

KATE NELSON, INISE TAWAKETINI,
RUTH SPENCER, AND DELLA GOSWELL

Isa Lei: Interpreter Training in Fiji

Fiji is a small island nation consisting of over 300 islands scattered over 850 kilometers (528 miles) in the South Pacific Ocean. It is where Melanesia and Polynesia meet. The capital of Fiji is Suva, on the largest island of Viti Levu (see Figure 1). According to the latest government census (2007), Fiji has a population of 827,900, with 473,983 (57%) of indigenous Fijian descent and 311,591 (37%) of Indo-Fijian descent (Fiji Islands Statistics Bureau, 2007). The number of deaf people living in Fiji is not yet determined but is assumed to be approximately 2,000 (Nelson, 2007). Fiji lies to the north of New Zealand and northeast of Australia, and these two developed countries have played a large part in the story of the Deaf community and its language.

The first significant contact Fiji had with Europeans was in the early nineteenth century with the arrival of traders in sandalwood and bêche-de-mer (Geraghty, 2007). They were followed by Christian missionaries from the 1830s who were the first to document local languages. European settlers then introduced commercial agriculture to the islands, and the British colonial administration brought 60,000 Indian indentured laborers to work in sugar plantations between 1879 and 1916 (Tarte, 1982). Their descendants are the basis of the current Indo-Fijian population.

The most powerful Fijian chief in the late nineteenth century was Ratu Seru Cakobau, on the island of Bau. Bauan is still the dominant Fijian

The title of this chapter *Isa Lei*, is the name of a Fijian song often sung at farewells. It signifies sadness because someone is leaving. “Isa Lei” was sung in heartfelt a cappella harmony by the students to the two Australian *kaivalagis* (white foreigners) who came to deliver the intensive final stage of the interpreter training program in August 2006. It was a powerful send-off and a symbolic reminder that there is more to be done to establish and consolidate a sustainable interpreting profession in Fiji.

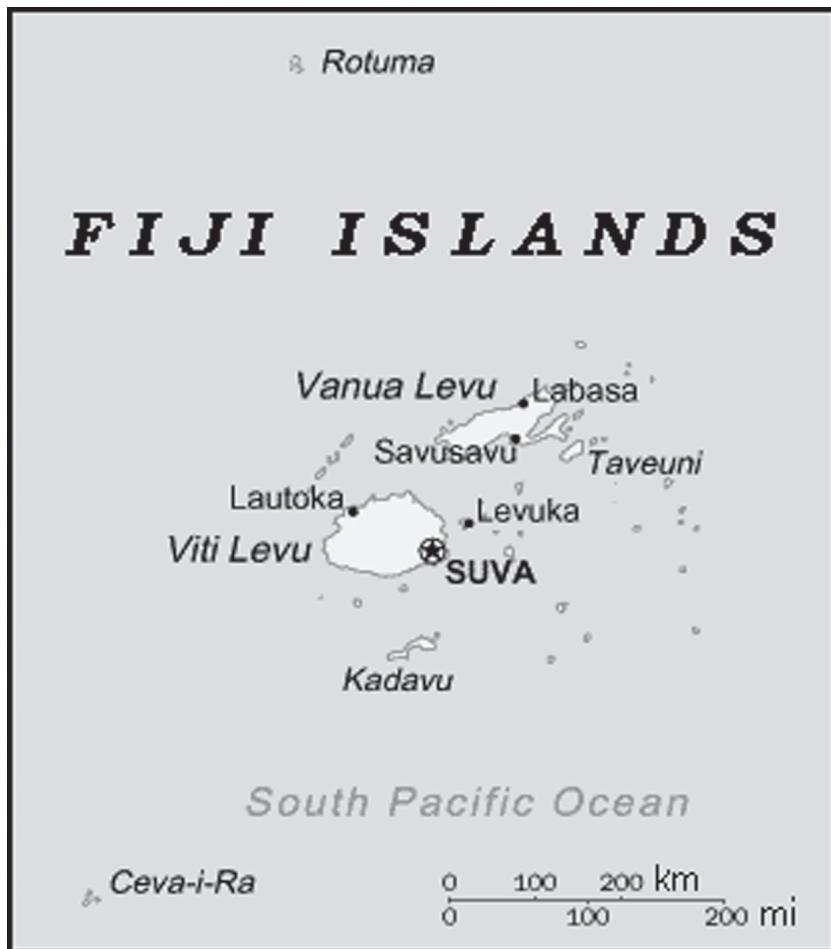


Figure 1. Map of Fiji. Note. Copyright CIA. *The World Fact Book*.

dialect today. Cakobau and other high chiefs voluntarily ceded Fiji to Great Britain in 1874. It became a British colony with English as the official language. Fiji emerged as an independent dominion in 1970, and became a republic in 1987.

As a consequence of colonization and the indentured Indian migration, Fiji now has three official languages: Fijian (Bauan), Hindustani (Fiji Hindi) and English. Most Fiji Islanders have either Fijian (Bauan or other dialects) or Fiji Hindi as their first language, however English maintains

a privileged position as the language of administration and education (Mangubhal & Mugler, 2006).

Fiji is effectively the hub of the South Pacific, home to the headquarters of many regional organizations. The University of the South Pacific has its largest campus in Suva. Pacific islander people are mobile and need to move to where the work is in order to support their families and communities, so Fiji attracts a mix of Pacific cultures. This diversity is reflected in the demography of the Deaf community, which includes Fijians and Indo-Fijians, as well as people from Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

The colonial legacy of *kaivalagi* dominance, the introduction of Christianity (53% of the population is Christian), the mix of races, the movement of people, and the privileged status of English in society, are all factors which have shaped the Fiji Deaf community and its interpreting needs.

DEAF EDUCATION

In many places around the world, Deaf communities have grown out of the contact and language exposure provided by residential deaf schools (Johnston, 1989). More recently, this pattern has been borne out in Nicaragua, where the first deaf school became the platform for the development of Nicaraguan Sign Language and a local Deaf community (Senghas & Kegl, 1994). From 1968, deaf children in Fiji were sent to “special schools” catering to children with a broad range of disabilities. Deaf children were mainstreamed with other “disabled” children, rather than having a deaf-specific educational program. These conditions were not a catalyst for the creation of a Deaf community or the consolidation of a signed language.

