

International Symposium on Signed and Spoken Linguistics (1)

‘Description, Documentation and Conservation’

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Abstract

Introducing the Sign Language and Linguistics Initiative

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The idea of establishing an initiative to promote sign language and linguistics studies is currently being developed at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) in conjunction with the Tsukuba University of Technology. In this presentation, the aim of this initiative from the point- of-view of both a descriptive linguist and a Deaf linguist will be introduced along with some background, and some currently planned activities.

Recently, sign language and linguistics studies have come to be recognized as one of the important subfields in linguistics. It is also recognized that endangered languages which need documentation include many signed languages. The idea of establishing an initiative emerged in the hope of achieving two goals. The first is to introduce academic activities related to the description, documentation and conservation of sign languages to linguists, Deaf communities, and the interested general public in Japan, and secondly, to develop an institutional base for promoting sign linguistics and through this to cooperate with institutions abroad that have been engaged in similar activities. These are expected to help establish an environment where interested prospective researchers (both deaf and hearing) can readily choose sign linguistics as their specialization. Specific activities foreseen in this scheme are organizing academic meetings (such as this symposium) and workshops on descriptive and documentation linguistics with a special focus on (but not limited to) signed languages, and networking of interested individuals and institutions. Information assurance of technical content for Deaf participants is an important related issue and will also be dealt with as part of our scheme.

By presenting our plans in the initial stage of this endeavor, we hope to receive comments and suggestions from researchers in the field based on both their successful and unsuccessful experiences. We also hope to be able to learn international needs related to sign language and linguistics studies, in order for us to ultimately contribute to them by establishing our initiative in Japan.