Tochigi dialect is impossible to understand, but this might be more a political statement than a factual one, considering both the variety of other Sign dialects present in Japan and the fact that most Deaf people regularly use Manually Signed Japanese as well. Tochigi dialect is also considered "strange" and "rural" by signers from more central and urban areas (Nakamura, 2006).

The term "shared sign language" refers to a language that has emerged in a community with a high ratio of deaf to hearing individuals and is shared by both the deaf and hearing members of the community (Zeshan & de Vos, 2012). A famous example of a shared sign language is Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, used on the homonymous island in Massachusetts where in the late nineteenth century, the general presence of Deaf people was 1 every 155, reaching peaks of 1 in 4 in some areas. For a detailed description of Martha's Vineyard history, community and language, see Groce (1985).

Shared sign languages are also present in the Japanese archipelago, even though many of them are endangered or extinct. In fact, all known shared sign languages in the world are in this state, as the spread and recognition of larger, urban sign languages leads to the endangerment of these small minority sign languages (Zeshan & de Vos, 2012).

Two shared sign languages have been studied and documented in Japan: Amami Ōshima Sign Language and Miyakubo Sign Language.

Amami Island is located in the Ryūkyū Island Chain. Under the Ryūkyū Kingdom, Amami was used as an outpost for traders and merchants traveling between China and Japan. The influence of Chinese culture on the island has been dominant, and can be seen in the use of signs as well. Due to the mountainous nature of the island, in the past it was difficult for the residents of Koniya area to travel to other parts of the island, so the residents married within the same area, resulting in a higher incidence of deafness. In 1993, the percentage of Deaf people in the area ranged from 0.27% in Koniya to 1.4% in

a neighboring village (Osugi et al., 1999). Occupational opportunities were the same for Deaf and hearing islanders (mainly fishing for men and the textile industry for women), and mutual communication between hearing and Deaf people was common. Thus the Koniya area can be considered an assimilated signing community.

Osugi, Supalla and Webb (1999) conducted fieldwork on the island, interviewing both hearing and Deaf residents using the word elicitation method to study the gestural communication used by islanders. They found that Koniya residents used different gestural communication systems, including a highly developed home sign system, which at the time of the study was on its way to become a full sign language due to the large community of users and being used for more than one generation. Moreover, they found that all islanders appeared to share lexical items, but only Deaf islanders made use of a productive multiple gesture naming system and of narrative description strategy.

Miyakubo Sign Language, also known as Ehime Ōshima Sign Language, is used in the town of Miyakubo, part of Imabari City in Ehime prefecture. Miyakubo is located in the northern part of a small island called Ehime Ōshima. In 2016, the rate of Deaf people in Miyakubo was 0.66% (Yano & Matsuoka, 2018). Until the early 2000s, Miyakubo Sign Language was widely used by both hearing and Deaf residents. However, the building of highway bridges between Ehime Ōshima, the surrounding islands and Honshū reduced opportunities for interaction between Deaf and hearing people. Moreover, while the oldest generation (over 80 years old) use Miyakubo Sign Language exclusively and the next generation (aged between their forties and seventies) use Miyakubo Sign Language as their dominant language, most of the younger generation (thirties and younger) are fluent in both Miyakubo and Japanese Sign Language. Younger signers tend to not mix the two languages when in the presence of older generations, but do when signing among themselves, or use Japanese Sign Language only. As they leave the island for education, employment or marriage, Japanese Sign Language is becoming the dominant language for younger Deaf people from Miyakubo. Because of the decreasing number of monolingual Miyakubo Sign Language signers, the language is at risk of extinction (Yano & Matsuoka, 2018).

Yano and Matsuoka (2018)[7] conducted a study on numerals and timelines in Miyakubo Sign Language. Numerical signs in Miyakubo Sign Language are different from the ones used in any regional variation of Japanese Sign Language, and the system for expressing large numbers is also different. In particular, a digital system is used to sign large numbers, signing digits in order from left to right (while Japanese Sign Language uses a multiplication strategy). Miyakubo Sign Language also has a separate set of numerals for money, which does not exist in Japanese Sign Language. Regarding timelines, in Japanese Sign Language they begin behind the body of the signer (the past) and proceed forward. Instead, timelines in Miyakubo Sign Language begin from the dominant hand side of the signer, and proceed towards the center of their body. However, a space for the future is not included. Celestial timelines are also used in Miyakubo Sign Language, where the time of the day is signed by moving handshapes along the line of the movement of the Sun. The position of signs relative to the signer's body changes according to the direction they are facing compared to the trajectory of the Sun. The comparison of the numerical and timeline systems in Miyakubo and Japanese Sign Language shows that their differences extend beyond the lexical variety.

## 2.4 Evolution of Japanese Sign Language

There is a scarcity of documents describing the Deaf community before the Meiji period (Itō, 1998), and this is even truer for Japanese Sign Language. The nature of sign languages, which do not have a written form, makes it difficult to study their historical evolution.

Before the founding of the first school for the Deaf in 1878, there was little sense of a unified sign language in Japan, as natural sign languages usually form around schools. The natural percentage of deaf people in a population (less than 0.5%) is not enough for Deaf communities to form in the countryside, where most people resided before the Meiji period, so home signs were mainly used. The urbanization of the Meiji period was a necessary condition for the formation of larger Deaf communities, and consequently for the formation of a more structured sign language (Nakamura, 2006). However, signing in

[7] Yano is a member of the Miyakubo Deaf community, and a bilingual signer of Miyakubo and Japanese Sign Language.

cities predates the founding of the first school for the Deaf: Furukawa Tashirō was inspired to found said school *after* he had witnessed Deaf children signing (and consequently being bullied) outside his prison cell.

The first written document about Japanese Sign Language is considered to be the sign language dictionary used at the Kagoshima School for the Deaf, written in 1902. Kimura and Kanda (2019) have been using this and other sign language dictionaries and textbooks from 1959, 1963, 1964, 1967, 1984, 1987, 1998 and 2005 to reconstruct the history of sign vocabulary that appears in all sources. From the 1960s onwards, dictionaries and textbooks aimed at training sign interpreters started reporting "folk etymologies" of signs, however these were added to ease the learning of signs, and are inferred from modern signs without doing any actual study on older forms (Kanda, 2019).

A conventional dividing line in the development of Japanese Sign Language can be traced after the end of the Second World War. "Traditional Signing" used an almost entirely spatial grammar, and no vocalization or fingerspelling. It is extremely hard to understand for post-war generations of signers. On the other hand, post-war signing is more influenced by spoken and written Japanese, and has a more linear grammar (Nakamura, 2006).

In 1980, the JFD received an *itaku* contract from the Ministry of Welfare to create new signs, and has been running a language-building program since then. Such a program, deliberately inventing and adding signs to the lexicon, seems to be unique to Japan (Nakamura, 2006). The JFD's control over the creation of new signs was already challenged in the 1990s by both D-Pro using alternative signs and teaching them at their interpreter training program (affiliated with the MHLW), and by the NHK sign language news, where new signs were created almost every day without waiting for JFD's approval (Nakamura, 2006). Even though nowadays new signs come from a variety sources, the JFD continues running its language-building program and publishes an official dictionary of new signs every couple of years: the 2022/2023 was published in January, 2023, while the 2024 edition will be released in December, 2024 (JFD's official shop).

## 2.5 Contact with Japanese and influence on Japanese Sign Language

For pre-lingually Deaf people, Japanese can be considered as their second language (their L1 being JSL), and difficulties are found not only in the oral modality, but also with written Japanese. Common problems include the use of particles and understanding deep case (Iori, 2021), and remembering and choosing the correct readings of *kanji* (Nakashima, 2023). The use of *keigo*, conjugating verbs and adjectives, and distinguishing between the transitive and intransitive forms of verbs are also difficult for many Deaf people (Nakashima, 2023).

However, JSL has been strongly influenced by both written and oral Japanese, especially in its vocabulary. The most representative example of the result of this contact is the presence of a special class of signs called "character signs". As described in Fischer and Gong (2010), there are two main ways of forming character signs: depicting and tracing. Depicted character signs are usually static visual representations of *kanji*, but for characters with several identical components, such as 品, movement is used to indicate the placement of the components. Tracing consists of writing the character in the air, usually with the index finger, a common practice among hearing Japanese people as well. Some character signs are produced with a combination of the two methods, such as 川, which is signed by raising the index, middle and ring finger and moving the hand downwards.

Another signing method that is the result of interaction between sign and written languages is fingerspelling, which means spelling words letter by letter while signing and is mainly used for proper names and loan words. The first fingerspelling system in Japan was developed by Furukawa Tashirō, as part of his pedagogical method for teaching Deaf children (Nakamura, 2006). The method was later abandoned and replaced in the 1930s with a method based on ASL fingerspelling. Vowels and some consonants were adapted intact, and other symbols were invented or adapted for the rest of the syllabary (Fischer & Gong, 2010). However, despite this method being imported in the 1930s, its regular use began only relatively recently: many elderly signers never learned fingerspelling, and wrote characters for proper names on their hands instead (Nakamura, 2006). For the same reason, many proper and place names that would be fingerspelled in most sign languages have signs in JSL (Fischer & Gong, 2010). See Figures 3, 4 and 5 for more detailed description and comparison of the fingerspelling systems.