In 1966, the Fiji Crippled Children’s Society asked for assistance regarding the education of deaf children. The New Zealand Education Department subsequently conducted a survey of Fiji, visiting educational facilities and meeting people with disabilities. The survey concluded that “the problem of deafness in Fiji, with particular reference to the younger age groups, was severe” (Hilton, 1972, p. 1).

Frank Hilton came to Fiji from Australia in 1967, to be head teacher of the Suva Crippled Children’s School. He initiated a pilot scheme to teach the “hearing handicapped children” separately (Hilton, 1972). Oralism was the method of instruction. Hilton noted that the children did

use signs but the signing was esoteric; that the children themselves “made it.” There was no standardized signing system in those days (Hilton, 2007). Interviews with older deaf people who were ex-pupils of the school reveal that when they were together at playtime or outside of school, they did use signs: a mixture of home signs and mime, combined with mouthing of English, Fijian, or Hindi words (Nelson, 2007). A hostel was set up by the school in 1970 to cater for children who lived outside Suva, however it had only five beds for deaf children, so it did not have the critical mass to function as a language hot-house as with other residential schools.

In the early 1980s, teachers of the deaf in Fiji undertook training in Australia, studying at the State College of Victoria (now Melbourne University). They returned with a new signing system: Australasian Signed English (Hilton, 2007). Australasian Signed English (ASE) is not the natural language of the signing Deaf community in Australia; that language is Australian Sign Language (Auslan). ASE follows the grammatical rules of English and is a composite of Auslan signs and contrived signs (Johnston, 1989). The introduction of ASE and its *Dictionary of Australasian Signs for Communication with the Deaf* (Jeanes & Reynolds, 1982) had a huge impact on the development of Fiji Sign Language. Just as spoken English has been imposed as the language of instruction in mainstream Fiji education, ASE signs have been used to teach English to deaf students, whose mother tongue, if any, is usually Fijian or Fiji-Hindi.

Most Fiji islanders’ social lives are heavily immersed in family, church, and sporting activities. At this time, there were no extracurricular activities or organized groups for deaf people beyond school, so deaf people only socialized with close friends in isolated pockets. Ex-students of the school state that there was shame associated with being seen in public as a deaf person, using sign language (Nelson, 2007). After deaf children left school, they tended to go straight back to their family, village, or island. Many of the Indo-Fijian deaf children subsequently emigrated with their families to America or New Zealand (Hilton, 2007).

Sign Language Development

Vivienne Harland’s work in Fiji has had a big impact on the consolidation of the Deaf community in Suva and beyond. Harland, who became deaf as a child, came from New Zealand to work as a missionary with the Gospel Church in Fiji in the 1970s. She returned to New Zealand in the early 1980s and, after losing further hearing, decided to learn to sign. At

the Christchurch Deaf Club she learned ASE. When she returned to Fiji in 1991, she combined her missionary work with her sign communication skills and established the Christian Fellowship for the Deaf (CFD). The CFD provided Bible study classes, and organized sporting groups and annual camps; creating places and events where deaf people could meet. This social infrastructure supported further growth of the Deaf community and, indirectly, Fiji Sign Language (FJSL). It was also a vehicle for the expanded formal usage of ASE in Fiji. Harland offered to teach Bible classes at the Hilton Special School (formerly the Suva Crippled Children's School). She recalls that she was specifically asked to use only ASE, and not the "deaf way of signing" (Harland, 2007).

Harland's contacts with the American-based Christian Mission for the Deaf located Matthew Adedeji from Nigeria, who came to Fiji from 1997 to 2000. He worked with the CFD, leading Bible classes, preaching, and evangelizing. On his arrival in Fiji, Adedeji was using Nigerian Sign Language (NSI). Due to earlier American missionary influences in Nigeria, NSI derives from a blend of American Signed Exact English (SEE) and American Sign Language (ASL), with local Nigerian and Ghanaian signs. Adedeji then had to learn both ASE and what was then a nascent FJSL.

Seeing Fiji delegates at the World Federation of the Deaf Congress in Madrid in 2007, Adedeji noted the more localized form of FJSL that has emerged even in the 7 years since he left Fiji (Adedeji, 2007). As with the evolution of signed languages generally, once the framework of a Deaf community in Fiji started to form, the development of FJSL escalated.

INTERPRETING ROOTS

The first attempts at public interpreting began in the 1990s at the Gospel church in Suva. Harland acted as the interpreter in regular services, speechreading the pastor's English, and passing the message on in ASE. At that time, interpreters sat alongside the deaf members of the congregation, rather than standing adjacent to the speaker, as is now the norm. The practice of deaf people interpreting for other deaf people is common in many Deaf communities, and provided the platform on which the emergent profession of deaf relay interpreting is based (Forestal, 2005).

When Adedeji arrived, Harland was working with a local interpreter, Tina Mareko, in a voluntary capacity for the church. Adedeji observed that both Harland and Mareko used ASE when they signed, and that less than half of the message was understood by the deaf audience (Adedeji, 2007).

Although he did not have the job of training interpreters, he urged the interpreters to use whatever it took to get the message across to deaf people and to go beyond the limits of ASE.

In the late 1990s, Adedeji was instrumental in setting up the Gospel School for the Deaf and in 1999 another Nigerian deaf man, Wale Alade, was recruited as head teacher of the school. Alade arrived with his hearing wife, Modupe Alade, who also acted as his interpreter. He had become deaf at fifteen, was university educated, and fluent in NSI, SEE, and written and spoken English. When he first arrived in Fiji, he noted that:

What I saw then was the imposition of Signed Exact English (SEE) rather than the evolution of NATURAL SIGN language. But a closer look then also revealed a dichotomy within the Deaf community itself in which the more able imposed strict rules to the rest on how they should sign. So we have a sort of “assumed” hierarchy of language competence and language use even among the deaf. My view was, the less educated expressed themselves more fluently in their natural (broke, broke language) deaf language, than the more educated who embodied the SEE rigid structure of expressing themselves. (Alade, 2007)

