

WHAT SIGN LANGUAGE CAN TELL US ABOUT HUMAN LANGUAGE



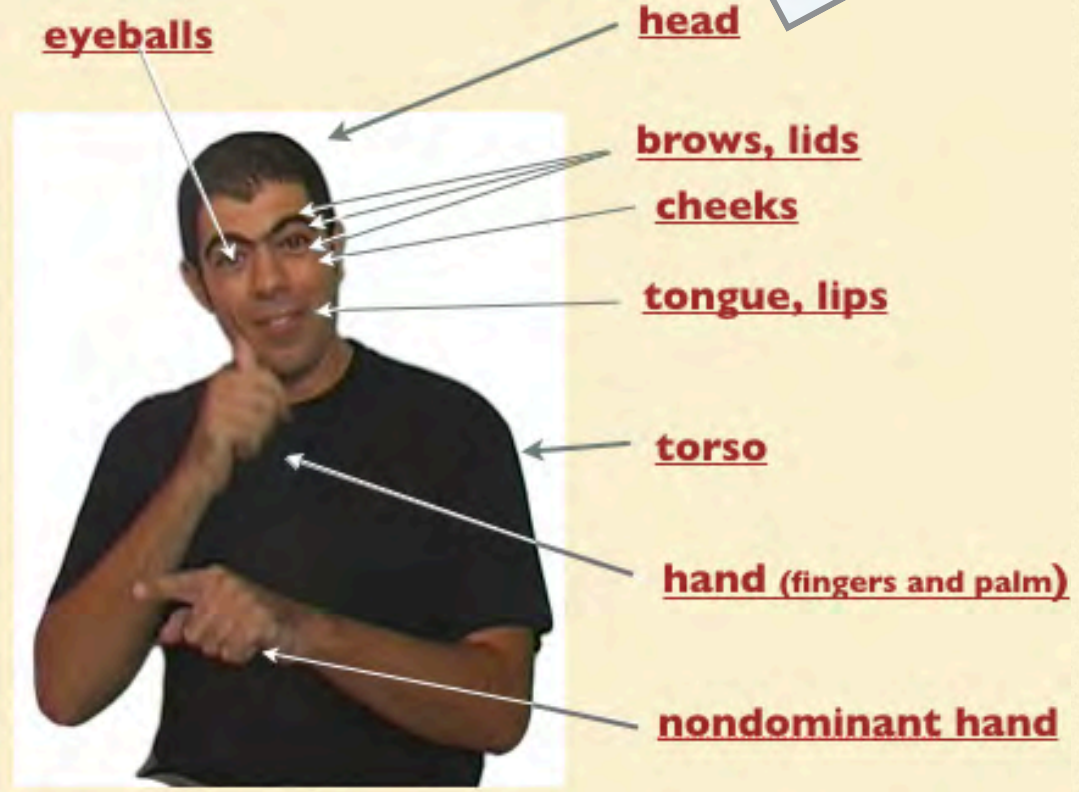
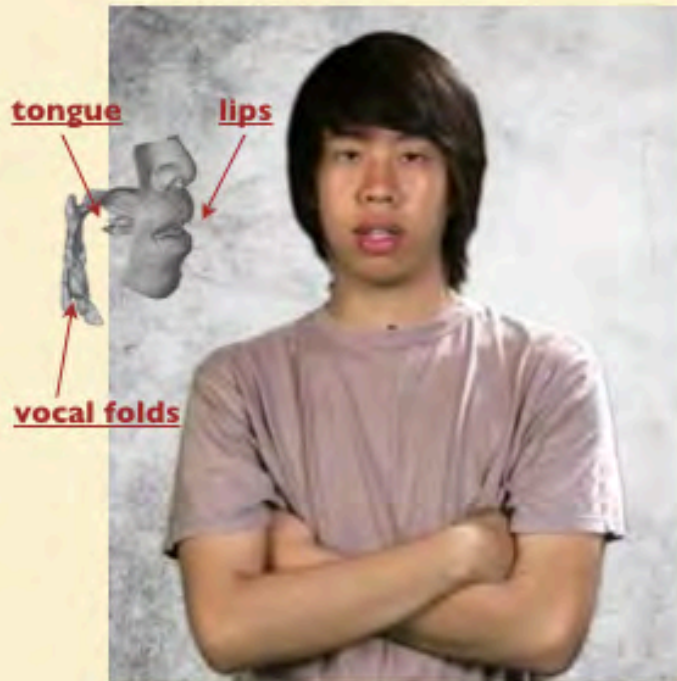
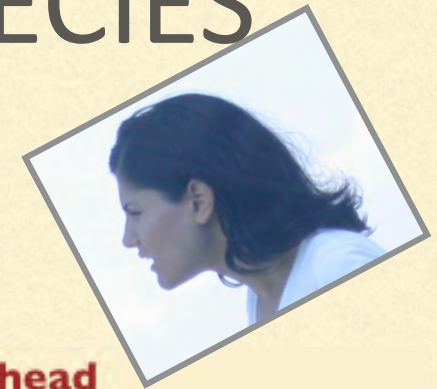
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Conference on LANGUAGES
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HUMANS ARE THE ONLY SPECIES WITH LANGUAGE