*Figure 3: Modern Japanese fingerspelling syllabary (Kanda, 1986)*

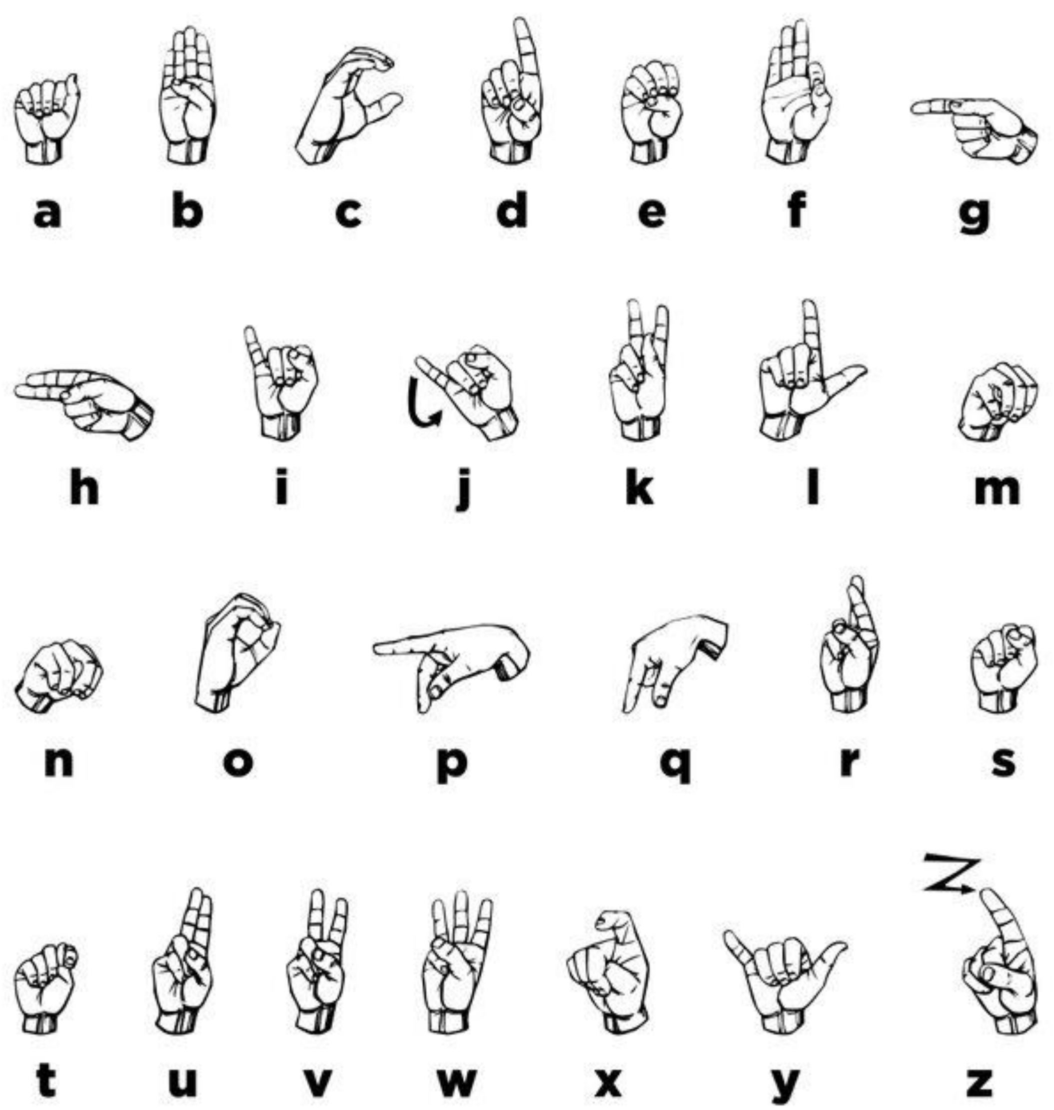


*Figure 4: ASL fingerspelling alphabet (Abner, 2014)*

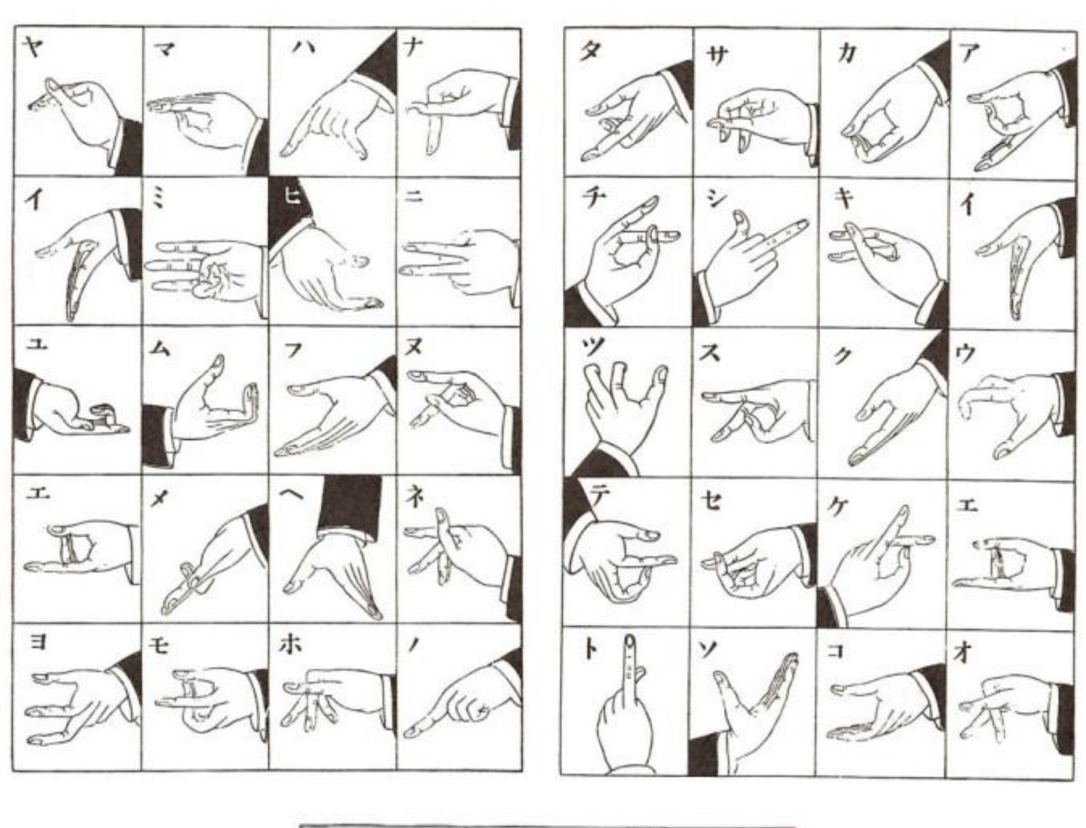

*Figure 5: Furukawa's fingerspelling syllabary, 19th century (Kanda, 1986)*

As can be seen in Figure 5, handshapes for the fingerspelling syllabary invented by Furukawa were visual representations of the corresponding syllable in *katakana*. There were also special handshapes that could be added to the syllables with the other hand to indicate a syllable with a voiced consonant (濁音 *dakuon*), one with an unvoiced consonant (清音 *seion*) and consonant gemination (促音 *sokuon*).

By comparing Figure 3 and 4, it can be noted that vowels A, I, U, E, O were adapted intact, and ASL K, S, R, H, Y and W were used for KA, SA, RA, HA, YA and WA respectively. NA and MA were inspired by ASL N and M but changed in shape, and TA was completely changed as ASL T is an inappropriate gesture in Japan (Fischer & Gong, 2010). The remaining syllables were invented taking inspiration from several minor fingerspelling methods that had been used in Japan until that moment, from numeral fingerspelling and from the shapes of *kana* (Kanda, 2017). Some examples of this latter method are the handshapes for HE and FU. Long vowels (長音符 *chōonpu*) are signed by moving the vowel downwards, voiced consonants (濁音 *dakuon*) by moving the syllable towards the right (or left for left-handed signers), and the P series (半濁音 *handakuon*) by moving the hand upwards.

Another use of fingerspelling other than proper names is in initialized signs. They are relatively rare in JSL, but new ones have been appearing recently. Initialized signs originated from one of the founders of education for the Deaf, Charles-Michel de l'Épée. They are signs that take the fingerspelled first letter of a spoken/written word and match it with a sign morpheme that gives it meaning. Some examples in JSL are アレルギー *arerugī* (“allergy”), signed by using an A handshape in the sign for “scratch”, レポート *repōto* (“report”), signed by using a RE handshape in the sign for “write”, and サークル *sākuru* (“club”), signed by using a SA handshape in the sign for “circle” (Fischer & Gong, 2010).

Deaf youth in Japan, especially students of Tsukuba University of Technology (for more details, see Section 3.3) are finding new creative ways to mix visual and verbal elements into their signing, such as fingerspelling onomatopoeias and interjectives and making puns. One example is fingerspelling P over one’s knee (膝 *hiza*) to form a new sign for “pizza”.

## 2.6 Evolution of Manually Signed Japanese

We do not know for certain if the teachers in the first schools for the Deaf used signing and speaking simultaneously or separately. If they used simultaneous communication, Manually Signed Japanese would also have been born with the first schools for the Deaf (Kimura, 2011).

The modern form of Manually Signed Japanese was suggested in 1968 by hearing educator Tanokami Takashi, and described more in detail in his 1979 book 手話の世界 *shuwa no sekai* ("The World of Sign Language"). According to Tanokami, even though sign language was prohibited in schools for the Deaf that used the Oral Method, it was a necessary tool for Deaf people to communicate. Thus, the solution to this problem would be to use a "sign language" that was a manual version of Japanese. The final objective for Deaf students was to learn written and spoken Japanese, but he believed "simultaneous signing" (同時法的手話 *dōjihōteki shuwa*) could be used as a support to achieve this goal. He also argued that the use of "simultaneous signing" should not be limited to schools for the Deaf; a "Sign Language based on Japanese" (日本語の手話 *nihongo no shuwa*) could be created for general use as well.

Nowadays, Manually Signed Japanese is widespread among Deaf signers in Japan, while the number of JSL users has been decreasing. Due to medical advancements, the number of hearing-impaired children has been dropping since the 1960s and is now approximately half of what it was then (Heinrich, 2012), and "deaf bubbles" such as those caused by rubella or streptomycin do not occur anymore. Other contributing factors to the decline in JSL use is mainstreaming in education and the exclusion of JSL in school curriculums, and the tendency of medical professionals to recommend cochlear implantation surgery over early support to acquire sign language (Sasaki, 2015).

However, commonly used Manually Signed Japanese is slightly different from how Tanokami theorized it. For example, he stated it was essential to include Japanese conjugations and desinences in Manually Signed Japanese, but these elements are not present in the contemporary form. The word order follows that of Japanese, but there are

"substitution patterns" for grammar expression that would be too difficult to understand while omitting conjugations and desinences; for example, the expression 〜なければならない *nakerebanaranai*, meaning "must/have to", is substituted by the sign vocabulary 必要 *hitsuyō* (Kimura, 2011).

Manually Signed Japanese is not as strictly Japanese as Tanokami as imagined it, but "basically a contact language, or pidgin, partly artificial and partly natural, part JSL (the signs themselves) and part Japanese (the grammar – or at least parts of it)" (Morgan, 2006, p.94).

## 2.7 "Confusion" over the distinction between Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese

> It must also be pointed out that neither JSL nor SJ are ideal, Saussurean langues in the sense of monolithic, totally independent systems. Indeed, no language ever is, particularly no minority language surrounded by such a dominant and prestigious language. In addition to variation due to dialect, signing exists in a variety of forms, on a continuum from something that is more closely Japanese-like in grammar, to something that is more closely JSL-like. (Morgan, 2006, p.95)

As already pointed out in this chapter, the distinction between Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese is not always rigid. While Deaf culturalist groups such as D-Pro and some scholars emphasize the differences between these signing forms, the term 手話 *shuwa* is often used to indicate both JSL and Manually Signed Japanese without distinction. The fuzziness of this term lead to a widespread belief among non-signers that there is no real difference between JSL and Manually Signed Japanese, only that signers who cannot speak are "forced" to use the first while speaking signers can use the latter (Kimura, 2011).

Most sign language and sign interpreting courses in Japan teach Manually Signed Japanese (Kakuta, 2010). Popular NHK sign language teaching program みんなの手話 *minna no shuwa*, was originally in Manually Signed Japanese, as JSL was thought to be too difficult for beginners. The same was true of NHK Sign Language News. This changed in 1995, when Deaf activist and scholar Kimura Harumi, who had been working at *Minna no shuwa* since 1991, was transferred at Sign Language News as the first Deaf newscaster, and called for the usage of JSL instead (Kimura, 2011).

The JFD itself affirmed in the 2021 document "Seeking a New Era in the Deaf Movement" that "distinguishing between Japanese Sign Language and Signed Japanese from the standpoint of a spoken language, and distinguishing between people who use such sign language expressions, leads to discrimination" (JFD, 2021b, pp. 1-2). The Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities of 2011 also uses the general term 手話 *shuwa* without further specifications. While on the one hand this lack of distinction, as the JFD says, could prevent discrimination of Deaf and hard of hearing people who prefer signing forms other than JSL, on the other hand it does not guarantee the presence of services specifically in JSL for people who need them. This problem is particularly evident in education (for more details, see Section 3.3).

## Summary

Japanese Sign Language is a natural language with a visual-gestural modality, related to Korean SL and Taiwan SL. Being a minority language in a context where the conditions for language interference are verified, it borrows heavily from Japanese both linguistically and pragmatically. Some results of this language contact are character signs and the use of fingerspelling.

Manually Signed Japanese is an artificial language that uses Japanese grammar combined with JSL vocabulary. Its modern form was proposed in the 1960s by a hearing educator, but nowadays it does not follow Japanese grammar as strictly and rigidly as its inventor had intended it.

There are other signing forms placed in a continuum between these two variations, for example the so-called "Contact Signing". Internal variation also exists, such as dialects

of JSL, which formed around schools for the Deaf in different regions and are generally mutually intelligible. On the other hand, shared sign languages developed in more isolated communities with a higher than average percentage of Deaf people, but these languages are now at risk of extinction.

While Deaf culturalist groups and scholars emphasize differences between JSL and Manually Signed Japanese, the two signing forms are often grouped together with the term 手話 *shuwa* both in public consciousness and official documents.

Having described the definitions and characteristics of JSL and Manually Signed Japanese, and sign variation both inside and outside them, next chapter will set out to explore sociolinguistic phenomena involving these two signing forms, and their contexts of use.

# CHAPTER 3

# USAGE OF JAPANESE SIGN LANGUAGE AND MANUALLY SIGNED JAPANESE

## 3.1 Signing at home

Deaf people in Japan are surrounded by the dominant hearing culture in their primary contexts for social interaction: home, work and school.

Over 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents (Sasaki, 2015). The vast majority of parents opt for their children to receive a cochlear implant and learn spoken language. However, the results of cochlear implant surgery vary greatly, and in many cases Sign Language is introduced only after the child fails to acquire spoken language (Humphries et al., 2014). As is written in JFD's 2020 pamphlet to advocate for Sign Language Legislation,

> 赤ちゃんが生まれたとき、新生児聴覚スクリーニング検査が行われます。この とき"きこえない・きこえにくい"と判明したら、早期に手話言語を身に付ける"支 援"を行うことで、コミュニケーションや言語発達の面で大きな効果が得られま す。しかし現状では、音声言語の獲得のため、補聴器や人工内耳に関する情報 提供はたくさんありますが、手話言語の獲得のための"情報提供"や"学習の支 援体制"が、まだまだ少ないのです。
>
> At birth, a newborn baby receives a hearing screening test. In cases where a child is found to be deaf or hard of hearing, early support to acquire sign language can greatly affect communication and language development. Currently, information regarding hearing aids and cochlear implants in order to acquire a spoken language is abundant, but information to acquire sign language and support systems for the deaf to learn sign language are still insufficient in Japan. (Japanese Federation of the Deaf (2020), p. 5)

This can be detrimental to the cognitive development of Deaf children: the critical period (also called sensitive period) for optimal language learning is before the age of five years

old. Unless children acquire a first language, be it spoken or signed, during this critical period, it is impossible for them to achieve mastery in any language afterwards (Caselli et al., 2019). Failure to acquire language has a disruptive impact on other cognitive functions as well, such as verbal memory organization, mastery of numeracy and literacy, and higher-order cognitive processing such as executive function and theory of mind (Humphries et al., 2014). It must be specified that not all Deaf children are affected by linguistic deprivation when not exposed to Sign Language, as for some spoken language is sufficient to support full first-language mastery on a developmentally appropriate timetable. However, it is indeed a phenomenon that disproportionately affects Deaf children and must be addressed (Caselli et al., 2019).

It is rare for Deaf children to have the opportunity to use JSL at home, and the number of Deaf people who sign from infancy or childhood is far fewer than those who learn sign language later in life (George, 2011).

The same situation presents itself to Deaf parents: while the "Deaf-of-Deaf" are considered a staple of Deaf communities, intergenerational Deafness is rare. Mitchell and Karchmer (2004) estimate that 80% of children of Deaf parents are hearing. CODAs have the possibility to learn sign language as their first language, and some end up acting as interpreters for their parents in public contexts. However, CODAs who do not learn to sign seem to outnumber those who do (Shibuya, 2009), and Deaf parents might avoid using sign-based communication with their children for fear of hindering their speech development (George, 2011).

Thus, Deaf people, whether children or parents, are often immersed in hearing culture even in the familial context. Interactions in JSL, or even singing in general, inside the home is mostly limited to rare cases of intergenerational Deafness, while for most Deaf people JSL is used socially outside the home with other signers, such as schoolmates or Deaf friends (George, 2011).

## 3.2 Signing at work

Access to employment has improved dramatically for Deaf people in the past few decades, due first of all to improved access to education, and to improved rights such as the

elimination of discriminatory laws that prevented Deaf people from accessing professions requiring a license in 2001 (JFD website), and the passing of the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (2013, amended in 2021), obligating public and private businesses organizations to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2022). However, the Deaf community is still characterized by low wages and underemployment compared to the general population. According to a 2021 report of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), the employment rate among hearing-impaired people that year was 40.3%. Data gathered by the MHLW in 2006 shows that 39.9% of Deaf people earned less than ¥90,000 a month, 69.5% earned less than ¥180,000, and 89.3% less than ¥300,000[8] (Sakamoto, 2011). Employed Deaf people are also reported to change jobs much more frequently than hearing and not otherwise disabled people; among the main reasons for changing jobs are low wages, a hostile work environment and lack of communication on the job (Sakamoto, 2011).