Despite Alade’s insights, and his encouragement to break away from English syntax in signing, signed English forms were then, and still are, widely considered to be “proper” signing by deaf people, teachers of the deaf, and interpreters in Fiji. FJSL is still called “broke broke English” by many deaf people, and has not been fully accepted as a legitimate public communication form because it is regarded as a manual version of Fiji English, also perceived as inferior in the wider community.¹ Ironically, Alade’s own interpreting needs reinforced this view of FJSL inferiority. His bilingual competence allowed him to follow signed transliterations of spoken English, which then became a model for interpreting practice:

I preferred simultaneous interpreting in order for me to trail the thought flow of the speaker and in some situations to use similar technical language in my reponse. I felt my position and status in some situations needed to be acknowledged. And for these reasons I needed a literal interpretation. (Alade, 2007)

During Alade’s stay in Fiji, he was the main client for all interpreting work, so deaf people and interpreters assumed that his preferred signing

1. Since the recent publication of *The Macquarie Dictionary of English for the Fiji Islands* (Mugler, Geraghty, & Tent, 2006), the written form of Fiji English has been legitimized. Recognition of Fiji Hindi as it is spoken and written by the Indians who live in Fiji remains an ongoing process.

mode was appropriate for all interpreting situations. The practice of interpreting for Alade in the literal, simultaneous manner was inadvertently carried over into all interpreting practice after he left in 2003.

Interestingly, Alade's wife, Modupe, provided a more effective model of interpreting, which was acknowledged at the time. For example, in 2000, students from Gospel School for the Deaf attended the annual National Disability Games, a sporting competition for all the special schools in Fiji. A teacher from Hilton Special School (previously Suva Crippled Children's School) was appointed as the interpreter for the day, but she was not making herself understood. Modupe Alade spontaneously stood up and began to interpret as well. This was the first time FJSL had been seen in a public place, and every deaf student was watching her instead of the other interpreter. Her efforts were acknowledged by the Ministry of Education on the day. Wale Alade considers it a breakthrough in interpreting practice:

My sole objective from that moment was for the hearing teachers at the GSD (Gospel School for the Deaf) to know that at such an event, they constituted the EARS of deaf people and they must let the deaf know everything that was said or sounded around even if it did not relate to the main events. I then developed the habit of using different teachers at different events and at the end of each day I often gave on-the-spot analysis of their performance. (Alade, 2007)

Alade's comment about interpreters being the "ears" (but not the mouths) of deaf people, reflects a somewhat patronizing idea of the interpreting role, prevalent in the early days of the profession when religious and other charitable organizations were the main service providers. It denotes a one-way information exchange: from the dominant spoken language to the deaf person, rather than a more balanced and empowering approach. This benevolent advocacy or "helper" model has been noted as a preprofessional stage in many developed countries as well, including the United States (Sanderson & MacIntyre, 1995) and Australia and New Zealand (Napier, McKee, & Goswell, 2006).

Despite Modupe Alade's interpreting competence and role-modeling, in the absence of a teaching or mentoring framework, her skills were not sufficiently understood or emulated by the majority of the Fiji interpreters at the time. However, a few interpreters did take up some of her ideas, and they began to stand in a more prominent position: up the front and next to the speaker. They also adopted the strategy of working in pairs when church interpreting, using prompts to assist their team member.

Deaf people began to request the services of the teachers from the Gospel School for the Deaf as interpreters (whose signing was seen as

closer to FJSL thanks to Wale Alade's influence) rather than their ASE counterparts at Hilton Special School. As the demand for interpreters grew, Alade was able to start lobbying for interpreters to be paid: "It got to a situation where I asked the service provider to give a stipend to the interpreter. The Human Rights Commission and the Disabled People's organisation followed the trend and started allocating a budget for interpreters" (Alade, 2007).

EMERGING DEAF LEADERSHIP AND ITS EFFECT ON INTERPRETING

A young deaf leader, Serevi Rokotuibau, began working as a volunteer teacher's aide at Hilton Special School (HSS) in 1997. He was the chairperson of the Suva Support Group for the Deaf, established under HSS to teach sign language and English classes. In 1999, the Suva Support Group sponsored Rokotuibau's attendance at the World Federation of the Deaf congress in Brisbane, Australia. In 2000, the Suva Support Group sent him to the Asia Pacific Deaf leadership training program run by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Both these events opened up the "deaf world" to him (Rokotuibau, 2007). He has since graduated as a teacher, and in 2002, was appointed the first deaf teacher at HSS.

In 2002, Rokotuibau worked with Alade to establish the Fiji Association of the Deaf (FAD), with an all-deaf executive. Rokotuibau became President of FAD, the Suva Support Group closed, and FAD took over the work of providing sign language and English classes. From this time onward, local deaf people like Rokotuibau, who were now in more prominent leadership positions, started working with interpreters in an official capacity.

In 2005, with help from the Fiji Disabled People's Association, a team of 16 people participated in the Deaflympics in Melbourne, Australia. Two interpreters were part of that team: Tina Mareko and Inise Tawaketini. This was a significant achievement for FAD and its leadership—the first time that Fiji was represented at the Deaflympics, and the first time any FJSL interpreters were exposed to Signed Language Interpreting (SLI) at an international level.

A New *Kaivalagi* Arrives

In 2004, Ruth Spencer, a qualified New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) interpreter, arrived to work as a volunteer with the Harland Hostel.

Vivienne Harland had converted her home into a hostel for the children attending the Gospel School for the Deaf and employed both deaf and hearing staff to run the hostel. Children from Kiribati, Vanuatu, and Nauru were coming to Fiji to attend the school, as well as children from other parts of Fiji.

When she first arrived, Spencer observed that deaf people would use FJSL when chatting informally among themselves, but revert to ASE in formal situations. She noticed that the sign language interpreters at church were predominantly using ASE and that they looked self-conscious when standing up the front, used a small signing space, and showed no grammatical facial expression. They stood at the side of the room rather than next to the speaker, and in meetings, sat in the same space as the deaf people rather than at the front of the room.

As an outsider, Spencer needed to be cautious about initiating change. Over time she modeled different interpreter behaviors, which were actually in-line with strategies that Modupe Alade had introduced beforehand. Spencer started standing at the front of the room next to the speaker and incorporated more FJSL grammar into her signing, using nonmanual features, productive (depicting) signs, and constructed action and dialogue. Her English-to-FJSL interpreting style, although still influenced by NZSL, was consequently more “free” and natural than the “literal” English-based form Wale Alade had unwittingly instigated. In response, many deaf people and other interpreters thought that she was using mime rather than signing, but despite the NZSL interference, found her interpretations easier to understand than the local ASE-based practice. Spencer worked in Fiji until 2007.

