The Classroom Sign Language Assessment (CSLA): A Process for Assessing and Supporting Development of Instructors’ Sign Language Skills
By Frank Caccamise, June Reeves, Geoff Poor, and Joan Carr

Introduction
This article provides a progress report on development of a classroom-based communication assessment tool. The first goal of this tool is to assess the effectiveness of NTID instructors’ classroom sign language communication skills and to use this information to assist instructors in their sign language skills development. A second goal of this assessment is to provide NTID faculty with information for their annual appraisals and their tenure and promotion documentation. This tool, the Classroom Sign Language Assessment (CSLA), owes much to the work of an earlier NTID project team that developed the Sign Language Skills Classroom Observation (SLSCO) (Reeves, Newell, Holcomb, & Stinson, 2000). Given this, our discussion of progress on the CSLA recognizes major aspects of the SLSCO Project that have informed our CSLA work.

The Sign Language Skills Classroom Observation (SLSCO)
In developing the SLSCO over a three-year period, Reeves et al. identified seven sign language linguistic features important for effective classroom communication (p.4-5), and discussed, via interviews with faculty, the process for providing feedback and the type of feedback most useful for professional development. The SLSCO involves:

1. One videotaping session of the instructor in her/his classroom
2. An independent viewing of this videotape (VT) by a team of three trained observers to identify priority linguistic features for improvement
3. Re-viewing the VT by the team to provide examples for the priority areas in 2. above
4. Writing an observation report
5. A report sharing and goal setting follow-up meeting between the instructor and an observation team member

CSLA Project Progress
Our CSLA project efforts began with a review and discussion of the SLSCO, with a focus on the seven sign language features included in the SLSCO, SLSCO procedures, information the SLSCO provides NTID instructors, and the best way to share observation results with instructors. We adopted the seven sign language linguistic features included in the SLSCO as valid indicators of sign language skills important for effective classroom communication, and we adopted the basic structure of the SLSCO.

The purpose of the SLSCO is to identify priority sign language linguistic features for improvement. SLSCO observers identified these features and recommended courses/activities for supporting skills development. We have maintained these two SLSCO aspects as shown on the CSLA Report Form (see p.5, last two sections of the form). In addition, since one goal of our project is to provide instructors with information about the effectiveness of their sign language communication skills, CSLA observers engage deaf and hard-of-hearing students enrolled in their classes. Follow up and support for partner sites and faculty began this fall and will continue through the spring of 2004. For further information please contact Foster at SBFNIS@RIT.EDU or Long, GLLERD@RIT.EDU.

As part of a second grant of the same title, Foster, Long and Sharon Rasmussen (CBGS) shared experiential activities and materials designed

Notes of Note
In June, 2003, 18 mainstream postsecondary faculty from four institutions in the northeast attended a Faculty Summer Institute as part of a US Dept. of Education grant, Promoting Access and Inclusion for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students in Postsecondary Education, led by Susan Foster and Gary Long. Faculty from these partner sites engaged in intensive, customized training utilizing activities designed to increase their ability to include and

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Communication and Access

Since 1987, the faculty and administration of NTID have worked together to improve communication within the NTID community, setting communication standards for tenure and promotion and creating the training opportunities for achieving these standards.

In the 1987-89 NTID Communication Task Force/CTF Recommendations to the Dean, NTID, for Institute Expectations and Guidelines for Faculty Communication Skill Development, 1990, the CTF stressed their recommendations “…focused specifically on the expressive/receptive communication skills needed for one-to-one and group interaction among students and faculty/staff.” Their task included, but was not limited to, sign language, speaking, simultaneous communication, and receptive understanding in academic, professional, and social situations; it included all areas of professional responsibility for faculty (teaching, research, counseling/advising, support service provision, academic administrative, and clinical work).

Recommendations for consideration in NTID faculty tenure and promotion processes included (1) participation/persistence in learning activities/efforts to develop, maintain, and improve communication skills and sensitivity to Deaf cultural issues; (2) development of skills in sign language and spoken communication strategies and techniques; and (3) achievement of a specified sign language communication skill level rating on the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI).

The CTF further stated that determination of competence should not rest on a single test result; there must be other options offered for documenting communication competence.

To provide NTID faculty additional options, the NTID Communication Assessment Options Faculty/Staff Communication Research Project Team submitted a proposal for seven projects to a research group formed during the 2001-02 academic year. This NTID Research Bulletin issue reports on progress of two of these projects, two new assessment tools:

1. Classroom Sign Language Assessment, an observational technique to identify faculty members’ sign language communication skills and to identify skills that may be appropriate for their further development.
2. Students’ Judgments of Faculty Members’ Communication Skills, to focus on development of a process for obtaining NTID students’ judgments of faculty members’ communication skills, with a focus on faculty members’ skills in classroom and advising environments.