It is rare for Deaf workers to have Deaf colleagues, thus signing in any form is generally absent from Japanese workplaces. This results in serious problems in communication, as reflected in a survey held by the Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities (JEED) in 2008, where 24% of Deaf workers reported having concerns about misunderstandings with co-workers, and 19% chose communication as their main workplace issue (George, 2011).

## 3.3 Signing in education

Schools and pedagogical language policies are fundamental in the formation and shaping of Deaf communities and coherent sign languages. As described in Sasaki (2015), there are three options for Deaf students to attend primary and secondary education in Japan:

1. Bilingual school with Japanese Sign Language as the medium of instruction and Japanese as a second language (1 school)
2. Regular neighborhood school with classes for deaf people (20,852 schools)

[8] Using 2006 exchange rates, respectively 600€/$763, 1200€/$1525, and 2000€/$2542.

3. Japanese-based school for the deaf (87 schools)

The only school that uses JSL as the sole medium of instruction is Meisei Gakuen, a private school founded in Tokyo in 2008. Its mission is to provide the students with a rich Sign Language environment and to immerse them in Deaf culture. Everyone at school uses Sign Language to communicate, and written Japanese and English are taught as second languages (Meisei Gakuen's website). This system is very effective in preventing linguistic deprivation and provides children with a strong foundation in their first language. As for Japanese, the oral language is not practiced and students are reported to have difficulties with some aspects of Japanese grammar (such as differentiating case particles が ga, を wo and に ni) and the writing system (Sasaki, 2015). Moreover, the school is working with specialists and researchers to improve the students' Sign Language from the level of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) to Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is needed for advanced learning (Meisei Gakuen's website). In addition to Meisei Gakuen, there are a few "free schools" (private places of learning usually with a less structured learning environment) that use Sign Language as their medium of instruction. The first of these schools, Tatsu no Ko Gakuen, was founded in 1999 (Honna and Kato, 2003).

Most Deaf students in Japan are mainstreamed and enrolled in regular schools. In this environment, spoken Japanese is the main communication method, and the inclusion of Deaf students depends on the individual effort of teachers and classmates. Deaf students enrolled in regular neighborhood schools can struggle with alienation, isolation and low self-esteem (Sasaki, 2015). In other cases, Deaf students are separated from the rest of the class and put into 特別支援学級 *tokubetsu shien gakkyū*, special support classes for disabled children, in particular into 難聴学級 *nanchō gakkyū* ("classes for the hearing-impaired"). They are self-contained classrooms and their main focus is to encourage the use of residual hearing and teaching speech and lip-reading, but methods are adapted to the needs of individual students (Hirose, 2021).

The practice of creating separate special support classes is advised against by the 1994 UNESCO Salamanca Statement on special needs education, which states that

> Assignment of children to special schools - or special classes or sections within a school on a permanent basis - should be the exception, to be recommended only in those infrequent cases where it is clearly demonstrated that education in regular

> classrooms is incapable of meeting a child's educational or social needs or when it is required for the welfare of the child or that of other children. (UNESCO & España. Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1994, p.12)

However, at the same time, the Statement recognizes that separate schools for students with specific disabilities can also play an important role in education, stating that

> The situation regarding special needs education varies enormously from one country to another. There are, for example, countries that have well-established systems of special schools for those with specific impairments. Such special schools can represent a valuable resource for the development of inclusive schools. The staff of these special institutions possess the expertise needed for early screening and identification of children with disabilities. Special schools can also serve as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools. Finally, special schools or units within inclusive schools - may continue to provide the most suitable education for the relatively small number of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools. Investment in existing special schools should be geared to their new and expanded role of providing professional support to regular schools in meeting special educational needs. An important contribution to ordinary schools, which the staff of special schools can make, is to the matching of curricular content and method to the individual needs of pupils. (UNESCO & España. Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1994, The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, pp.12-13)

Schools for the Deaf in Japan use a variety of communication methods such as cued speech (a communication method that uses a small number of hand shapes and placements in combination with mouth movements, to allow distinction of phonemes that look identical when lip-reading), fingerspelling, lip-reading, written Japanese and Manually Signed Japanese (Sasaki, 2015). This is based on the Total Communication method, propagated in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the United States, when the growing concern about the educational performance of Deaf children led to reconsidering the validity of the oral method. It was believed that the use of manual sign codes representing the oral language would ease the acquisition of literacy in the majority hearing language among Deaf children (Deumert, 2000). Teaching methods have been updated over the

years (for example, the degrading practice of tying deaf students' hands behind their backs to prevent them from signing has, thankfully, disappeared), and the use of Sign Language is now permitted among students, but it is still not used as a medium of instruction and professors are not required to know it (Sasaki, 2015). Moreover, the rotation system (meaning that teachers have to change schools every set number of years) prevents even willing teachers from mastering Sign Language and how to teach Deaf students before being transferred (Kakuta, 2010). Kakuta (2010) analyzed the school goals of the four public schools for the Deaf in Tokyo, and reported that they use Manually Signed Japanese and consider it as a tool to improve communication skills in written and oral Japanese. Of all public schools for the Deaf, only the one in Sapporo has a signing program (only offered in the classrooms taught by two specific teachers who support the use of JSL in education), while all others use the Total Communication approach endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (Hayashi and Tobin, 2015).

With the exception of Meisei Gakuen, Sapporo School for the Deaf and a few free schools, Japanese Sign Language is scarcely present in educational spaces in Japan, while Japanese-based signing methods such as Manually Signed Japanese, fingerspelling and cued speech constituted the dominant option in this field.

As for tertiary education, while universities have started recruiting Deaf students in the early 2000s and a degree in not as inaccessible for Deaf students as it used to be (Nakamura, 2006), services for Deaf students enrolled in universities are still limited. According to a survey held by the Japan Student Services Organization and reported in the August 18th, 2018 episode of NHK's program ろうを生きる 難聴を生きる *Rō wo ikiru nanchō wo ikiru* ("Living Deafness, living hearing loss") out of 1170 universities, 812 (69.4%) did not offer any form of assistance to Deaf students, 358 (25.8%) offered some form of assistance (e.g. help with note-taking and specific computer programs), and only 56 (4.8%) provided a Japanese Sign Language interpreter. When interpreters are provided, they are almost always volunteers (George, 2011) and there is a shortage of interpreters who are qualified for interpreting advanced content such as university lectures (NHK, 2018). There is no university in Japan that uses sign language as the medium of instruction (there is only one such institution in the world, Gallaudet University), but there exists a university specifically catered to Deaf and blind students, the Tsukuba University of Technology. It provides individualized support to its students

and promotes research that combines specialized subjects and disability fields. Moreover, it offers support services to deaf and blind students at other universities and to people of any age outside of university (Tsukuba University of Technology's website). As of 2019, there were also nine universities that offered JSL courses in their languages departments (Kimura & Oka, 2019).

Despite the general lack of services related to signing in Japanese universities, for many students who mainstreamed throughout primary and secondary education, universities are the first place where they come into contact with other Deaf people and with sign language, as reported by several interviewees in McGuire (2020).

Advocacy for Sign Language in Deaf education in Japan has continuously been met with opposition. In 1983, an Osaka Deaf group started a movement to request JSL to be installed as a subject (not as a medium of instruction) in Deaf schools. Their proposal was rejected, but it inspired the JFD to get the MEXT involved and ask for better Deaf education practices in Japan (Honna and Kato, 2003). In response to repeated appeals by the JFD, in 1991 the MEXT appointed a group of specialists (all hearing) to investigate teaching methods in Deaf schools. Their report was published in 1993. It affirmed that the objective of language programs in Deaf schools was to teach Japanese, and that Japanese Sign Language was a hindrance to this objective. Moreover, JSL was described as "not a full-fledged language" and "having a small vocabulary insufficient for expression", showing that the group had a limited and stereotyped understanding of sign language. However, they also recognized that signing is a fundamental communication method for Deaf people, and agreed that Deaf children should be given opportunities to acquire basic signs (through Manually Signed Japanese) and fingerspelling (Honna and Kato, 2003). The ban on Japanese Sign Language use in schools was lifted in 2002 (Heinrich, 2012), but it is to be used as an aid for Japanese language materials, and excluding the few exceptions seen above, no curricula in JSL can be approved (Nakamura, 2002).

Among arguments against the use of sign language in education, deficit theories have mostly been challenged and disproven, but cultural ones remain strong. The main argument is that the emphasis placed on Deaf cultural identity by some of the parents and members of the Deaf community who choose an education in sign language for their children violates the core cultural values of cultural homogeneity and shared Japanese

identity (Hayashi and Tobin, 2015). A similar argument affirms that Japanese people are distinguished by Japanese culture and language, and Deaf people should not be exempted from this expectation as Japanese citizens (Honna and Kato, 2003). More practical objections state that if Deaf people are to take part in Japanese society and economic life, knowledge of Japanese is required (Honna and Kato, 2003), and that switching to a JSL approach to Deaf education would require the coordination of changes not only at elementary and secondary school level, but also at kindergarten and university levels. According to supporters of this argument, such a change would not currently be feasible (Hayashi and Tobin, 2015).

## 3.4 Signing in sign interpreting

In Japan, almost all sign interpreters are volunteers or semi-volunteers, coordinated by local welfare offices, usually JFD prefectural associations. The Sign Language Interpreter Certificate Examination (SLICE) accredited by Ministry of Health and Welfare was created in 1989 (JFD's English website), and starting from 1995, party candidates who require the service of a sign interpreter during elections have to hire one accredited by the Ministry. However, there is no other reference in law to the accreditation of sign languages interpreters, and it has not been designated as a profession requiring a professional license. As a result, while governmental agencies tend to hire interpreters from the list of those who passed the official examination, in most other cases freelancers and volunteers are hired, and they often work without significant compensation nor legal backup (Japanese Association of Sign Language Interpreters [JASLI] website). For instance, interpreting staff at JFD events receive a transportation stipend and around ¥1,000[9] for every hour of interpreting, but are also required to pay for the meeting's admission fee and any other expense on their own, so they sometimes end up having a net loss (Nakamura, 2006).

Most interpreters start by attending informal signing circles and then proceed with more formal sign interpreting courses run by JFD prefectural associations. These courses teach signing that closely follows Japanese grammar, and interpreters are taught to

[9] Using 2006 exchange rates, approximately 6.70€/$8.50

simultaneously mouth the sentences they are signing (Nakamura, 2006). On the other hand, the only national sign interpreter training program, funded by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), has been run since 1991 by D-Pro leader and Deaf culturalist Kimura Harumi (Kimura's website, 2020). The program prefers to train people who have not received previous sign training. It teaches Japanese Sign Language with a spatial grammar and without mouthing, in addition to teaching interpreters about Deaf culture and the bilingual/bicultural model. However, the JFD and its prefectural associations also control the majority of sign interpreters dispatch centers, and many requests for interpreting services come from JFD members. Interpreters trained in the MHLW program struggle to find jobs at interpreter dispatch centers and many retrain to learn Japanese-based signing (Nakamura, 2006). The exception, as stated above, is interpreting jobs for politicians and governmental agencies, where MHLW interpreters are preferred (JASLI website).

Thus, even in sign language crucial environments such as interpretation contexts, Japanese-based signing receives institutional preference over spatial-based JSL (George, 2011). However, as awareness that JSL is a different language from Japanese is spreading, the number of sign interpreters willing to learn JSL and use it in their work is slowly increasing (Kimura & Oka, 2019).

## 3.5 The concept of diglossia and domains of language use

Deaf communities are generally multilingual groups, whose members make use of both natural sign languages and spoken, written, and signed forms of the languages of the majority hearing culture (Deumert, 2000). This is true also of the Japanese Deaf community, whose members make use, in varying degrees, of Japanese Sign Language and spoken, written and Manually Signed Japanese.

As seen in the previous sections, JSL is almost completely absent from work environments, and its use is generally very limited in schools, where Japanese and Japanese-based signing are the dominant languages; JSL is also relatively rare in familial contexts unless multigenerational Deafness is present, and for many people its use is limited to interacting with Deaf peers outside the home. In this context, it can be said that

JSL exists in a diglossic relationship with Japanese, and thus with Manually Signed Japanese.

The term diglossia was coined by Charles Albert Ferguson in 1959 to describe social situations where a particular language community uses two language varieties in complementary domains, typically with one language variety used in formal domains such as public speaking, education, employment, and the other variety used in relatively more informal contexts such as among close friends or in the home. In 1967, Joshua Fishman expanded the concept, including not only situations where two language varieties are used, but also ones where two different languages or dialects are present in a complementary distribution (George, 2011). The more prestigious language/variety is called "H (high) language", while the other "L (low) language". The usefulness of the concept of diglossia to describe the American Deaf community has been put into question, in favor of the concept of "extensive bilingualism" (for more details, see Section 3.9) but in many other countries the relationship between natural sign language and the language of the hearing majority is still one of diglossia (Deumert, 2000).

In Japan, while Japanese Sign Language and Japanese/Manually Signed Japanese are used in different domains, JSL is not strictly confined to informal and familiar contexts, as it would be in quintessential diglossic communities. However, due to the lack of access to sign language in many public institutions, JSL is rarely used in these formal contexts. As George (2011) explains,

> JSL exists in formal organization and social contexts such as conventions put on by Deaf organizations, and sign language dominated institutional contexts such as Deaf Association offices or workplace contexts with a significant number of Deaf employees. While JSL has the potential to support a wide variety of social contexts, for a significant part of the Deaf population daily use of sign language tends to be restricted to informal contexts with peers. (George, 2011, p.19)

Thus, JSL and Japanese fulfill complementary communicative functions, with Japanese used as a means of communication in public contexts and JSL used in private ones.

## 3.6 Code/mode-switching, mixing and blending

Code-switching, including both mode-switching from oral to sign language, and switching across the sign continuum (for example between a sign language and a manually coded language), is a pervasive feature of Deaf communication, both among Deaf people and between Deaf and hearing. Switching may depend on factors such as addressee or situation.