Despite best intentions to the contrary, a few NZSL signs are now used by the Deaf community, as a legacy of Spencer’s work. It is inevitable that in a small developing Deaf community, *kaivalagis* (white foreigners) who come to live and work in Fiji will, inadvertently or otherwise, influence FJSL with the signed languages and systems they have brought with them. Harland and the teachers of the deaf have imported ASE; Adedeji and Alade have introduced aspects of SEE/ASL-based NSI; and now there is a NZSL layer. Most of these influences have originated in Suva, which in turn influences the signing in other Fiji towns and islands.

INTERPRETER TRAINING IN FIJI

In Fiji there is no spoken language interpreting profession. There is no training, association, or register of interpreters for any language. However,

“interpreters” are used in court, parliament, and for police matters. Those who interpret in court are as designated “court clerks” and paid very little. Paul Geraghty, linguist and associate professor at the University of the South Pacific, states that they are people with minimal education who were given the jobs by relatives who are magistrates, judges, or working in some capacity in the system (Geraghty, 2007). In this context, the provision of a training program for sign language interpreters in Fiji is particularly significant.

Prior to the commencement of the training course in 2006, sign language interpreters in Fiji have generally been unaware of, and unaccountable for, the quality of their interpreting output. Interpreters would often make up signs as they worked, and this practice has been accepted by deaf people. The Deaf community has also never challenged the practice of interpreters answering questions on an individual’s behalf and making decisions for their clients. This is not unusual in a context where interpreting is preprofessional, still “helper” oriented, and where the sign language is still emerging with a lexicon that is not yet standardized or large enough to accommodate a broad range of concepts. A compounding factor is the Fiji cultural norm of not confronting or criticizing others directly.

FAD recognized the need to document FJSL and to improve the quality of interpreting generally. In 2004–05, FAD applied for an Australian Volunteer International placement and funds to create a dictionary and provide interpreter training. Kate Nelson, deaf and Fiji-born (although still regarded as a *kaivalagi* because of her Australian background), was recruited to take up the placement in 2005. When Nelson arrived, there was only one full-time Fijian interpreter, Rita Miller, working solo at the Gospel High School. Miller was interpreting for deaf students in their 1st year of high school, unsupervised, and remunerated from donations.

2006 was a landmark year in terms of the recognition and development of the Deaf community and the FJSL interpreting profession:

- FAD received a grant to employ five full-time interpreters at two Suva high schools: Gospel High School and Marist Brothers High School. Nelson and Spencer were enlisted to establish a monitoring and supervision system; the first time there had been any monitoring or supervision of interpreters in Fiji.
- Production commenced on the FJSL dictionary.
- FAD set up an interpreter committee to help monitor interpreting activities and work toward setting up an interpreting association.
- Two FJSL interpreters, Inise Tawaketini and Claudette Wilson, were

sponsored to attend the Sign Language Interpreters Association of New Zealand (SLIANZ) annual conference.

- Nelson and Spencer recruited students and conducted the first interpreter training course.

THE 2006 INTERPRETER TRAINING COURSE— A CASE STUDY

The first sign language interpreter training course in Fiji ran for approximately 6 months. Classes were held once a week for 2 hours from March to August 2006. Nelson and Spencer were the principal teachers for the weekly classes, with a guest lecture from Hayley Best, a visiting New Zealand interpreter. Toward the end of the course, Della Goswell and Jemina Napier, interpreter trainers from Australia, taught a 6-day intensive component. The course had two assessments, and the graduation was held in September. Of the 25 students who enrolled, 17 graduated.

Most of the funding for the training came from AusAID (the Australian government's international development agency) and NZAID (New Zealand's international aid and development agency). This funding enabled the students to attend without cost.

Needs Analysis

As with any first-time course, it was important to determine the needs of the group as a starting point. For a program taught by kaivalagis, it was even more critical to try and frame the content and process of teaching to the local context: linguistically, culturally, and politically. Nelson, living and working in Fiji for a year prior to the start of the course, had time to observe the situation in Fiji with regard to interpreter competencies and practice. She liaised with Goswell and Napier on the needs analysis, to ensure that the intensive stage of the course would also be tailored to meet the needs of the Fiji context.

The initiative for the course came from FAD, rather than from interpreters themselves; FAD felt that the interpreters needed more skills development. This externally driven approach to training can produce a defensive response, so Nelson took time to talk with the interpreters and get them onboard, to ensure that the training was something they wanted to do. The majority agreed and expressed interest, however, there was some resistance from the interpreters working at the high school, who were compelled to attend as part of their employment contracts.

The class demographic profile was as follows:

- The gender balance was 22 females and 3 males—a typical ratio for sign language interpreters in many countries.
- The majority of students had Fijian as their 1st language, with English as a second language, and FJSL as their 3rd language. Some of the students also spoke Hindi and Tuvaluan.
- None of the students were native signers (i.e., children of deaf adults), which is unusual for the first cohort of sign language interpreters compared with other more developed countries. This probably reflects the relatively recent emergence of the Deaf community and FJSL, and consequently limited opportunities for signing deaf adults to have partnered and reared children by this time.
- Most students had graduated from high school.
- Most students were working full time as teachers at either Hilton Special School or Gospel School for the Deaf.
- Only 10 students had regular interpreting experience to draw on, although most of the other students had some voluntary interpreting work experience in a school or church context.

The first challenge was to find appropriate teaching resources. Nothing specifically Fiji-oriented has been created, so Nelson initially sourced curriculum material from the U.S., drawing on: *Sign Language Interpreting: A Basic Resource Book* (Solow, 2000), *Reading Between the Signs: Intercultural Communication for Sign Language Interpreters* (Mindess, 2004), and *Reading Between the Signs Workbook: A Cultural Guide for Sign Language Students and Interpreters* (Mindess, 2004). Soon after the course started, another, more locally relevant, interpreting text became available: *Sign Language Interpreting: Theory and Practice in Australia and New Zealand* (Napier, McKee, & Goswell, 2006). This was provided to all students as a textbook.