Both project teams are applying the principle stated in the 1990 CTF report that “…the recommendations are based on the notion that building and maintaining a language community requires the facilitating of each person’s development through both learning and evaluation experiences.” These projects, and those that follow, will help to ensure continued progress in NTID’s efforts to provide a communication environment that supports students’ access to a quality education and access for all NTID faculty/staff to full participation in the NTID community.

*These two projects build upon the previous work of NTID faculty. Recognition and appreciation is extended to June Reeves, Bill Newell, Sam Holcomb and Michael Stinson for their continuing efforts to provide quality and effective communication for all within the NTID environment.

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provide “positive” examples of instructors’ sign language linguistic features use, as well as error and omission examples (see CSLA Report Form). The comments of two NTID faculty members who participated in the piloting of the SLSCO support this decision. One faculty member responded, “It is supportive in reporting on areas in need of improvement. It is unsupportive in that it is not balanced with a critique of areas of strength;” a second faculty member responded, “Although a lot was pointed out and listed, the statement that I did some things well went a long way.”

An aspect of the SLSCO that we agreed was critically important to maintain is a follow-up meeting, which received strong support from NTID faculty participating in the SLSCO piloting. Of 12 faculty responding to the statement that “My (SLSCO) follow-up meeting was helpful in understanding my written report,” on a six point rating scale with “6” being “Strongly agree”, there were nine “6” ratings and three “5” ratings.

Comments included, “The best kind of one-on-one teaching,” “Absolutely enlightening,” and “It was nice to see my videotape and have someone point out the places where my shortcomings were illustrated…. [the] follow-up meeting helped me understand how to rectify my shortcomings.” CSLA Follow-Up Meetings, together with CSLA Reports, are critical to achieving the first project goal of using CSLA results to assist instructors in their sign language skills development.

As stated earlier, a second goal of this project is to provide NTID faculty with information for their annual appraisals and tenure and promotion documentation. To help achieve this goal, we have worked on developing rating scales for the seven SLSCO sign language linguistic features and we made some edits to the descriptors for these features. As shown on the CSLA Report Form (p.4-5), this process resulted in development of one five point rating scale for two of the linguistic features, a second five-point rating scale for four of the linguistic features, and one feature (comprehension) being moved to an “Additional Comments” section on the CSLA Report Form. This latter decision was based on feedback from SLSCO project team members, who stated that classroom taping with a single camera does not provide a view of students communicating, and, therefore, faculty members’ comprehension cannot be fairly rated. We considered adding a second camera for taping, but decided this would be too intrusive for a classroom setting.

In addition to the above, progress during our first two years has included development of a working document entitled Classroom Sign Language Assessment (CSLA) Purposes, Materials, and Procedures. This document includes a set of CSLA forms and in-depth information about CSLA procedures that are designed to help ensure consistency in conducting the CSLA. For example, rating procedures specify a minimum of two raters per CSLA videotape, and standard procedures are detailed when independent ratings of one or more sign language linguistic features are not in agreement.

In order to provide continuity to CSLA development, CSLA training and development of training materials began during Summer 2003. During Fall 2003, training for CSLA Observers continues, which is helping us refine our Classroom Sign Language Assessment (CSLA) Purposes, Materials, and Procedures document. Piloting of the CSLA is expected to continue through the winter of 2003-04.

Further validation of the CSLA may include comparing the ratings of CSLA raters: (1) to those of independent, non-professional judges, (2) to Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) results, and/or (3) to the Student/Faculty Communication Survey currently being piloted at NTID (see article, p.6). Also, we will investigate CSLA reliability via comparison of the two observers’ first independent ratings for each sign language linguistic feature and, as resources permit, will conduct observations to allow rating comparisons across all CSLA Observers.

Possible Steps in CSLA Process

CSLA training and piloting will likely result in additional refinements to CSLA materials and procedures. The CSLA steps listed on p.4 provide a general description of what the final CSLA process might entail:

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for instructors who have deaf and hard-of-hearing students in their classes at the AHEAD conference in July. The focus of the presentation was specifically on pedagogy, and the ways in which teaching practices enhance or impede access for these learners. The project’s website, “ClassAct” is currently being evaluated at four beta sites and will be open to the public early in 2004.

Marc Marschark has received the Edmund Lyon Founder’s Award from the Rochester School for the Deaf (RSD) in recognition of his professional contributions to the field of education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children. The award was presented at RSD’s Underwriters’ Dinner as part of their Adventures in Education celebration.

Also, Marschark has been invited by Oxford University Press to edit their new Perspectives on...
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1. One videotaping session of the instructor in her/his classroom using a lecture format.
2. Viewing of this videotape (VT) by trained observers to provide ratings, and examples (positives, errors, and omissions) as appropriate, for six sign language linguistic features.
3. Feedback/other comments pertinent to instructor’s classroom use of sign language, including comprehension skills if observable.
4. When observers’ first independent ratings are not in agreement, additional viewing and observer discussion to finalize ratings.
5. Preparation of an observation report for the instructor.
6. A follow-up meeting between the instructor and CSLA Team member to review the videotape, discuss the instructor’s current sign language skills and suggestions for improving these skills.