In the same situation, a Deaf person might use Japanese Sign Language with other Deaf people or hearing people proficient in JSL (for example, trained interpreters); Manually Signed Japanese with people who are studying sign language but are not proficient and people who only know Manually Signed Japanese; and spoken Japanese with hearing people who do not sign. Code-switching between Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese is very common in Deaf spaces such as sign language circles or meetings and events attended by many sign language learners and interpreters. On the other hand, code/Mode-switching between Japanese Sign Language and spoken Japanese is common in schools that follow the Oral Method, where students tend to use JSL among themselves and switch to speaking with teachers (Kimura, 2011).

Code-mixing occurs when the alternation of languages or varieties occurs within the same utterance. For Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese, an example of mixing could be signing a sentence in JSL but adding a fingerspelled final particle. This might also be considered an example of Contact Signing. Mixing of JSL and oral Japanese is also possible, by uttering words out loud during a JSL conversation (Kimura, 2011). Mixing of sign and oral language has been particularly observed between Deaf children and hearing parents (Deumert, 2000), but also occurs among Deaf people who are fluent both in sign and spoken language. Another instance of code-mixing in the Japanese Deaf community is including American Sign Language (ASL) vocabulary or expressions in JSL utterances (Kimura, 2011). This kind of mixing is particularly prevalent in D-groups, particularly Deaf Shock (Nakamura, 2006).

Code-blending is a phenomenon unique to bimodal bilingualism, which consists of aspects of a spoken and signed utterance being produced simultaneously. While it is not possible to produce two sign languages or two oral languages at the same time, code-blending is possible since the articulators of speech and sign are largely separate (Quadros et al., 2020). It is also possible to blend a sign language with a spoken one from a different

hearing majority; Kimura (2011) reports the example of a conference about sign interpreting in the United States held in Japan, where some people signed JSL while speaking English. There are several patterns of code-blending: sign or oral language might be prevalent, or they might be produced equally. Moreover, mouthing Japanese speech (not just words, but complete utterances) while signing is also considered code-blending (Kimura, 2011).

## 3.7 Contesting visions of JFD and D-Pro

The JFD's position on signing has been that Japanese Sign (日本手話 *nihon shuwa*) is any kind of signing used in Japan, and that it is not a language separate from Japanese. As JFD leader Matsumoto Masayuki (already mentioned as the first Deaf lawyer in Japan) wrote in a 1997 essay,

> Establishing a definition for the term Japanese Sign (日本手話 *nihon shuwa*) is difficult because of the linguistic and social problems relating to the question of what the Japanese language (日本語 *nihongo*) itself is. If you characterize the Japanese language as "the forms of language (言葉 *kotoba*) used in Japan (both past and present)," then Japanese Sign could also be conceived as part of the Japanese language (with the spoken language consisting of one form and signing another form of the Japanese language as a whole) …
>
> Defining Japanese Sign as "only the type of signing that does not involve mouth movements," is based on the same principle as establishing the Tokyo dialect as the common language (standard Japanese [標準語 *hyōjungo*]), in contrast with other regional dialects… It all boils down to how you want to define the term "Japanese Sign." (Matsumoto, 1997b, p.4, cited in Nakamura, 2006, p.29)

Matsumoto's words are representative of the JFD policy of blurring both the difference between Japanese and Japanese Sign Language, and between Japanese sign variations.

This assimilationist view has been successful for obtaining improvements in the conditions of the Deaf community (such as lifting the ban on signing in schools and obtaining funds to build up sign vocabulary), as it allowed them to maintain a good

relationship with the state and by not defying the view of Japan being monolingual and monocultural.

On the other hand, D-groups introduced a new conception of JSL, as a language separate from Japanese not only in grammar, but also in culture. In the manifesto "A Declaration of Deaf culture", Kimura and Ichida (1995) defined Deaf people as "a linguistic minority who converse using Japanese Sign Language, a language that is distinct from the Japanese language." (Kimura and Ichida, 1995, p. 354, cited in Nakamura, 2006, pp. 8-9). They also write that it is an independent, autochthonous and natural language, and the native language of Deaf people in Japan. They believe there exist a "pure" sign language, signed without voicing and with a visual-spatial grammar system. D-groups and their beliefs appeal to a younger generation of Deaf people in search for a sense of identity and belonging.

As studies on sign languages and Japanese Sign Language progressed, it has become almost impossible to argue that Japanese Sign Language is not an independent language with its own grammar and syntax. Even the JFD changed its official position on this first point, and in its 2020 pamphlet for sign language legislation wrote,

> 手話言語は音声言語と違う文法体系をもっています。手の形、位置、動きに 加え、表情や強弱などを用いて、意見や気持ちや考えを視覚的に表現し、伝えあう言語です。[…] 音声言語とは違う文法体系を持つ手話言語を使うろう者がいることを、社会 全体で理解することが大切です。
>
> Sign language has a different grammatical system than spoken language. In sign language, personal opinions, feelings, and thoughts are visually expressed and communicated using the shape, position, and movement of the hands, as well as facial expressions and degree of strength. […] It is important for society as a whole to understand that there are deaf people who use sign language which has a different grammatical system than spoken language. (JFD, 2020, p. 3)

However, the JFD still maintains its position that, while the ideology that spoken Japanese is superior to signing has afflicted the Deaf community, distinguishing between Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese would only lead to discrimination (JFD, 2021b).

### 3.8 Prestige of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese

Deaf people in Japan interact daily in social contexts dominated by the hearing, both in private spaces and in public ones. This social environment is one where spoken and written Japanese have dominant social and economic currency, and this reflects on the prestige of both Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese.

As described in the previous sections, Deaf people rarely have the opportunity to interact in JSL both in the private context of the home, and especially in public ones such as work or education. While JSL use is not completely restricted to private and informal contexts, the overall relationship between JSL and Japanese can be described as diglossic. The primary use of JSL in private contexts among peers and the general lack of representation in media makes it so that hearing people are largely unfamiliar with JSL. Beliefs about JSL are derived from its association with a minority and marginalized group, which affects attitudes towards the language (George, 2011). Common misunderstandings about JSL are that it is not a real language; that Deaf people only use it if they have no other option to communicate, so if they physically cannot speak (Kimura, 2011), or that it is completely iconic and lacking the possibility to express abstract concepts, making it inferior to spoken language (Kimura & Ichida, 1995).

According to Silverstein's theory of indexical order, "nonreferential indexes, or 'pure' indexes, are features of speech which, independent of any referential speech events that may be occurring, signal some particular value of one or more contextual variables. […] the 'meaning' of these indexes is purely pragmatic […]" (Silverstein, 1976, pp. 29-30). First-order indexicals can be described as "instances of speech that are statistically associated with a group", while second-order indexicals are "associated with *types* of people" (Eldredge, 2017, p.40). Thus, JSL does not only index Deafness, but also characteristics attributed to Deaf people. For example, because of their language signers are thought of as being more direct than the "typical" Japanese (Kimura, 2009); however, negative attitudes towards sign language and Deaf people feed off each other, and so signers can also be seen as "stupid" (Kimura, 2011), and less capable than the hearing, and even "inadequate" and "incomplete" as JSL is perceived to be (George, 2011). Attitudes towards sign language and signers improved after the "Discovery of JSL" (Kimura, 2011), but negative attitudes and stereotypes are still present even in institutions, as the case Osaka Prefectural Ikuno Elementary School for the Deaf student proves (for more details, see Section 1.2.5).

On the other hand, being closer to the dominant Japanese, Manually Signed Japanese enjoys greater prestige than JSL both among Deaf and hearing people, especially when used in combination with mouthing or speaking (Kimura, 2009). The higher prestige of Japanese reflects on Manually Signed Japanese, which receives institutional preference and has a better public image in the vast majority of contexts, even in sign language crucial environments such as the sign interpreting field and schools for the Deaf (George, 2011).

In Deaf culturalist D-groups, spatial-based JSL is considered the "pure" form of sign language and enjoys covert prestige over Manually Signed Japanese, which indexes users as outsiders, "hard of hearing" but not culturally Deaf (Nakamura, 2006). However, these contexts are limited and in general Manually Signed Japanese enjoys higher prestige even inside the community.

Higher prestige of the manually coded language over the natural sign language is a common feature of many Deaf communities around the world, for example in Nepal (Hoffmann-Dilloway, 2008), Australia (Branson and Miller, 1998), Indonesia (Branson and Miller, 1998), Italy (Tessarolo, 1990) and Russia (Grenoble, 1992). The American Deaf community constitutes an exception, as explained in the next section.

## 3.9 A Comparison with American Sign Language and Manually Coded English(es)

It is outside the scope of this text to provide a detailed analysis of the sociolinguistics of the US Deaf community, but as it is the country where research on Deaf Studies and sign language are most developed, and Japanese D-groups were inspired by American identity politics, it is useful to describe the US situation as well. This section will illustrate a brief overview of The US Deaf community to then find points of similarity and difference with the Japanese situation.

American Sign Language (ASL) originated in 1817, when Thomas Gallaudet founded the first school for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. It was originally an amalgam of French Sign Language, modified French initialized signs (both brought to the United States by French Deaf educator Laurent Clerc), and local forms of signing used before the

establishment of an education system for the Deaf (Nakamura, 2006). Already by 1835, the dominant language of instruction in schools for the Deaf in the United States was ASL, and schools placed little emphasis on learning speech. By 1858, over 40% of educators in the several schools for the Deaf that had been founded in the meantime were Deaf themselves (Drasgow, 2024). ASL thus spread across the country. However, the resolutions of the 1880 Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf, also called the Milan Congress, interrupted this trend, resulting in the abolition of sign language instruction in almost all countries in the world, including the United States (Moores, 2010). Even though ASL continued to be used and passed down in Deaf communities, the oral method remained hegemonic for the following 100 years and ASL was banned both inside and outside classrooms. This situation changed in the 1960s, due to the political activism of Deaf people who advocated for their rights and to have a say in the education system. Another important factor was the publication of William Stokoe's *Sign Language Structure: An Outline of the Visual Communication Systems of the American Deaf*, which provided evidence that ASL was a real language separate from English, and is considered the founding text of sign linguistics (Drasgow, 2024).

Alongside these social changes, several new English-based signing forms were also developed in the 1960s, as illustrated in Rendel et al. (2018). All the following systems are meant to be used in simultaneous communication, so by speaking and signing at the same time, and the term Manually Coded English (MCE) can be used to encompass all the sign varieties that attempt to show the English language visually (Spencer & Glover, 2015).

Seeing Essential English (SEE1), also called Morphemic Sign System (MSS), was created in 1966 by David Anthony, a Deaf educator, and is now used exclusively in one school for the Deaf in Texas (Rendel et al., 2018). Grammatical markers such as verb endings or articles have their own sign in SEE1, while they are not typically included in ASL. A distinctive characteristic of SEE1 is that all compound words are formed as separate signs, so for example instead of using the ASL sign for "butterfly", SEE1 places the signs for "butter" and "fly" in sequential order (Spencer & Glover, 2015).

Signed English (SE) was developed by hearing researcher Harry Bornstein and his team at Gallaudet University, specifically for young children. English grammar is not always

apparent in SE, and it has morphemic inconsistencies, so it is considered an ungrammatical system (Luetke-Stahlman, 1988).

Signing Exact English (originally referred to as SEE2, now only SEE) was developed in the late 1960s by Gerilee Gustason, a Deaf woman, Esther Zawolkow, a CODA, and Donna Pfetzing, the mother of a Deaf child (Rendel et al., 2018). It was developed from SEE1 and follows the same principles, but compound words are signed using the equivalent ASL sign, so about 80% of SEE signs are either borrowed from ASL or are modified ASL signs (Spencer & Glover, 2015). It was the most successful form of Manually Coded English of that period and was vastly used in educational programs for the Deaf through the 1990s (Luetke-Stahlman & Milburn, 1996).

Nowadays, the most used English-based sign variety is Conceptually Accurate Signed English (CASE), also called Pidgin Signed English (PSE), which combines an English grammatical structure with the use of concepts rather than words, typical of ASL (Spencer & Glover, 2015).

As Nakamura (2006) explains, minority politics in the US is unique because of the availability of the multiculturalism frame provided by the civil rights movement. Not only does it make it easier for new immigrant groups to be recognized as part of this frame, but the same is true for non-ethnic minorities as well, such as the LGBTQ+ or the Deaf community. Unlike the Japanese community, the American Deaf had a very powerful ethnic multiculturalism frame to leverage, both in its political fights and identity building. It thus constructed itself as a cultural, linguistic and even ethnic minority, where knowledge of ASL and Deaf culture are much more important indicators of belonging than audiological deafness or hearing loss. Hard of hearing and late-deafened people who mainly communicate orally are often excluded from being recognized as Deaf, while signing CODAs are seen as native signers and thus part of the community, even if hearing (Nakamura, 2006). As Eldredge (2017) points out, usage of feature that fully take advantage of ASL's spatial medium are even more salient indicators of Deaf identity, as they are not possible in spoken language. On the other hand, using English-based signing indexes people as outsiders, deaf but not culturally Deaf.

As the alternate use of ASL and English/Manually Coded English does not seem to be tied to domain or register, the usefulness of applying the concept of diglossia to the American Deaf community after the 1970s has been put into question. The situation can

be better described as one of extensive bilingualism, where signers shift along the sign continuum depending on addressee, topic, situation and the desire to establish one's social identity (Deumert, 2000).