The Weekly Classes

Nelson and Spencer conducted the course predominantly in English with some FJSL instruction. They focused on topics that Nelson had seen as gaps in the current knowledge base, so the course content included:

- Deaf culture—a new concept to the students (and the Deaf community)—and the students' role in mediating between cultures
- Basic FJSL linguistics—its legitimacy as a language still being a novel idea

- The use of FJSL versus ASE in interpreting
- Church interpreting and the translation of religious songs (as a key context for the Deaf community and the interpreters in Fiji).

From the start, the teachers were presented with a number of pedagogical challenges. The first was linguistic—they had unconsciously assumed a level of English fluency and literacy for the group that many of the students struggled to meet. The classes and handouts were presented in English, and the textbook was in written English, from a non-Fiji perspective, so the information was not optimally accessible.

Another challenge was their perceived credibility as teachers and practitioners. Spencer is a qualified and experienced interpreter, but had not trained interpreters before; Nelson has experience teaching Auslan but is not a trained interpreter. In addition, one legacy of colonization in Fiji is that local people can be sensitive to being told what to do or what is right by *kaivalagis*. Both teachers noticed that the high school interpreters, who had been required to attend the training, seemed particularly resistant to their teaching approach and ideas.

Nelson and Spencer initially chose a lecture format as the main delivery style, with the intention of getting as much information across to the students as possible in a short period of time. They planned to present theoretical ideas first, as a foundation for the later, intensive practical stage taught by the more experienced practitioners. In the context of an educational culture that does not encourage students to ask questions of their teachers, the noninteractive teacher-centered format limited class participation and learning, with only the most experienced and assertive students asking questions. In response to what they realized was a restrictive learning environment, Nelson and Spencer subsequently expanded the range of class activities, with more group work and practical tasks, prior to the intensive phase.

The 6-Day Intensive

Goswell and Napier were accorded much respect as overseas visitors. FAD had highlighted the importance of the opportunity for the students, and as two of the authors of the textbook, they had immediate cachet. This meant that expectations were high, and so were their responsibilities. It was their task to make the theory of the preceding coursework “real.” In the limited timeframe of 6 days, they needed to engage with the group immediately and to gauge what teaching/learning strategies were working

best. As Garrison and Archer (2000), Winston (2005), and others suggest, they used an interactive, student-centered collaborative teaching style to draw students into discussion and to create an environment safe enough for the students to take risks.

After an updated needs analysis with the group, the topics delivered were a mix of language-focused content and behavior-based concepts. Initially, the teachers aimed to increase the students' metalinguistic awareness of two of their interpreting languages—FJSL and English—and to introduce feedback techniques. The concepts of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, the role and ethics of an interpreter, and team interpreting strategies were introduced by using role-plays. The intensive training was aimed at consolidating and building on the earlier class material, by working experientially: from practice back to theory. Many of the teaching strategies were part of any interpreter trainer's repertoire and included:

- Expanding the students' analytical frameworks so that they were better able to see and describe features of the languages they were working between (FJSL in particular), and the roles they were implicitly taking on.
- Frequent analysis of students' interpretations, modeled by the teachers and then practiced with peers. This was initially done live in small groups and then later on video. The aim was to develop feedback skills that were specific as well as constructive (a technique they needed to develop early so that it could be sustained beyond the course).
- A staged approach to contributing to the class discussion, and interpreting in front of peers—the students initially worked in pairs, then in small groups, and finally in large groups in order to develop confidence and mutual trust.
- Role-plays using a range of prominent local deaf people, so that students were practicing with the clients they would eventually work with. These deaf guest teachers were also filmed, to create sample monologic texts as resources for later FJSL analysis, and as source texts for interpreter practice. Indirectly this also had the benefit of exposing some of the Deaf community leaders to concepts and strategies that the students were learning.
- Overtly modeling interpreting behaviors—often demonstrating inappropriate practice in contrast to best-practice techniques.
- Showing video examples of competent signed language interpreters working in other places in the world—to broadly contextualize the Fiji

interpreters' work. This revealed linguistic similarities across signed languages and dilemmas that all interpreters face.

Goswell and Napier also faced pedagogical challenges, usually involving cultural sensitivities. Conscious of their capacity as *kaivalagis* to inadvertently introduce more "foreign" signs, they tried as far as possible to use FJSL signs in their teaching and encouraged FJSL corrections from the other teachers and the students. The teachers also needed to be careful in their use of the words "Fiji" and "Fijian"—Fijian refers to the indigenous people of Fiji only and does not include the Indo-Fijians. The sign language has therefore been called Fiji Sign Language, rather than Fijian Sign Language, as an inclusive acknowledgement of its use by the wide range of deaf people living in Fiji.

In some of the devised role-plays, Goswell and Napier acted as hearing professionals, but their characterization was based on Australian norms, and the students sometimes became confused. After feedback and modeling from the students, the role-plays were adapted to be more realistic of Fiji discourse patterns, and therefore more effective. For example, in Fiji, doctors do not typically explain a diagnosis of an illness; rather, they ask questions of the patient and then hand over a written prescription. In Australia, as in many other Western countries, patients expect an explanation of what is wrong with them and why any medication is being prescribed. It is also perfectly acceptable to ask questions of the doctor.

Further role-play scenarios needed to be devised around school and church settings once it became clear that these were the contexts most familiar to the group, and the most common venues for their interpreting work. The teachers also needed to ensure that their language use in the role-plays and the classroom was moderate; Fiji society is very conservative, and colorful language is not acceptable in public, even in jest. (Australian culture, for instance, is more accepting of the use of certain swear words in public and formal domains.)

It was easy to assume that current models of interpreting appropriate to the Deaf communities in developed countries would automatically apply in Fiji. Despite legislative human rights entitlements, deaf people have had little access to education or interpreters, and still look to hearing people for guidance and answers when dealing with the wider community, so the "helper" paradigm often makes more sense than a bilingual-bicultural mediator. Students were encouraged to think about which model could be used and when, given their specific cultural circumstances, and to be aware

of the limitations of the helper framework rather than dismissing it all together (Solow, 2000).