WE HAVE TWO KINDS

1. UNIVERSALS

NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT UNIVERSALS

1. **Symbolization** of objects, actions, ideas. We are 'the symbolic species' (Deacon 1997)
2. **Combinatoriality** of language units: Sounds, **words**, phrases, and **sentences** combine and recombine with other units of the same kind to produce a potentially infinite number of interpretable expressions.



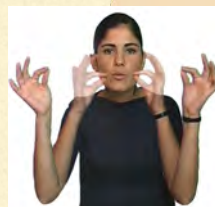
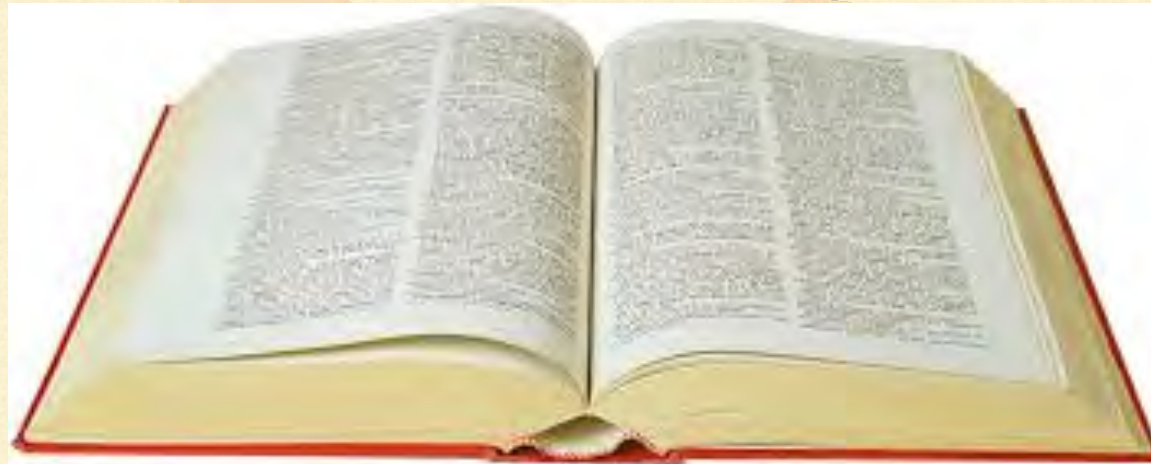
2: HOW DOES
LANGUAGE
BEGIN?

2.1. SYMBOLIZATION FIRST



3: MIND & BODY

3.1. IN SIGN LANGUAGE, WORDS CAN HAVE **ICONIC** FORM



CAT



EAT



DRIVE

3: MIND
& BODY

3.2. SENTENCE FORM CAN BE
SIMULTANEOUS [TWO HANDS]

‘At the Museum’

‘While **I looked** (at a painting),
someone walked over beside me.’

‘**I looked** at the **person as**
she walked over beside me.’

‘**I** (asked her), **What** do you
want?.’

(50% of normal speed)

3: MIND
& BODY

3.2. ICONICITY + TWO HANDS =
SIMULTANEOUS FORM FOR
SIMULTANEOUS EVENTS



**'While I looked (at the painting),
someone walked over beside me.'**



**'I looked at the person as
she walked over beside me.'**



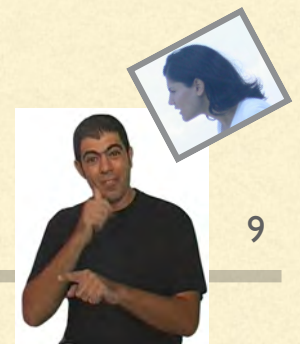
**'I (asked her)
What do you want?'**

SIGNALS OF THE HANDS, FACE, AND BODY ARE PART OF LANGUAGE (Kendon 1980, NcNeill 1994)



CORE UNIVERSALS

- **Symbolization** of objects, actions, ideas
- **Combinatoriality** of language units: Sounds, words, phrases, and sentences combine and recombine with other units of the same kind to produce a potentially infinite number of interpretable expressions.
- **Iconic, simultaneous expressions of the body**



THANK YOU

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