ASL commands a high prestige in the American Deaf community, even more so ASL that makes full use of the visual-spatial modality, such as the one used in traditional Deaf storytelling. However, English-based sign varieties still enjoy overt prestige among some Deaf people, as negative attitudes towards sign language are still fostered in educational settings (Deumert, 2000). The attitudes of the American Deaf community towards ASL, Manually Coded English and the spoken language are complex, as explained by Bayley and Lucas (2011):

> Deaf people have inevitably internalized many of the attitudes of the majority society, as Kannapell found in her pioneering 1985 study. Through a survey and in-depth interviews, she found conflicting attitudes toward the natural sign language and the majority spoken language. That is, pride with respect to the sign language co-occurred with an attitude that its use reveals a lower educational level or even lower intelligence in the user, while use of a signed version of the majority spoken language was viewed as evidence of good education and superior intelligence. Pride with respect to the natural sign language also coexisted with the misconception that it is not a real language or is a deficient form of the spoken majority language (Bayley and Lucas, 2011, p. 94)

The American Deaf community constructed its identity on the multiculturalism frame, and the concept of cultural Deafness is relatively widely accepted. Some Deaf families can trace back their lineage and have been passing down ASL with pride for several generations (Nakamura, 2003). In this environment, even though negative attitudes of hearing society make their influence felt especially in educational contexts, ASL generally enjoys a high prestige inside the Deaf community. On the other hand, the view of Japan being monolingual and monocultural influenced attitudes towards sign language, and even in the Deaf community Manually Signed Japanese commands a much higher prestige compared to JSL, a preference that until very recent years was encouraged by the JFD as well. After the "Discovery of JSL" in the 1990s, D-groups have taken inspiration from American identity politics and Deaf culturalism in particular. Even among Japanese Deaf culturalists, some affirm that the American model cannot and should not be imported

in Japan as is (Shibuya, 1998), and assimilationist views are still prevalent. Deaf culturalism has nonetheless had an important influence on the Japanese Deaf community in recent years, as proven for example by the JFD affirming that JSL is a separate language from Japanese starting from 2020.

## Summary

The Japanese Deaf community lives immersed in hearing culture, and is characterized by the extensive use of various sign variations and spoken/written Japanese. Their multilingualism gives rise to phenomena both typical of minority language communities, such as code-switching and code-mixing, and others that are exclusive to Deaf communities, such as code-blending.

The high prestige of Japanese reflects on the usage and prestige of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese: the resulting situation is one similar to diglossia, where Manually Signed Japanese receives institutional preference in public spheres, such as education, work and even sign interpreting. JSL, while not fully confined to private spaces, is mainly used in informal interactions with peers. JSL however enjoys covert prestige in Deaf culturalist spaces such as D-groups.

Having illustrated the usage of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese reported in academic literature, the next and final chapter will report the findings of a questionnaire on the subject administered to Japanese Deaf people, so as to gather new data and investigate the development in recent years.

# CHAPTER 4

# RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

## 4.1 Information about the questionnaire

The following chapter will analyze the results of a questionnaire administered to Deaf people in Japan, investigating usage and perception of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese. The text of the questionnaire (both in Japanese and translated in English) can be found in the appendixes.

The questionnaire was approved by the Ethics Committee of Ca' Foscari University of Venice on April 16th, 2024, and administered via Google Forms from May 2nd to May 19th, 2024. During this period, 84 answers were collected, and every participant answered all items. The questionnaire was sent to and subsequently shared by several associations (e.g. sign language circles, Deaf youth associations, Deaf schools, etc.) and pages related to Deafness or sign language on social media. Particular attention has been paid to contacting potential respondents from a variety of backgrounds, as limiting the research to one kind of association (e.g. Deaf culturalist or hard-of-hearing associations) would likely have heavily influenced the results.

To minimize the burden on participants and ensure a good number of responses, the questionnaire was deliberately made short (10-15 minutes of estimated duration) and did not include open-ended questions, apart from an optional space to add further comments at the end of the questionnaire. It was comprised of 17 items, divided into three sections:

- The first section contained general demographic questions (age, gender) and more specific questions related to Deafness (e.g. presence of other Deaf people in the family, chosen identity terms, etc.)
- The second section contained items about the usage and perception of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese (e.g. attributing characteristics, adequacy in different domains, etc.)
- The third section contained questions about the perceived frequency of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese in different media

## 4.2 Section 1: Demographics and questions related to Deafness

Section 1 of the questionnaire started with two demographic questions, inquiring about the respondents' age and gender.

As for the age, 4 respondents (4.8%) were born before 1969, 26 (31%) between 1970 and 1979, 23 (27.4%) between 1980 and 1989, 13 (15.5%) between 1990 and 1999, and finally 18 (21.4%) were born after 2000.

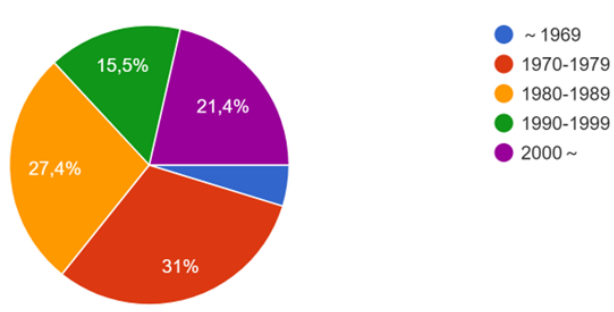


*Figure 6: Birth years of the respondents*

54 respondents (64.3%) were female, and 26 (31%) were male, including one respondent who specified being a trans man. The remaining 4 respondents (4.8%) chose not to disclose their gender.

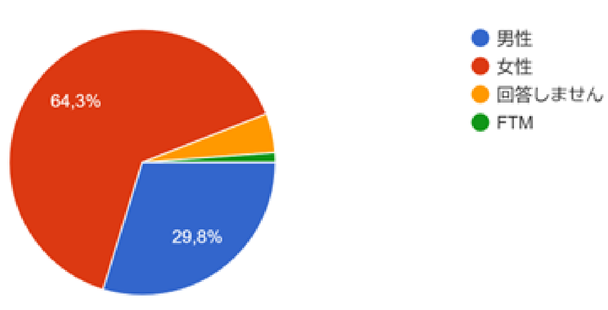


*Figure 7: Gender of the respondents*

The third item asked respondents to select terms that described their identity. They were asked to select all terms that applied, and could add new ones if they wished.

Nakamura (2006) reported that the post-mainstreaming generation of Deaf "often identify themselves as hearing (健聴 *kenchō), hard of hearing (難聴 nanchō), or*

*hearing- impaired (聴覚障害 chōkaku shōgai), and not as deaf (ろうあ rōa)" (Nakamura, 2006, p.139) and that the loanword デフ defu, used mainly by D-groups, was falling out of use, as these groups started using Japanese terms they previously rejected. However, the answers to the questionnaire showed an opposite trend.*

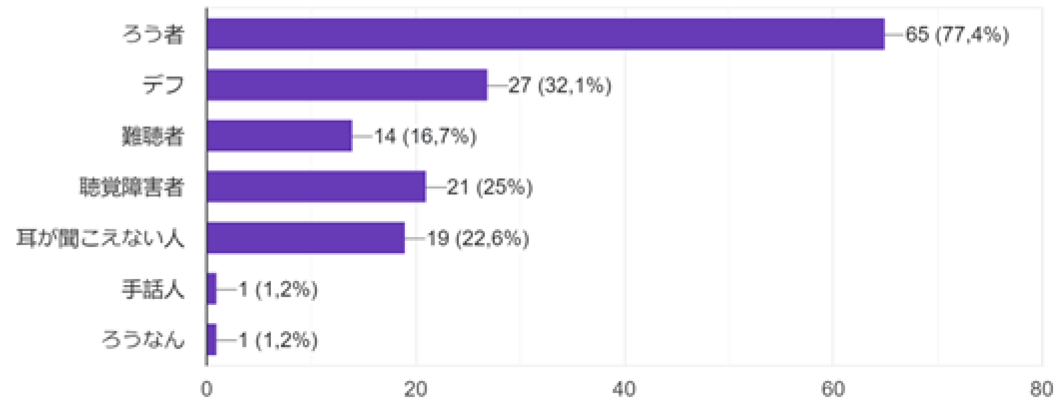


*Figure 8: Identity terms chosen by the respondents*

65 respondents (77.4%) chose the term ろう者 *rōsha* ("Deaf") to describe their identity, making it the preferred term by the majority of participants. The second most selected term was デフ *defu*, chosen by 27 respondents (32.1%). Thus, instead of falling out of use, this loanword probably lost its strong connection with D-groups and radical identity politics, becoming more widely used. On the other hand, 聴覚障害者 *chōkaku shōgaisha* ("hearing-impaired") and 難聴者 *nanchōsha* ("hard of hearing") were chosen by fewer respondents, respectively 21 (25%) and 14 (16.7%). The periphrasis 耳が聞こえない人 *mimi ga kikoenai hito* ("person who cannot hear") was selected by 19 participants (22.6%). Moreover, two participants added new words to the list: 手話人 *shuwajin* ("signer") and ろうなん *rōnan* (a combination of ろう者 *rōsha* and 難聴者 *nanchōsha*). The term 手話人 *shuwajin* is particularly interesting, as it is an extremely rare word and signals sign language being an important part of the respondent's identity.

The following questions gathered data about when participants became Deaf, whether they have a cochlear implant, and presence of other Deaf people in their families, all factors that can influence the signing habits of respondents.

The majority of respondents, 62 or 73.8%, are Deaf from birth, and another 16 (19%) lost their hearing before the age of three. Few participants became Deaf later in life, respectively 3 (3.6%) between the ages of four and twelve, and 3 (3.6%) in adulthood.

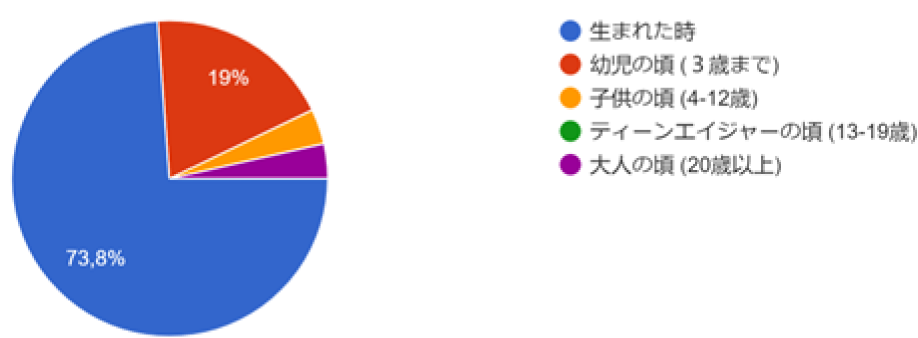


*Figure 9: Life phases when respondents became Deaf*

Regarding cochlear implants, only 6 (7.1%) of respondents have one, while the remaining 78 (92.9%) do not.

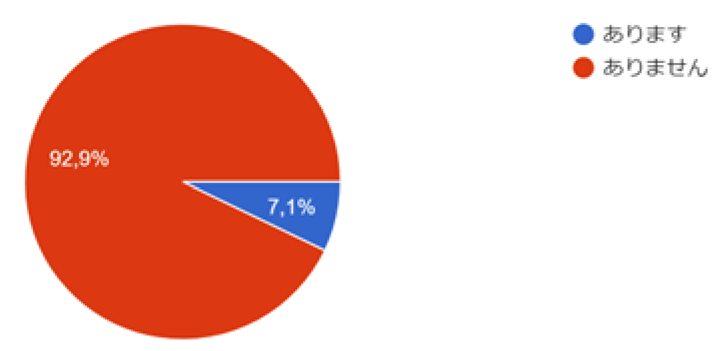


*Figure 10: Cochlear implantation in respondents*

On the other hand, the number of respondents with and without Deaf family members is almost the same, respectively 43 (51.2%) and 41 (48.8%) respondents.

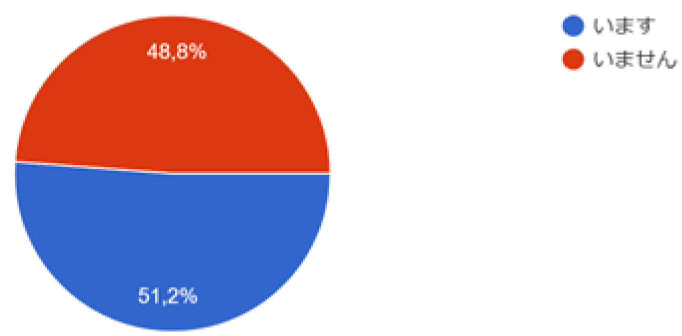


*Figure 11: Presence of Deaf family members*

Finally, the last item of Section 1 asked respondents how often they interact with other Deaf people. The participants seem to be generally well inserted into their Deaf communities, as 38 respondents (45.2%) answered “every day” and 15 (17.9%) “almost every day”. Of the remaining respondents, 14 (16.7%) answered “at least once a week” and 17 (20.2%) “less than once a week”.

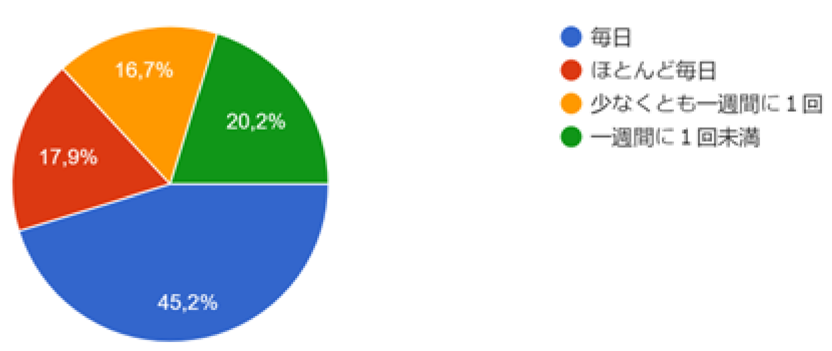


*Figure 12: How often respondents interact with other Deaf people*

## 4.3 Section 2: Usage and perception of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese

The second section was comprised of three kinds of items, and each type was asked once for Japanese Sign Language and once for Manually Signed Japanese.

As for frequency of use, to the question “How often do you use Japanese Sign Language?”, a total of 55 respondents (65.5%) answered either “every day” or “almost every day”, 11 (13.1%) “at least once a week” and 18 (21.4%) “less than once a week”.

For Manually Signed Japanese, 31 respondents (36.9%) answered either “every day” or “almost every day”, 14 (16.7%) “at least once a week” and 39 (46.4%) “less than once a week”. So, it appears that the respondents use Japanese Sign Language more frequently than Manually Signed Japanese.