Collaborative problem-solving of cross-cultural issues as they arose was an empowering process for the students, and a learning opportunity for the teachers. The students responded very well to the intensive training, gaining confidence and insights into their interpreting practice day by day. Their acquired knowledge needed to be shared with the Deaf community—a key stakeholder in the provision and outcomes of the training. To this end, a workshop was held during the intensive course, aimed at demonstrating some of the ideas and skills being taught, and gauging community response, with the interpreter/deaf client relationship as the main theme.

Deaf Community Workshop

Approximately 40 deaf people attended the workshop, mostly from Suva, but encouragingly also from outlying areas; some had traveled overnight to get there. Goswell and Napier facilitated the workshop using their basic FJSL with lots of gesture and mime. It was framed as a series of wrong-way/right-way vignettes, with local Deaf community leaders (many of whom had been involved in the earlier role-plays), interpreting students, and the teachers—all acting out scenarios. The actors first demonstrated overtly inappropriate interpreter (or deaf client) behaviors, and the audience was asked to comment on what was wrong and what alternatives there might be. The actors then presented the co-created improved version. After the scenarios, a question-and-answer session was opened up. The format of the workshop was accessible and entertaining, and the issues generated lots of discussion among the Deaf community members. They were able to meet and evaluate the interpreter trainers and their ideas.

One best-practice concept that did not meet with unanimous approval was the suggestion that interpreters (and deaf presenters) wear plain contrasting clothing to highlight their signing, especially in large public forums. Many of the deaf men wear *bula* shirts, which have large colorful floral designs, and saw no reason to discontinue that proud cultural tradition; the Deaf community was left to continue that discussion.

Training Outcomes

Feedback from the students at the end of the course was overwhelmingly positive; each of them was enthusiastic about the experience, and was able

to pinpoint skills and knowledge that they had acquired. Some of the interpreters in the group already had innate competencies in-line with the standards of professional interpreters in Australia and New Zealand, and they gained more confidence along with more skills. As trainers, it was rewarding to see such growth and awareness in such a short time, however, therein lies the danger: how to sustain the momentum once the training has ceased and the trainers have gone? As an attempt to address this issue, the final topic in the intensive course was entitled: Where to from here?

All of the teachers involved in the training program made concerted efforts to create resources for the group while they were in Fiji and to send further materials once they had returned home. However, it became clear that the main imperative was to support the interpreters as a functional group, with access to further development opportunities in the longer term. This initially requires local leadership with continued outside support.

Inise Tawaketini, one of the students from the course (and an author of this chapter), worked with Spencer before she returned to New Zealand in 2007, delivering a 2-week interpreter training course tailored for the interpreters working in the high schools. She has now taken on the role of local trainer for further skills development of the Fiji group. As a result of the continued contact between Fiji and Australian interpreters, Tawaketini was one of two representatives from Fiji sponsored to present at the Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ASLIA) national conference in Sydney in 2007. The Fiji interpreter group has now also been connected with the Australasia/Oceania region of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI). It is hoped that the group's leadership and contacts will enable continued development of interpreter training and practice in Fiji.

CONCLUSION

For better or worse, four decades of kaivalagi influence have made a significant impact on the development of Fiji Sign Language, the formation of the Deaf community, and the work of FJSL interpreters. As a result, deaf people in Fiji, and the interpreters working with them, are dealing with a still-evolving local signed language, in the context of a range of local and imported spoken languages.

Only since 2004 have Fiji deaf people had the opportunity to visit other countries, to acquire skills for themselves, and to bring these insights and

capacity back to their community. The group of FJSL interpreters is also only just starting to develop their skills base from within: the only approach that is sustainable in the longer term.

In the meantime, the lessons learned from the recent experience of the Australian and New Zealand interpreter trainers are worth documenting and building upon. There are many developments in sign language interpreter practice internationally, which are worth sharing. As long as cultural differences are respected and accommodated, there is still value in bringing appropriate outside expertise to developing countries like Fiji, if it is requested.

“Isa Lei” was sung to the kaivalagis in sad farewell at the end of the 2006 intensive training course, at a significant time in the short history of the Deaf community in Fiji. Alongside that initial disappointment there is also hope that the momentum generated by the course, and the contacts that have been established in its aftermath, can feed into and encourage further growth and empowerment for deaf people in Fiji and the interpreters who work with them.

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Training of Sign Language Interpreters in Japan: Achievements and Challenges

IN ORDER to discuss how sign language interpreter training began in Japan, we will provide a historical context. The training of sign language interpreters by deaf people in Japan did not start with a clear intention. Things started to change in 1963 when a citizens' volunteer group, which called themselves *Mimizuku* (long-eared owl), began meeting regularly. Their aim was to learn sign language, to be friends with deaf people and participate in their activities, and to build a better society. They did not, however, begin learning sign language in order to become sign language interpreters.

Learning to sign and learning to become a sign language interpreter is a process that requires hard work over a long period of time. In many countries, teachers in schools for the deaf and hearing children of deaf parents ended up becoming interpreters based on their sign language ability. Although they had developed their sign language abilities either naturally or through dedicated effort, they did not see themselves as interpreters in the professional sense. This was partly due to the discriminatory customs and views against people with disabilities in general at that time. As a result, a developed nation like Japan had been without interpreters for a long time. However, *Mimizuku's* ideals of equality and full participation in society were a good starting point for sign language interpreter training.

Until the 1950s, deaf people and teachers from deaf schools, with the aid of local groups such as the Lions Club, held public classes and basic workshops for bus guides in several parts of Japan. However, these programs were only offered for a short time. Their aim was not to train interpreters; it was to help hearing people learn about sign language. Because the time frame was short, it was seen as a starting point, rather than a

chance to master the language. Either way, no sign language interpreters grew out of these programs. But, meeting with deaf people and joining in their activities gave students the opportunity to naturally build communication skills over time.

The Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD), especially its Youth Department, took the opportunity to give their full support to the newly emerging Mimizuku group. Among others helping the circle develop were Ito Shunsuke (a teacher at the local deaf school and a sign language interpreter) and Kono Yoshikazu (a hearing person with deaf parents). Shunsuke understood the significance of defending deaf people's rights. Later, an organized group of sign language interpreters appeared for the first time in Japan. They were members of Mimizuku, who had been well trained as interpreters. This experience in Kyoto quickly spread to all parts of Japan with the support of the Youth Department of the JFD. These groups were developing fast and getting a lot of media attention. In time, these volunteer groups (called sign language circles though their particular names varied) emerged all over Japan. Among the active members of the JDF-Youth Department in those days was Ando Toyoki, current president of the JDF; Takada Eiichi, former JDF president; Matsumoto Masayuki, former JDF vice president; Itabashi Masakuni; Kawai Yousuke; and many others who would later become central figures in the history of the Japanese Deaf movement.

