

Re: ASL translation?

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2007-09/msg00305.html>

- *From:* "Peter T. Daniels" <grammatim@xxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Mon, 10 Sep 2007 19:21:44 -0700
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On Sep 10, 7:00 pm, Harold Weissman <Harold...@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Mon, 10 Sep 2007 14:07:11 -0700, Peter T. Daniels wrote:

On Sep 10, 2:59 pm, Harold Weissman <Harold...@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Mon, 10 Sep 2007 11:17:48 -0700, Peter T. Daniels wrote:

On Sep 10, 2:13 pm, Harold Weissman <Harold...@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Is the process of communicating through ASL analogous to a translation? Let me give you an example.

No, it is translation.

Assume that I have a text T in English. A person A, conversant in ASL, reads the text and communicates it to another person B on the fly in ASL. B commits it to writing in English, producing a text T'.

My question is, How similar are T and T' likely to be? If we

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do
the same thing with, say,
English and Russian, the
final English
text can comically differ
from the original English
text – I guess
you guys are familiar with
the story (apocryphal, but
illustrative
anyway) about "The spirit is
strong but the flesh is weak"
being
changed into "The vodka is
good but the meat is rotten"
after
following the English ->
Russian -> English route.

Is something like that
possible in English -> ASL
->
English?

Certainly. English and ASL are
grammatically about as different as
languages can get — they're practically at
the extreme ends of
various typological continua.

So, a person who uses ASL for communicating, instead of
ordinary
speech, but who writes and reads in English, is effectively
using two
different languages?

No, they are using two different languages.

OK, fair enough.

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If I speak English and write in English, I am using the same language, right? How come that ASL is a totally different language?

Because ASL has nothing to do with English. It developed out of French Sign Language early in the 19th century. I don't know where French Sign Language came from, but French isn't a candidate.

Well, I guess that my question could be reformulated in terms of the FSL.

Would it not have been possible to map written English on to some sign system, just as it is done with spoken English?

When you "map" English into signing, you're doing something called "SEE," Signing Effective English IIRC, which is sort of a pidgin of ASL vocabulary and English grammar. I wonder whether it's even found any more.

I don't know what distinction you're looking for in "mapping" written vs. spoken English.

I am talking about the correspondence between written and spoken language. There is one (more than one, in fact) for English, but none for ASL (ASL is not written) right?

A couple at least of writing systems have been devised for ASL. One is based on linguistic analysis of the phonemes (called "cheremes" because of etymology), the other attempts to be iconic. Neither is used much.

I know that the mapping is in the reverse direction (spoken language precedes written language) but since ASL is an artificial language,

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What do you mean by "artificial language"?

One like Esperanto.

Bad answer! What makes a language "like Esperanto"? Being assembled out of bits and pieces of a handful of languages known to its creator, and then being touted as "universal"?

I wonder why the mapping as not done? Is there something in speech vs. signs that prevents it?–

What mapping?

I meant "is not done." I was just wondering why they did not take spoken English and mapped it on to some sort of hand sign–based alphabet?–

But why? Deaf people didn't know spoken English! (And were generally believed to be dumb — that's why "dumb" means 'stupid' and not just 'speechless'.)

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