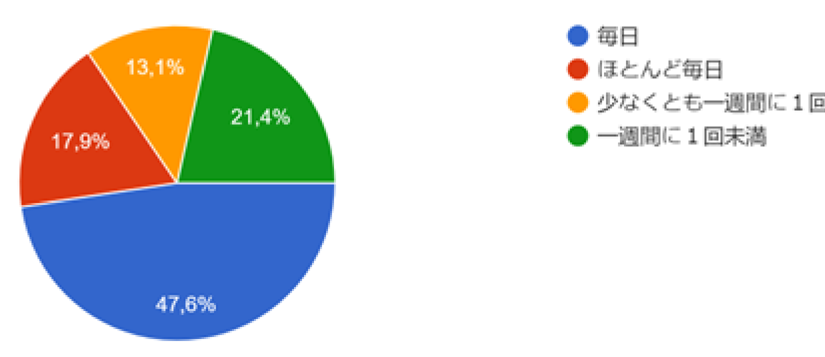


*Figure 13: Frequency of use of Japanese Sign Language*

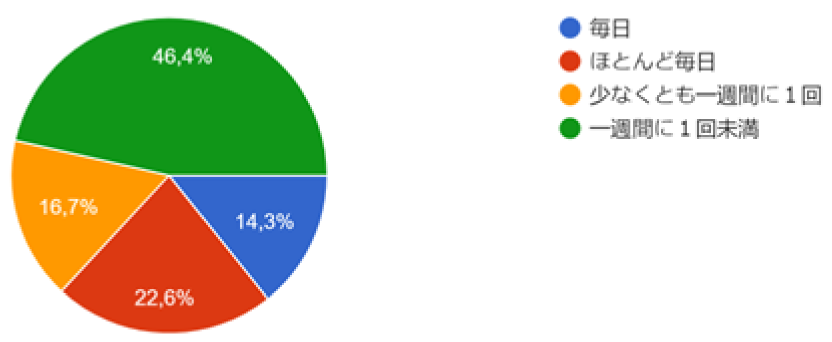


*Figure 14: Frequency of use of Manually Signed Japanese*

In the following items, respondents were asked to assign a score from 1 to 6 to the adequacy of using Japanese Sign Language/Manually Signed Japanese in different domains, namely “school/university”, “work”, “home”, “with friends” and “with strangers”, where 1 was “not adequate at all” and 6 “completely adequate”. The domain of “church” was not considered for this study.

The following table sums up the mean values attributed by respondents.

|  | Japanese Sign Language | Manually Signed Japanese |
|---|---|---|
| **School/University** | 3.37 | 3.04 |
| **Work** | 2.65 | 2.99 |
| **Home** | 3.89 | 2.61 |
| **Friends** | 4.42 | 2.95 |
| **Strangers** | 2.60 | 2.81 |

*Table 1: Mean values attributed to the adequacy of using Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese in different domains*

The following diagrams show the distribution of answers.

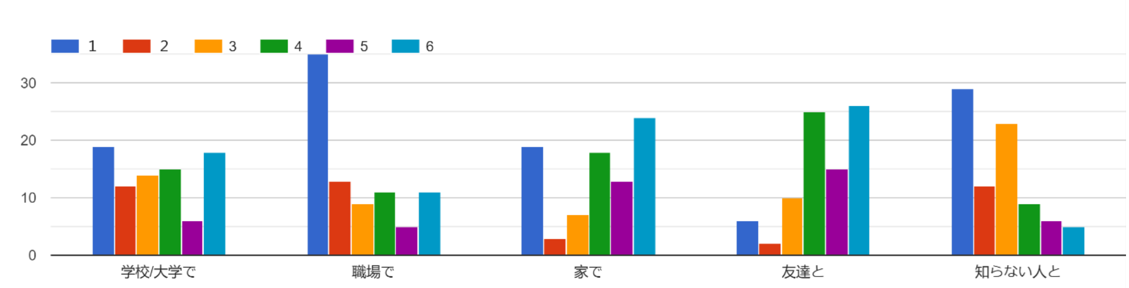


*Figure 15: Adequacy of using Japanese Sign Language in different domains*

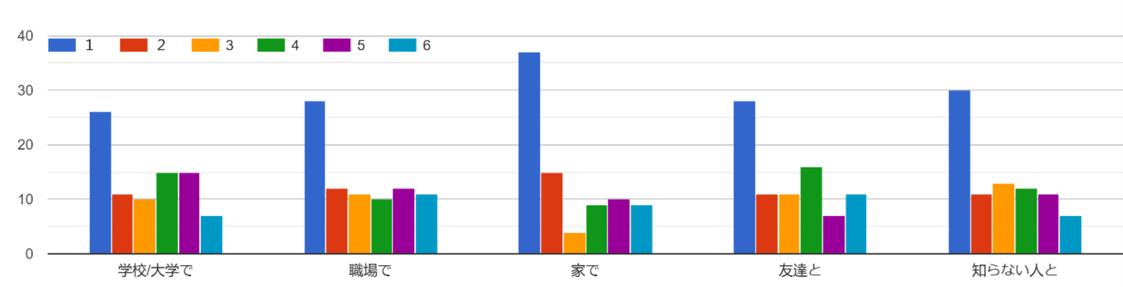


*Figure 16: Adequacy of using Manually Signed Japanese in different domains*

Firstly, let us briefly consider the mode, the value that appears most often in each set. The mode is 1, or "not adequate at all", for almost every question, indicating that most respondents find both Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese inadequate in most contexts, probably due to the dominance of oral/written Japanese. The only exceptions to this trend were Japanese Sign Language "at home" and "with friends", where the mode was 6, or "completely adequate".

For a more detailed analysis, let us take the mean values into consideration. Both languages got their lowest score "with strangers", 2.60 for Japanese Sign Language and 2.81 for Manually Signed Japanese. The second lowest score was "at work", 2.65 for

Japanese Sign Language and 2.99 for Manually Signed Japanese. In both domains sign languages are scarcely present, and Manually Signed Japanese is considered just slightly more adequate than Japanese Sign Language. In educational contexts, on the other hand, the opposite is true, as Japanese Sign Language received a higher score in this domain, 3.37 compared to the 3.04 of Manually Signed Japanese. The scores for "at school/university" still indicate that both languages are considered somewhat inadequate for the context, but more adequate than "at work" or "with strangers", probably due to the fact that since the ban on sign language in schools was lifted in 2002, signing is present in some form in the educational experiences of Deaf people.

The scores for "at home" and "with friends" showed more discrepancy between Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese, both in favor of JSL. "At home", Manually Signed Japanese received a mean score of 2.61, while JSL 3.89. As 51.2% of respondents have other Deaf people in the family, it is sensible they would consider JSL adequate to use in the home (score >3.50). "With friends" was the domain with the biggest score difference between the two languages, 2.95 for Manually Signed Japanese and a high 4.42 for JSL, confirming that JSL is most used among Deaf peers, and more in general in private contexts.

In the following items, respondents were asked how much they agreed with attributing some characteristics to Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese. The rating scales and assigned numerical values were as follows:

- 1: Strongly disagree
- 2: Disagree
- 3: Neutral
- 4: Agree
- 5: Strongly agree

When analyzing answers, intervals were assigned to the ratings as follows:

- <1.5 = Strongly disagree
- 1.5-2.5: Disagree
- 2.5-3.5: Neutral
- 3.5-4.5: Agree
- >5: Strongly agree

The following table sums up the mean values attributed by respondents:

| | Japanese Sign Language | Manually Signed Japanese |
|---|---|---|
| **Formal** | 4.14 | 2.71 |
| **Informal** | 3.79 | 2.79 |
| **Youthful** | 3.13 | 2.63 |
| **Old-fashioned** | 3.40 | 2.05 |
| **Polite** | 3.56 | 3.06 |
| **Impolite** | 2.17 | 2.12 |
| **Masculine** | 2.54 | 1.85 |
| **Feminine** | 2.46 | 1.94 |
| **Intellectual** | 3.40 | 2.57 |
| **Simple** | 3.01 | 3.07 |

*Table 2: Mean values attributed to characteristics of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese*

The following diagrams show the distribution of answers.

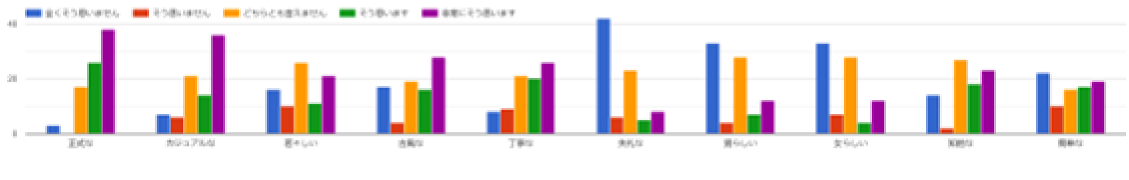

*Figure 17: Characteristics of Japanese Sign Language*

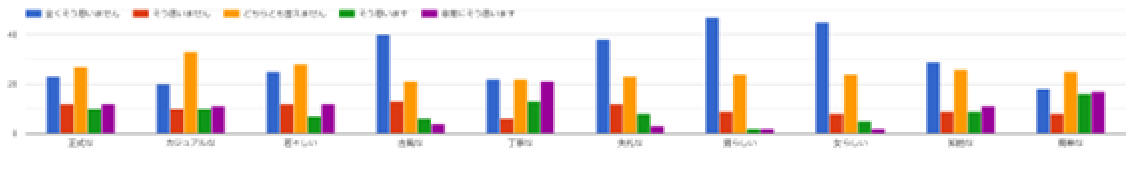

*Figure 18: Characteristics of Manually Signed Japanese*

At a first glance, the data gathered in these items seems contradictory. Using a scale between two opposite characteristics instead of rating a single one might have led to gathering clearer data.

As for formality, JSL received a score of 4.14, while Manually Signed Japanese was considered neutral in this aspect, with a score of 2.71. The same is true for informality, where JSL received a score of 3.79 and Manually Signed Japanese 2.79. As an

independent language, JSL has its own formal and informal registers, and while there some shared communicative strategies to showcase formality in Japanese and JSL, JSL mainly relies on non-manual signals to mark registers (George, 2011). For a detailed dissertation on how JSL users linguistically encode the formal register, see George, 2011. On the other hand, Manually Signed Japanese is mainly used in Sim Com with oral Japanese, and does not have independent registers.

Regarding "youthfulness", while both mean scores were in the neutral interval, JSL is considered more youthful (3.13) than Manually Signed Japanese (2.63). On the other hand, respondents disagreed that Manually Signed Japanese is old-fashioned (2.05), while the score was neutral (but close to "agree") for JSL (3.40).

As for politeness, JSL is considered more polite (3.56) than Manually Signed Japanese (3.06), and respondents disagreed that either language is impolite, with scores of 2.17 for JSL and 2.12 for Manually Signed Japanese.

For both languages, the score for "masculine" and "feminine" were very close to one another, respectively 2.54 and 2.46 for JSL, and 1.85 and 1.94 for Manually Signed Japanese, so they do not appear to be marked for gender. However, while for JSL this is expressed with scores between neutral and "disagree", for Manually Signed Japanese the scores are fully in the "disagree" range, close to "strongly disagree".

JSL is considered more intellectual (3.40) than Manually Signed Japanese (2.57), even though once again both scores are in the neutral range. For both languages, the score was almost completely neutral for being "simple", 3.01 for JSL and 3.07 for Manually Signed Japanese.

Let us also consider the two varieties one at a time, starting with JSL.

The following table shows the scores attributed to characteristics of Japanese Sign Language, arranged from highest to lowest:

| Japanese Sign Language | |
|---|---|
| **Formal** | 4.14 |
| **Informal** | 3.79 |
| **Polite** | 3.56 |
| **Old-fashioned** | 3.40 |
| **Intellectual** | 3.40 |
| **Youthful** | 3.13 |
| **Simple** | 3.01 |
| **Masculine** | 2.54 |
| **Feminine** | 2.46 |
| **Impolite** | 2.17 |

| Colour | Meaning |
|---|---|
| Green | Agree |
| Yellow | Neutral |
| Orange | Disagree |

*Table 3: Characteristics of Japanese Sign Language, arranged from highest to lowest score*

Overall, the respondents seem to hold a positive attitude towards JSL, as the characteristics which received the highest scores were “formal”, “informal” and “polite”, followed by “intellectual” and “old-fashioned”. Regarding the latter, besides receiving a score of 3.40, the mode for JSL being old-fashioned was “strongly agree”, indicating that this belief reported in Nakamura (2006) might still be held by the community to some degree. On the other hand, the scores for “youthful” and “simple” are very close to complete neutrality, showing that JSL is not particularly associated with these attributes. As stated earlier, the difference between the scores for “masculine” and “feminine” was minimal, with “masculine” being slightly higher. The lowest score, in the “disagree” range, was attributed to “impolite”, confirming the positive view of JSL held by respondents.

Next, let us analyze the scores for Manually Signed Japanese, ranked from highest to lowest in the following table:

| Manually Signed Japanese | |
|---|---|
| **Simple** | 3.07 |
| **Polite** | 3.06 |
| **Informal** | 2.79 |
| **Formal** | 2.71 |
| **Youthful** | 2.63 |
| **Intellectual** | 2.57 |
| **Impolite** | 2.12 |
| **Old-fashioned** | 2.05 |
| **Feminine** | 1.94 |
| **Masculine** | 1.85 |

| Colour | Meaning |
|---|---|
| (green) | Agree |
| (yellow) | Neutral |
| (orange) | Disagree |

*Table 4: Characteristics of Manually Signed Japanese, arranged from highest to lowest score*

The highest scores for Manually Signed Japanese were attributed to "simple" and "polite", however both characteristics scored very close to complete neutrality. In general, respondents were very reluctant to attribute any kind of characteristic to Manually Signed Japanese, as seen both in the mean values, all in the "neutral" or "disagree" range, and in the modes of the different questions, which are either "neutral" or "strongly disagree". This might be due to the fact that Manually Signed Japanese is often used in Sim Com and is a different modality of Japanese, so it is not seen as having attributes independently of Japanese. The scores for "informal" and "formal" were very close, with "informal" being slightly higher. Unlike JSL, Manually Signed Japanese is considered more "youthful" than "old-fashioned", as the first scored in the neutral range and the second in the "disagree" one. Respondents had a neutral position (but closer to "disagree") regarding Manually Signed Japanese being "intellectual", while they disagreed that it is "impolite", and either "masculine" or "feminine". It was, however, considered slightly more "feminine" than "masculine" by participants.