Conclusion

The CSLA project’s primary goals are to develop a classroom-based observation assessment tool to assess the effectiveness of NTID instructors’ classroom sign language communication skills and to assist instructors in their sign language communication skills development; the secondary goal is to give NTID instructors information to include in their annual appraisals and in their tenure and promotion documentation. Achievement of these CSLA project goals, hopefully, will contribute to the Institute’s goal of full communication access for all NTID community members.

CLASSROOM SIGN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT (CSLA) DRAFT REPORT FORM

November, 2003

Instructor: NAME
Course: TITLE
Lesson Topic: TITLE
Date of Taping: DATE

Primary Communication Mode(s) Used:

Ratings for Six Sign Language Linguistic Features Important to Effective Classroom Communication with Deaf Students

| Rating Scale for sign language features #1 & #2: |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Always/ Almost Always | Errors Did Not Cause Interference with Intelligibility | Errors Caused Some Interference with Intelligibility | Errors Caused Significant Interference with Intelligibility | Generally Not Understandable |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

1. Signs and Fingerspelling Produced Accurately & Clearly: This feature involves use of appropriate production characteristics of signs and fingerspelling. These include handshape, movement, placement/location, and orientation of the hands/arms while producing signs. Also included under sign and fingerspelling production are the appropriate positioning of hands and arms and their movement within the signing space.

Rating: Errors:

2. Sign Knowledge and Use Convey Message Intent: This feature involves breadth of sign vocabulary knowledge and the ability to select and use signs appropriate to intended meanings. It also includes the ability to modify signs as appropriate to communicate more complex meanings, for example, number, size, degree, intensity, manner, distance, and time/duration.

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Deafness series, which focuses on issues related to language, education, culture, and other topics of interest to deaf individuals, educators of deaf students, and investigators across a variety of fields. Patricia Spencer (Gallaudet University) will co-edit the series.

In August, 2003, Frank Caccamise and Bill Newell conducted a Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) Training Workshop at the Ohio School for the Deaf. Also, Caccamise, Vince Ortolani, Mary Lou Basile, Camille Aidala, Don Feigal, and Cea Dorn completed their work on development of a sign language CD-ROM for Administrative Support Technology (AST) terminology, and presented their work at the International Symposium on Instructional Technology and Education of the Deaf at NTID in June, 2003. For additional information, contact Caccamise at FCCNCR@RIT.EDU.
3. **Space Used Effectively to Refer to Noun Referents**: This feature involves establishing and using referents for nouns in the signing space in order to discuss them and to compare and contrast ideas, people, and places. Skills important for this area are establishing points in space as referents, eye-gaze, producing noun signs so that they are consistent with real world orientation, using directional verbs consistently, and shifting of the body to show contrast/comparison and for assuming roles when reporting indirect discourse (includes role shift).

4. **Non-Manual Signals Convey & Support Meaning**: This feature involves the use of facial expression, eye gaze, head movements, body shift and pausing to convey information regarding sentence types; that is, to distinguish statements vs. questions, to distinguish Wh (what, who, etc.) from yes/no questions, and to mark conditional statements, rhetorical questions and topics. It also includes use of non-manual signals to convey information regarding relative size, degree, intensity, manner, distance, and time/duration.

5. **Classifiers Convey Accurate Information about the Physical World**: This feature involves the use of specified handshapes to communicate efficiently and effectively about the physical world. These specific handshapes are used to show location and movement of nouns, to describe nouns, to show how objects are handled and used and to show how the body appears/moves. Classifiers are referred to/written about in the following way: CL:B (table located there).

6. **Discourse Organization is Visually Effective**: This feature involves using signs and sign language techniques for organizing the whole, and the sub-narratives/statements within, in extended communication sequences (such as classroom lectures). Specialized signs (for example, NOW, FINISH & OFF-POINT), rhetorical questions, listing on the non-dominant hand for related items and sequence of events, and other signing techniques (for example, non-manual signals such as body shifts & pauses) are used to signal topic introductions, reviews, endings, transitions, and asides. These signs and techniques help to make the entire discourse visually clear and easy to follow.

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**Additional Comments** (Optional): Additional examples, comments about comprehension skills if clearly observable, & other comments pertinent to instructor’s classroom use of sign language based on observation.

**Priority Sign Language Linguistic Features for Skills Development**
b
**Course/Activities Recommended for Skills Development**
b
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Mike Stinson has just received two grants from the US Department of Education, one from the Steppingstones of Technology Innovation program in the amount of $399,999, and a second from the Model Demonstration Projects for Children with Disabilities program $699,999. Both projects build on the work that Mike and his team have done over the last 15 years with C-Print, developing it into one of the premier support services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The new projects will expand the C-Print model using automatic speech recognition (ASR). While the Steppingstones project will focus on middle and high school students in public schools, the Model Demonstration project will focus on undergraduate students at RIT and at Louisiana State University. A major focus of both projects will be to foster student use of the new C-Print Pro educational...