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER TRAINING

The JDF is a national body of deaf people reorganized after World War II. It is a democratic organization with the aims of independence and autonomy for deaf people. It has outlived the prewar subordinate status of being controlled by the administrators of deaf schools.

After the war, JDF demanded a state-funded official sign language interpreting (SLI) system and the building of centers for deaf people in their local communities. But in a society still full of discriminatory customs and views against people with disabilities in general, the government granted neither of the demands.

The national and local governments did not take JDF and its local chapters seriously and responded negatively as follows: "In deaf schools you are taught spoken Japanese and teaching in sign language is not allowed, much less sign language interpreting. You were taught in deaf schools to read lips and you can communicate by exchanging written notes."

The appearance of Mimizuku and the spread of other sign language circles changed that trend. By the late 1960s, hearing people who had learned to sign in these groups became volunteer interpreters and developed their activities nationwide. This connected the activities of sign language circles and the development of volunteer SLI.

The demands of deaf people and the achievements of the interpreters led to a stronger grassroots movement to lobby the national and local governments for a SLI system. Governments who had found it easy to ignore the demands of deaf people now had to respond to hearing activists and increased media attention as well.

As a result, the Ministry of Health researched the situation in Kyoto. In 1970, a training program for sign language volunteers, the Sign Language Volunteers Project, began. They were called volunteers, but in reality this was the first system of government-funded training of sign language interpreters. Regional governments carried out these public sign language classes with 50% funding from the national government. At that time, the classes were not for training interpreters. The goal was to train "hearing volunteers able to communicate with deaf people through sign language."

In Japan at that time, the government had little experience in training professionals in the field of social welfare, such as sign language interpreters. The national government failed to specify important information for the project, such as training levels, curriculum, textbooks, and so forth. It also provided insufficient funding to the regional governments. As a result, the quality and content of the training varied from area to area.

The regional governments were responsible for these projects. They worked with regional deaf organizations, which used local deaf members and interpreters to teach the classes. However, the quality of training varied due to the knowledge and skills of the teachers. So, teacher training became a big issue for a national training system. While this project created a lot of publicity about sign language, it was not successful from an interpreter training standpoint.

Employment and Dispatch Projects Begin

The government established two more projects to utilize people who had completed the volunteer classes which began in 1970:

Project 1: Sign Language Interpreter Placement Project (1973)

Project 2: Sign Language Volunteer Dispatch Project (1976)

The regional government ran both of these projects with 50% funding from the national government. Project 1 placed sign language volunteers in social welfare offices to interpret when deaf people visited. Project 2 was created to register and send sign language volunteers to hospitals, workplaces, and schools when deaf people needed interpreting.

In the 1970s, besides these two projects, some cities and towns began to employ interpreters as full-time workers. Local deaf organizations also established systems for dispatching interpreters to meet the local demands. Therefore, more and more interpreting services became available.

At present, there are 47 prefectures and 15 designated major cities in Japan. Interpreters are dispatched from offices or specialized centers in about 40 of these areas nationwide. However, there are few full-time interpreters. Most interpreters are housewives or have unrelated full-time employment.

TRAINING SIGNED AND SPOKEN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS IN JAPAN

In Japan, spoken language translators and interpreters are trained in colleges, junior colleges, vocational schools, and so forth. These courses are part of foreign language education and function between different languages. Sign language interpreters, however, are trained as part of social welfare programs. They are seen more as social welfare workers than language interpreters. Deaf people are recognized more for their disability than as language users.

Therefore there are no schools with spoken language translator and/or interpreter training courses that regard sign language as a language and provide sign language interpreter training. Sign language interpreters are trained in social welfare vocational schools. Sign language interpreting services are funded from social welfare budgets for people with disabilities, and dispatched by organizations supporting people with disabilities.

Up until about 10 years ago, there had been no connection between spoken language interpreter training and sign language interpreter training. Recently, attitudes to legal interpreting have provided an opportunity for the exchange of views between spoken and sign language interpreters.

TRAINING SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In 1990, The National Rehabilitation School offered the first sign language interpreter training course at a higher education institution in Japan.

The 2-year (40-student) course is available to high school graduates. Knowledge of sign language is not compulsory at admission, and during the 2-year period students receive interpreting training. At the end of the course, they are expected to be ready to take the National Sign Language Interpreters Certification (to be discussed later). However, they must pass a final examination.

Most of the graduates hope to work as sign language interpreters, but they do not have a good chance of putting their training into practice since there are not enough job opportunities.

Today, another private college offers a 4-year course, and a private vocational school provides a 2-year (30-student) course. The curriculum and teaching methods in these courses vary. In the future, as the number of training courses increase, unifying the content and method of certification will be essential.

As mentioned, there is a lack of job opportunities for graduates as professional interpreters. This is one of the central reasons why the number of courses at higher education institutions is relatively small. For interpreter training to develop, the government must create more job opportunities for graduates.

TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR INTERPRETERS

Despite the beginning of higher education courses in 1990, registered interpreters who studied at earlier public classes still tend to carry out the majority of interpreting work in Japan.

In the 1980s, deaf people became more active in society. The conventional training systems struggled to respond to increased demand for more access to interpreting services.

In 1998, the Ministry of Welfare and Labor announced the new Sign Language Interpreters Training Project. This was based on a 1-year research project conducted by a ministry-appointed group of deaf people, sign language interpreters, and researchers. The ministry also renewed the Sign Language Volunteers Training Project and specified the time frame of the training, the qualifications of students and teachers, the goals and the curriculum, as follows:

1. Sign Language Volunteers Training Project

The trainees are beginners with no prior contact with the Deaf community or sign language. The goal is conversational sign language. The curriculum requires 80 hours of classroom time.

2. Sign Language Interpreters Training Project

The trainees must be able to converse with deaf people in sign language as a prerequisite. The goal of the program is to provide students with basic interpreting skills. The curriculum requires 90 hours of classroom time.