To summarize, respondents did not fully attribute any characteristic to Manually Signed Japanese, as all attributes received scores in the "neutral" or "disagree" ranges, while results for JSL were more varied, and sometimes apparently contradictory. This could be explained by the respondents not interpreting characteristics as opposed to one another, but as complementary. For example, they might think JSL is both "formal" and "informal" because it has both a formal and informal register and can be used in a variety of contexts.

Respondents generally do not seem to hold particularly negative views towards JSL as described in part of the academic literature.

## 4.4 Section 3: Signing in media

The third section of the questionnaire contained three items inquiring about the perceived frequency of use of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese in different media, namely movies and TV series, TV programs (such as the news or talk shows) and social media.

In movies and TV series, Manually Signed Japanese seems to be more present than Japanese Sign Language, as the number of respondents who answered “always Manually Signed Japanese” or “Manually Signed Japanese more often than Japanese Signed Language” is 41 (48.8%), while 16 (19%) answered “more or less the same” and a total of 27 (32.1%) answered either “always Japanese Sign Language” or “Japanese Sign Language more often than Manually Signed Japanese”. As movies and TV series with Deaf characters are mainly catered towards hearing viewers, the prevalence of Manually Signed Japanese might be due to the fact that, as described in Section 1.2.3, Sim Com is more convenient for conveying meaning without having to rely on subtitles.

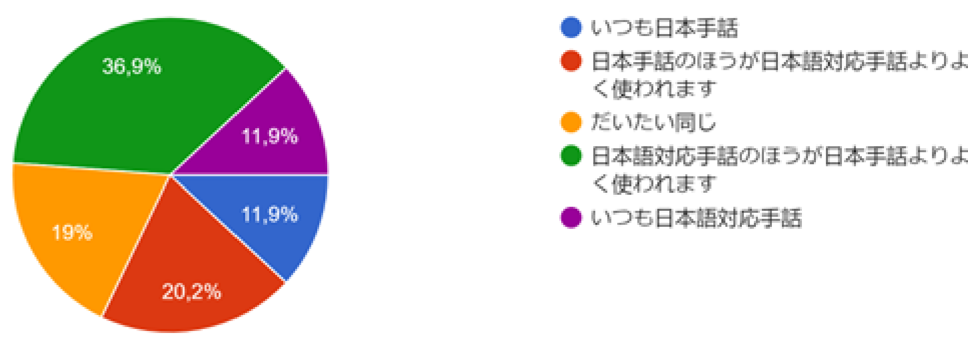


*Figure 19: Signing in movies and TV series*

As for TV programs, the contrary seems to be true, as 49 (58.3%) answered either “always Japanese Sign Language” or “Japanese Sign Language more often than Manually Signed Japanese”. 17 (20.2%) answered “more or less the same” and 18 (21.5%) “always Manually Signed Japanese” or “Manually Signed Japanese more often than Japanese

Signed Language". Contrary to movies and TV series starting Deaf characters, TV programs in sign language are usually created directly in sign and designed for Deaf people and sign language learners, so they do not have the same limitations. Moreover, popular NHK programs みんなの手話 *minna no shuwa* and Sign Language News have been in Japanese Sign Language since 1995 (for more details, see Section 2.7), so the prevalence of JSL in TV programs found by the questionnaire seems sensible.

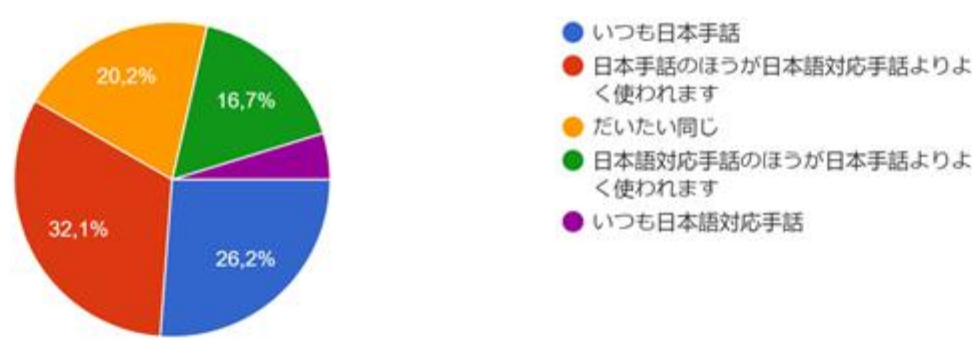


*Figure 20: Signing in TV programs*

Japanese Sign Language also seems to be prevalent on social media. 42 respondents (50%) answered either "always Japanese Sign Language" or "Japanese Sign Language more often than Manually Signed Japanese", 25 (29,8%) answered "more or less the same" and 17 (20.3%) "always Manually Signed Japanese" or "Manually Signed Japanese more often than Japanese Signed Language". The video format of many popular social media applications, such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, lends itself well to the use of JSL without limitations. Guimarães and Fernandes (2018) conducted exploratory research on social media use by Deaf youth in Brazil, and found that they relied on social media for learning sign language, staying informed on the Deaf community, and meeting other Deaf people. Nowadays, it is easy to find Japanese social media profiles dedicated to JSL and/or Deaf culture, and as of May 2024 the most popular Japanese Deaf influencer (難聴うさぎ *Nanchō Usagi*, @yuixrab) counts 267,000 subscribers on Youtube and over 400,000 on TikTok. When I visited Meisei Gakuen in February 2023, Professor Oka Norie reported that many of the students wanted to pursue a career on social media, particularly YouTube, as they felt there were not many other jobs where they could use JSL. While a career as a YouTuber or influencer might be appealing to many young students, the motivation behind this choice for Meisei Gakuen's students provides a glimpse into how

important social media representation can be for minorities. More research is needed on the role of social media as a new frontier for constructing and sharing Deaf identities.

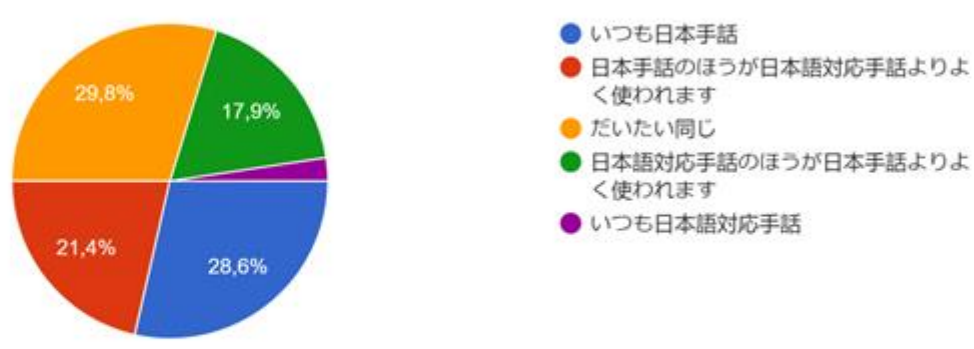


*Figure 21: Signing on social media*

## 4.5 Additional comments

After completing the mandatory items, respondents were given a space to freely write any additional comment they had about the topic of the questionnaire. Below are comments left by the participants, numbered for convenience:

1. 日本語対応手話ができないものが日本手話が出来る場面が多い。日本語に翻訳が難しいがイメージ掴める。

1. There are many situations where I can't use Manually Signed Japanese but I can use Japanese Sign Language. Translating into Japanese is difficult, but I can get the picture.

2. 日本手話をもっと広めたい！

2. I want more people to know about Japanese Sign Language!

3. 私は日本手話も日本語対応手話も「手話」だと思っています。なぜそんなに無気になるのかわからない。[10]

[10] The respondent wrote 無気になる *muki ni naru*; I interpreted the intended phrase as the homophone 向きになる/ムキになる *muki ni naru*, "to get worked up, especially at something trivial".

3. I think both Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese are “sign language”. I don’t understand why we should make such a big deal out of this.

4.日本手話を第一言語(ろう者など) とする方たちを内向的にしたのは、日本語対応手話(聴力障害や健聴者など)だと未だに思います。 その為、日本手話を完全に覚えるのは難しいですが、リスペクトする事は最も必要だと思っています。

4. I think that, to this day, what made people whose first language is Japanese Sign Language (Deaf, etc.) introverted is Manually Signed Japanese (hard of hearing, hearing, etc.). So, it is difficult to learn Japanese Sign Language completely, but I think it is necessary to respect it.

5. 日本手話の方が使いやすい

5. Japanese Sign Language is easier to use.

6. 聞こえる両親に手話で育てられました。 日本手話が使えるろう学校は日本で一校のみで、そこに 5 年間通いましたがそれ以外の期間は基本日本語対応手話でやりとりが大変でした。 また、大学は聴者だけだったためあまり手話は使いませんでした。

6. I was raised by hearing parents with sign language. There is only one school in Japan where Japanese Sign Language is used, and I attended it for five years. However, the rest of the time it was hard to converse in basic Manually Signed Japanese. Also, since there were only hearing people at university, I could barely use Japanese Sign Language.

7. 日本手話を使う人は日本語対応手話を使う人に対していじめる

7. People who use Japanese Sign Language bully those who use Manually Signed Japanese.

These comments provide some more insight into the respondents’ ideas about Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese. Comment 3. agrees with JFD’s view that distinguishing Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese is not useful, however other comments convey different ideas about these varieties. Comments 1., 5., and 6. express that Japanese Sign Language is easier and/or more natural, and comment

2. states a wish for Japanese Sign Language to be more widespread and known. In addition, comments 5. and 6. express difficulties with Manually Signed Japanese. It is worth noting that the respondents who wrote comments 1., 2., 5., and 6. identify as Deaf and have been deaf since birth, while the respondent who wrote comment 3 identifies as hard of hearing and became deaf as an adult.

Interestingly, comments 4. and 7. show opposite views, with number 4. stating that Manually Signed Japanese and its users make people whose first language is Japanese Sign Language "introverted", while 7. says that it is JSL users who "bully" Manually Signed Japanese users. In this case, the person who wrote comment 4. identifies as hearing-impaired and became deaf as an adult, while the one who wrote comment 7. Identifies as Deaf and has been deaf since birth.

## 4.6 Summary, limitations of this study and ideas for further research

The research questionnaire presented in this chapter aimed to gather data about usage and perception of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese among Japanese Deaf people.

The first significant notion revealed in the study was that participants largely prefer the more identitarian ろう者 *rōsha* ("Deaf") over other terms that emphasize physical deafness such as "hard of hearing" (難聴 *nanchō*), or "hearing-impaired" (聴覚障害 *chōkaku shōgai*).

Participants use JSL more often than Manually Signed Japanese, and regarding language domains, JSL is considered adequate for use in private contexts such as with friends and family, but also slightly more adequate than Manually Signed Japanese in educational environments. Both varieties are considered inadequate for use at work and with strangers, with Manually Signed Japanese being slightly more adequate in these contexts.

Respondents did not associate any particular characteristic to Manually Signed Japanese, as all scores were either in the neutral or "disagree" range, probably due to it being a different modality of Japanese rather than an independent language. On the other hand, JSL was considered "formal", "informal" and "polite". Its scores "old-fashioned" and

“intellectual” were also very close to the “agree” range, and anyway higher than the correspondent scores for Manually Signed Japanese. Neither language was marked by gender.

Finally, regarding signing in media, Manually Signed Japanese is used more often in TV series and movies, while Japanese Sign Language in TV programs and on social media.

While this questionnaire gathered a good number of responses and was useful in collecting new data about the usage of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese, it has several limitations. Firstly, for practical reasons the questionnaire had to be written in Japanese, which might not be the first language for many of the participants. Moreover, items 12 and 13 (attributing characteristics to JSL/Manually Signed Japanese) should have been changed into a scale between two opposite characteristics instead of considering one characteristic at a time, so as to yield clearer and more concise results. Even though efforts were made to contact respondents from a variety of backgrounds, it is not possible to know if respondents fully reflect the composition and variety of the Japanese Deaf community. Finally, a written questionnaire was the only method of data collection.

For future research on the topic, adopting different research methods, such as holding interviews in the participants’ preferred language, would supplement the questionnaire’s findings. Taking into consideration aspects that were not analyzed in this study (such as regional differences) or delving more in detail into issues that were only briefly covered (such as signing in media) would also be useful.

# CONCLUSIONS

In the first part of this dissertation, the historical and political circumstances that shaped the Japanese Deaf community and influenced their politics and identity-building for many decades were analyzed. First, mandatory education for Deaf children was introduced relatively late, after World War Two, and sign language was banned in schools until 2002. Moreover, contrary to other industrialized countries, where rubella outbreaks created deaf bubbles of pre-lingually deafened children whose first language was sign language, up until the 1960s, almost all large cohorts of deaf children in Japan were post-lingually deafened by an antibiotic called Streptomycin, and their primary language was Japanese. These post-lingually deafened children thrived in educational contexts compared to pre-lingually deafened ones, and later formed the core leadership of the JFD. In the following years, the plummeting birthrate, the tendency to mainstreaming in education and improved medical care all contributed to a further loss of Deaf identity and cemented the disability view of Deafness. As Japan did not have a powerful multiculturalism frame to build a notion of Deaf identity upon, when Deaf culturalist D-groups such as D-Pro and Deaf Shock appeared in the 1990s, they were considered too radical by part of the community, first and foremost by the JFD and its leaders.

This clash between the groups translated into the linguistic realm. The JFD maintained its assimilationist view, which frames deafness as a disability, deemphasizes the differences between Japanese Sign Language and Japanese, and did not distinguish between JSL and Manually Signed Japanese, for several decades. Not challenging the view of Japan being monolingual allowed the JFD to obtain welfare benefits and rights for Deaf people. Existing legislation about sign language also does not distinguish between the two varieties. Due to the high prestige of Japanese, Manually Signed Japanese received institutional preference in public contexts, while JSL, despite not being fully confined to private spaces, was mainly used among peers in informal interactions.

However, multiple changes have taken place in recent years. While still maintaining that distinguishing between Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese would only lead to discrimination, the JFD now affirms that sign language is separate from Japanese, and is campaigning for sign language legislation. The ban on sign language in schools was lifted in 2002, and in 2008 the first school with JSL as the medium of

instruction and a Deaf culturalist approach was founded. The JFD also declared in 2021 that their "new era" would be characterized by increased intersectionality, and new intersectional Deaf groups are also appearing outside of the JFD, most notably several LGBTQ+ Deaf associations starting from the mid-2010s. The spread of social media has also made sign languages more easily accessible than ever.

Did the introduction of identity politics by D-groups in the 1990s and the other changes that took place starting from the 2000s have an influence on the language use and ideology of the Deaf community?

To answer this question, a research questionnaire was administered to Japanese Deaf people to gather data about the use and perception of Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese.

The first findings of this questionnaire might seem obvious, but are nevertheless worth mentioning: despite the JFD's official line on the matter, most signers distinguish between JSL and Manually Signed Japanese, use them in different contexts, have preferences between the two, and hold different beliefs about them. The respondents use JSL more often, and while it is considered to be most adequate for private contexts, namely with family and even more so with friends, JSL is also considered more adequate than Manually Signed Japanese for educational contexts, perhaps a consequence of the reintroduction (even though limited) of sign language in schools. Respondents also held a fairly positive view of JSL, while on the other hand they did not attribute any characteristic to Manually Signed Japanese. As for media, according to the respondents Manually Signed Japanese is more used in TV series and movies, and JSL in TV programs and social media. Some commenters also expressed that JSL is more natural for them, and reported difficulties with Manually Signed Japanese.

As already stated, this study had several limits, and further research is needed on this topic, particularly qualitative research. However, the questionnaire shows that, while Manually Signed Japanese receives institutional preference, JSL is considered adequate for use in a variety of domains, contexts and media, and its prestige inside the community is increasing. On the other hand, the low score of Manually Signed Japanese in all attributes indicates that, once again, contrary to the JFD's view on the matter, rather than being assimilated with JSL, it is not seen as independent from Japanese.

It is worth repeating here that there also exists a continuum of sign varieties between and other than Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese, and that the Japanese Deaf community is not a homogeneous group. "There are many ways to be deaf. Perhaps that message will be the lasting contribution of deaf politics in Japan," ended Nakamura's 2006 book *Deaf in Japan* (p.192). Depending on their background, hearing ability, presence of cochlear implants, etc., different Deaf people will of course hold different beliefs both about their preferred method of communication and their identity. American Deaf identity politics cannot be applied to Japan uncritically, nor should they be. However, it is important that all Deaf people have easy access to their primary language in all contexts, including (and especially) those whose first language is not Japanese.

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# APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL APPROVAL

**VERBALE N. 4/2024**

**Riunione della Sottocommissione Etica della Ricerca (SER) dell'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia del 16 aprile 2024**

Il giorno 16 aprile 2024, alle ore 10.00, sono stati convocati in modalità telematica (attraverso applicazione sincrona) i componenti della SER:

| | P | AG | A |
|---|---|---|---|
| Barbara Da Roit (Presidente) | ✓ | | |
| Agar Brugiavini | ✓ | | |
| Stefano Calzavara | ✓ | | |
| Chiara Da Villa | ✓ | | |
| Claudia Irti | ✓ | | |
| Lucetta Scaraffia | | ✓ | |
| Silvia Zabeo | | ✓ | |

Verbalizza Elena Guida (Biblioteca Digitale di Ateneo).

**Ordine del giorno** inviato tramite email il 12 aprile 2024:

1. Approvazione verbale della Seduta dell'11 marzo 2024.
2. Analisi e approvazione di interpelli, DMP, aspetti etici
3. Varie ed eventuali.

*(omissis…)*

**Analisi e approvazione di interpelli, DMP, aspetti etici**

**LUPI_QUERY_marzo 2024**

La Sottocommissione etica per la Ricerca (SER) dà parere favorevole al documento presentato, purché la studentessa riporti più dettagliatamente nella sua documentazione come intende raccogliere i dati e garantirne l'anonimato.
Sempre a garanzia dell'anonimato si consiglia inoltre di indicare nel campo "Age" (section 1, item 1) una serie di fasce d'età anziché richiedere un valore esatto, se non è indispensabile ai fini della ricerca.
Non è necessario effettuare una nuova submission del documento.

1

*(omissis…)*

Alle ore 11.20 la seduta ha termine.

Professoressa Barbara Da Roit, Presidente della Commissione Etica

Elena Guida, redattrice del verbale

Elena Guida

2

# APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE IN JAPANESE



## 日本手話と日本語対応手話調査

こんにちは。イタリアのヴェネツィア・カフォスカリ大学に所属している、フランチェスカ・ルーピと申します。

日本手話と日本語対応手話の使い方について研究に参加を求められています。この研究調査は、私の修士課程の卒業論文を書くために必要な要素です。

参加してくださったら、本当にありがたいです。

調査は、１８歳以上のろう者/聴覚障碍者を対象しています。どんな聴力でもいいし、人工内耳があってもなくても参加できます。

予想所要時間は１０分です。

プライバシー: データはEU一般データ保護規則に基づいて、完全に匿名および集約された形で収集と発行します。個人が特定できる情報が収集されることはありません。

研究者: フランチェスカ・ルーピ、ヴェネツィア・カフォスカリ大学 (872813@stud.unive.it)

研究指導教員: パトリック・ハインリッヒ、ヴェネツィア・カフォスカリ大学

* Indica una domanda obbligatoria

1. インフォームド・コンセント *

   *Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.*

   ☐ 上記に同意し、お問い合わせフォームに進みます。

2. 出生年度はいつですか。 *

   *Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

   - ~ 1969
   - 1970-1979
   - 1980-1989
   - 1990-1999
   - 2000 ~

3. 性別は何ですか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- 男性
- 女性
- 回答しません
- Altro: ______

4. どんな言葉が自分のアイデンティティを説明すると思いますか。該当するものすべてを選んでください。 *

*Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.*

- [ ] ろう者
- [ ] デフ
- [ ] 難聴者
- [ ] 聴覚障害者
- [ ] 耳が聞こえない人
- [ ] Altro: ______

5. 人工内耳がありますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- あります
- ありません

6. いつろう者/聴覚障害者になりましたか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- 生まれた時
- 幼児の頃 (3 歳まで)
- 子供の頃 (4-12歳)
- ティーンエイジャーの頃 (13-19歳)
- 大人の頃 (20歳以上)

7. 家族には、他のろう者/聴覚障害者がいますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- います
- いません

8. どれくらいの頻度で他のろう者/聴覚障害者と対話しますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- 毎日
- ほとんど毎日
- 少なくとも一週間に１回
- 一週間に１回未満

Sezione senza titolo

9. 日本手話を使うのは、下記の場面に合うと思いますか。(1=まったく合いません、6=非常に合います) *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 学校/大学で | | | | | | |
| 職場で | | | | | | |
| 家で | | | | | | |
| 友達と | | | | | | |
| 知らない人と | | | | | | |

10. 日本語対応手話を使うのは、下記の場面に合うと思いますか。(1=まったく合いません、6=非常に合います) *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 学校/大学で | | | | | | |
| 職場で | | | | | | |
| 家で | | | | | | |
| 友達と | | | | | | |
| 知らない人と | | | | | | |

11. どれくらいの頻度で日本手話を使いますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- 毎日
- ほとんど毎日
- 少なくとも一週間に１回
- 一週間に１回未満

12. どれくらいの頻度で日本語対応手話を使いますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- 毎日
- ほとんど毎日
- 少なくとも一週間に１回
- 一週間に１回未満

13. 日本手話に下記の特徴は当てはまると思いますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

| | 全くそう思いません | そう思いません | どちらとも言えません | そう思います | 非常にそう思います |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **正式な** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **カジュアルな** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **若々しい** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **古風な** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **丁寧な** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **失礼な** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **男らしい** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **女らしい** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **知的な** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **簡単な** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

14. 日本語対応手話に下記の特徴は当てはまると思いますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

| | 全くそう思いません | そう思いません | どちらとも言えません | そう思います | 非常にそう思います |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **正式な** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| **カジュアルな** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| **若々しい** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| **古風な** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| **丁寧な** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| **失礼な** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| **男らしい** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| **女らしい** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| **知的な** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| **簡単な** | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |

Sezione senza titolo

15. 映画やテレビドラマで手話が使われる場面を見る場合、どちらのほうがよく使われると思いますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- ⬭ いつも日本手話
- ⬭ 日本手話のほうが日本語対応手話よりよく使われます
- ⬭ だいたい同じ
- ⬭ 日本語対応手話のほうが日本手話よりよく使われます
- ⬭ いつも日本語対応手話

16. テレビ番組 (ニュース、トークショーなど) で手話が使われる場面を見る場合、どちらのほうがよく使われると思いますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- いつも日本手話
- 日本手話のほうが日本語対応手話よりよく使われます
- だいたい同じ
- 日本語対応手話のほうが日本手話よりよく使われます
- いつも日本語対応手話

17. SNS (インスタグラム、LINEなど) で手話が使われる場面を見る場合、どちらのほうがよく使われると思いますか。 *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- いつも日本手話
- 日本手話のほうが日本語対応手話よりよく使われます
- だいたい同じ
- 日本語対応手話のほうが日本手話よりよく使われます
- いつも日本語対応手話

18. ほかにコメントがありましたら、こちらに書いてください。

調査に参加してくださって、本当にありがとうございました。コメントや質問があれば、こちらのメールアドレスに連絡してください: 872813@stud.unive.it

送信した後、調査を他の人とシェアしてくださったら、本当にありがたいです。

回答を保存するように、［送信］ボタンをクリックしてください。

# APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH



## Questionnaire on Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the usage of Manually Signed Japanese and Japanese Sign Language in the Japanese Deaf community. This study is part of the requirements for obtaining my Master's degree and will be part of my Master's thesis.

You must be over 18 and Deaf, hard of hearing or hearing impaired to participate. There are no audiological requirements to be considered deaf for this study, and both people with and without cochlear implants are welcome to participate.

If you choose to participate, you will fill out a questionnaire comprised of three sections. The study is expected to take approximately 10 minutes.

The data will be collected completely anonymously and in an aggregated form. No personally identifiable information will be collected and the information you choose to provide in this study cannot be connected back to you. The data will processed according to the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679. Information collected for this study may be published anonymously and in an aggregated form.

Researcher: Francesca Lupi, Ca' Foscari University of Venice (872813@stud.unive.it)

Supervisor: Patrick Heinrich, PhD, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

* Indica una domanda obbligatoria

1. Informed consent *

*Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.*

☐ I have read and understand the above consent form. I certify that I am 18 years old or older and agree to participate.

2. Please select your birth year. *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- ~ 1969
- 1970-1979
- 1980-1989
- 1990-1999
- 2000 ~

3. What is your gender *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Altro: ______

4. Which of these terms would you use to describe your identity? Select all that apply. *

*Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.*

- Deaf (in Japanese)
- Deaf (in English)
- Hard of hearing
- Hearing impaired
- Person who cannot hear
- Altro: ______

5. Do you have a cochlear implant? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Yes
- No

6. When did you become Deaf? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- At birth
- As a toddler (up to 3 years old)
- As a child (4-12 years old)
- As a teenager (13-19 years old)
- As an adult (20+ years old)

7. Do you have other Deaf people in your family? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Yes
- No

8. How often do you interact with other Deaf people? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Every day
- Almost every day
- At least once a week
- Less than once a week

Sezione senza titolo

9. How adequate do you think using Japanese Sign Language is in these contexts? (1=not adequate at all, 6=completely adequate) *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **At school/university** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **At work** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **At home** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **With friends** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **With strangers** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

10. How adequate do you think using Manually Signed Japanese is in these contexts? (1=not adequate at all, 6=completely adequate) *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **At school/university** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **At work** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **At home** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **With friends** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **With strangers** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

11. How often do you use Japanese Sign Language? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- ◯ Every day
- ◯ Almost every day
- ◯ At least once a week
- ◯ Less than once a week

12. How often do you use Manually Signed Japanese? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Every day
- Almost every day
- At least once a week
- Less than once a week

13. How much do you agree with attributing the following characteristics to Japanese Sign Language? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Formal** | | | | | |
| **Informal** | | | | | |
| **Youthful** | | | | | |
| **Old-fashioned** | | | | | |
| **Polite** | | | | | |
| **Impolite** | | | | | |
| **Masculine** | | | | | |
| **Feminine** | | | | | |
| **Intellectual** | | | | | |
| **Simple** | | | | | |

14. How much do you agree with attributing the following characteristics to Manually Signed Japanese? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Formal** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **Informal** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **Youthful** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **Old-fashioned** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **Polite** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **Impolite** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **Masculine** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **Feminine** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **Intellectual** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| **Simple** | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

Sezione senza titolo

15. When you see signing used in movies and TV series, what is your impression of how frequently Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese are used? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- ◯ Always Japanese Sign Language
- ◯ Japanese Sign language more often than Manually Signed Japanese
- ◯ More or less the same
- ◯ Manually Signed Japanese more often than Japanese Sign language
- ◯ Always Manually Signed Japanese

16. When you see signing used in TV programs (such as the news or talk shows), what is your impression of how frequently Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese are used? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Always Japanese Sign Language
- Japanese Sign language more often than Manually Signed Japanese
- More or less the same
- Manually Signed Japanese more often than Japanese Sign language
- Always Manually Signed Japanese

17. When you see signing used in Social media (such as Instagram reels and TikToks), what is your impression of how frequently Japanese Sign Language and Manually Signed Japanese are used? *

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Always Japanese Sign Language
- Japanese Sign language more often than Manually Signed Japanese
- More or less the same
- Manually Signed Japanese more often than Japanese Sign language
- Always Manually Signed Japanese

18. If you have any additional comment, please write here.

Thank you for completing the survey. If you have any other comment or question, you can contact the researcher at this address: 872813@stud.unive.it

If you want to share the questionnaire after completing it, it would be extremely helpful.

Please click "Submit" to save your answers.