Training Methods

The volunteer project continued with the same guidelines. At this point, it was clearly recognized that conversational ability and interpreting ability are different skills. Curriculum and testing systems were developed for each of the courses, which was another step forward. This testing system began in 2001, with an average pass rate of approximately 30% (for the 6 years up to 2006).

CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

In 1989, the National Sign Language Interpreters Certification was created. It was not a government qualification, but offered by an organization approved by the Minister of Welfare and Labor. Between 1989 and 2006, 1,789 people have passed this examination. Many are members of the Japanese Association of Sign Language Interpreters (JASLI), which is a national member of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI).

In 1998, some areas began separate examinations, supported by state governments. In 2001, the National Sign Language Research Center unified these examinations and established a new one. The content, grading methods, and pass/fail level are now the same throughout Japan. As a result, more and more prefectures have stopped their own examinations and started participating in this newly unified examination. It is expected that in the near future all 47 prefectures will join. The examination is in four parts:

1. Written examination
 - Basic knowledge necessary for SLI activities
 - Knowledge of spoken Japanese
2. Interpreting skills
 - Interpreting skills in various settings
 - Ability to summarize signed speeches in spoken Japanese

Since 2001, 1,324 people have passed this examination.

Using the two figures provided, there are approximately 3,000 certified interpreters currently active in Japan. (It is not known how many passed the state examinations before 2001.)

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS' ORGANIZATIONS IN JAPAN

There are two key sign language interpreting organizations in Japan: NRASLI and JASLI.

Zentsuuken: The National Research Association of Sign Language Interpretation (NRASLI)

The National Research Association of Sign Language Interpretation (NRASLI) was established in 1974 for hearing members. If you share the goals of the organization, sign language ability is irrelevant. As a result, members include students of sign language, interpreters, researchers, and so forth. There is a wide variety of activities from research into SLI principles and interpreting case studies to activities for realization of sign interpreting services in local communities. In 2007, there are approximately 11,000 members, with chapters in all 47 prefectures.

Japanese Association of Sign Language Interpreters (JASLI)

JASLI was founded in 1991. In order to qualify, you have to pass the National Sign Language Interpreters Certification. Membership is not compulsory, although 85% of registered interpreters are members. Many members of JASLI are also NRASLI members. JASLI focuses on hosting workshops to improve interpreting skills as well as upgrading the social status and working environments of sign interpreters.

NRASLI and JASLI have a good working partnership. They work together with the JDF toward various goals such as “full participation and equality” for deaf people.

THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT OF JAPANESE SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

The number of professional sign language interpreters in Japan is estimated to be 1,400 according to the NRASLI nationwide research in 2005.

Forty-six percent work in local governing bodies, 27% in private organizations such as interpreter dispatching centers, and 12% in local recruitment offices.

Only 16% are employed as full-time workers, so it is necessary to improve their working conditions. Medical treatment, the children's school matters, and workplace discussions are all common requests for interpreters. Recently, more deaf people are going to tertiary institutions, so the demand for class-related interpreting has increased.

THE NATIONAL SIGN LANGUAGE RESEARCH CENTER (NSLRC)

As previously discussed, most interpreters in Japan are trained in government-funded public classes. These classes are conducted by local deaf organizations. Few interpreters have come from higher education courses.

Consequently, in 2002, the NSLRC was created in Kyoto to improve teaching material and teacher training. This was possible through the cooperation of national and regional governments, JDF, NRASLI, and JASLI. The center conducts research on sign language and interpreting, and it supports various activities nationwide.

It is important for the center to work closely with higher education institutions. Their goal is to develop a comprehensive and unified national interpreter training system. Among the main programs and projects at the center are:

- creating new signs and studies in Japanese sign language, including collecting and preserving traditional signs found in local communities
- developing a curriculum for training sign language interpreters and their trainers
- creating, developing, and editing materials such as textbooks for a range of levels
- hosting seminars and workshops for sign language interpreters and their teachers
- conducting the Unified Sign Language Interpreting examination
- conducting the National Sign Language examinations

WHAT IS CHARACTERISTIC ABOUT JAPAN?

Sign language interpreting guarantees deaf people's communication, but it does not necessarily create equality and allow deaf people full participation

in society. Sign language interpreting is just one part of this ultimate goal, which deaf people, sign language interpreters and hearing sign learners (in sign language circles) are striving for. As a group, the JDF, NRASLI, and JASLI are working together toward the same goal.

Sign language interpreting services are an essential part of achieving our goal, but it is not enough on its own. As well as improving interpreting services, we need to increase the exposure of sign language nationwide. Therefore, developing and enlarging "sign language circles" has been and remains an important challenge for us.

Along with training sign language interpreters, we began conducting a National Sign Language Examination in 2006. This is one way to encourage the public to learn about sign language. This is not an evaluation of interpreting ability, but a way to check how well you communicate with deaf people in sign language. This will motivate learners to aim higher and more hearing people to try to learn sign language. More than 3,000 people took part in 2007.

The number of sign language learners every year exceeds 200,000. This includes "circle" members who are active in spreading the language; students in sign language seminars run annually in every prefecture for beginners; viewers of TV programs such as the semi-state-owned Japan Broadcasting Corporation's (NHK) "Signs for Beginners"; and viewers of pay TV programs that are produced by nonprofit organizations such as the Unified Broadcasting System for the Disabled backed by JDF. The "All Japan Sign Language Examination" is aimed at these people.

The turnout for the third examination in 2008 is expected to be over 5,000 and to reach 10,000 in the near future. The aim is to ensure enough hearing people can communicate in sign language so that people are not dependent on sign language interpreters alone.

CONCLUSION

We have described the history and the current state of training sign language interpreters in Japan. The challenges to consider for the future include:

1. Based on the history of Mimizuku, to pursue two goals:
 - a. spread sign language to the public, and
 - b. establish a system of training, dispatching, and placing of professional sign language interpreters.

2. Increase sign language interpreter training at institutions of higher education.
3. Establish a comprehensive and unified training system led by the National Sign Language Research Center, which is integrated with higher education institutions.

To promote points 1 and 2, it is crucial to lobby national and local governments and businesses to improve the working conditions of sign language interpreters and to provide more job opportunities.