

Tracing the Origins of Legal Terminology in ASL: Perspectives for ASL/English Interpreters

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Suggested Citation

Shaffer, Barbara () "Tracing the Origins of Legal Terminology in ASL: Perspectives for ASL/English Interpreters," *Journal of Interpretation*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/joi/vol26/iss1/4>

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ABSTRACT

Diachronic research is, at times, akin to archaeology. The researcher must piece together bits of evidence with the goal of creating a complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Researchers studying a signed language face a more daunting task, due to the relative dearth of available data. The goal remains the same, however, and the insights gained regarding the origins of words can aid working interpreters in their construction of target texts. In this study, I explore the origins of commonly used legal terminology in present day American Sign Language (ASL) using some of the first French Sign Language dictionaries and early 20th century ASL films. Through the use of grammaticalization theory (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994; Janzen 2012), I also offer some possible insights into how such terms emerged and evolved. Finally, I offer suggestions as to how legal interpreters could incorporate this knowledge into their work and how such an approach could guide interpreters as they analyze the lexicon and grammar of ASL.

INTRODUCTION

Interpreters in all settings must constantly assess the language they are producing, as well as the language they are receiving from their consumers, and must make continuous modifications based on the evolving discourse. This real-time assessment and adjustment of language use falls within the realm of intersubjectivity (see Zlatev, Racine, Sinha, and Itkonen (2008); see also Verhagen (2008) and Janzen and Shaffer (2008) and for a review of intersubjectivity in language; also Janzen and Shaffer (2013) for intersubjectivity in interpreting).

This article provides a glimpse into language evolution, and how language use motivates language change. The aim of this paper is to discuss word formation within a language: how words emerge and change in meaning as they are used. With this context, I will trace the known history of a few words commonly used in legal settings. Obviously, this won't be an exhaustive analysis but it will provide a construct for considering language use in signed language interpreting, based on what we know about language change in signed and spoken languages, as well as discourse pragmatics. I will then give a more detailed analysis of the American Sign Language (ASL) word commonly glossed as RIGHT, exploring the origins of that word as well as the ways its meaning has changed over time. My goal is to provide perspective on how language users and language communities create language, by demonstrating a few short examples from ASL. Finally, I explore a framework for considering language as we encounter it in our interpreting work.

GRAMMATICALIZATION AND LEXICALIZATION

Language emerges and changes over time and through use. In the evolution of language, two commonly studied linguistic phenomena are lexicalization and grammaticalization. Both are well-attested mechanisms of language change. I will return to the concept of lexicalization later, but for now we will define lexicalization as the diachronic (changing over time) process of words entering a given language. Grammaticalization is the diachronic process whereby lexical morphemes such as nouns and verbs develop over time into grammatical morphemes, or in other words, where less grammatical morphemes such as auxiliaries develop uses that are more grammatical, like tense or aspect markers (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca, 1994). Thus, any given grammatical item, even viewed synchronically, without reference to its development, is understood to have an evolutionary history.

Grammaticalization, the process by which grammar develops, is understood to be universal, that is, every language undergoes grammaticalization. Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994) note that grammaticalization is quite regular and has predictable evidence found in the two broad categories of phonology and semantics. Semantic generalization, called semantic bleaching by some, takes place as a lexical morpheme loses some of its specificity and can be more broadly applied, usually within a particular construction. Some components of the meaning are lost when this generalization takes place. Similarly, grammaticalized elements and the constructions in which they occur tend to undergo phonological reduction. This generally happens at a faster rate than for lexical elements not undergoing grammaticalization. Some of the mechanisms for grammaticalization include metaphor, semantic extension and language contact. Examples of this will be seen below.

A commonly cited example of grammaticalization in English is the phonological and semantic changes seen in the phrase ‘be going to’ (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca, 1994; Bybee, 1998; Janzen, 2012). With respect to phonology, ‘be going to’ has undergone phonological reduction in some constructions such that it is often pronounced *I’m gonna*, *I’munna*, and even *I’ma*. ‘Be going to’ originally had uses that indicated ‘physical movement toward a locational goal’. ‘Be going to’ constructions still remain a part of English and can now have a range of meanings including ‘physical movement toward a locational goal’ as in *I am going to the store*, and other more ambiguous uses where physical movement is not necessarily a component of the meaning, as in *I am going to eat now*. Further grammaticalized uses, where no physical movement is implied or intended, can also still be expressed with the original phonological form, as with utterances like *I am going to sleep well tonight*. Here, *I am going to* only indicates movement toward a goal in an intentional or future sense, not physical movement. Both uses of ‘be going to’: physical movement toward a locational goal, and future/intent, co-occur in present day English. Phonologically reduced forms of ‘be going to’, however, do not have such semantic latitude. In present day usage ‘I’m gonna’ utterances cannot be understood to include physical movement toward a goal without the addition of another verb of movement. This means that *he’s gonna the store* is not considered grammatical by most English users. *Gonna* utterances do often appear with other verbs, however, and in those instances, *I’m gonna* marks intention or futurity, while the second verb indicates an activity or state. An example of this would be *I’m gonna*

graduate in May. Similarly, *I'munna*, and *I'ma* are, as of now, only generally used for movement toward goal constructions that do not describe physical movement, unless accompanied by another verb indicating movement. As such, utterances such as *I'm gonna cook dinner*, *I'munna get the new iPhone*, and *I'ma start a diet tomorrow* are all possible. Notably, it is common to use the physical movement toward a goal phrase 'be going to' following a grammaticalized form such as *I'm gonna* or *I'munna*, resulting in utterances like *I'm gonna be going to Austin this fall*. This reminds us that 'be going to' utterances are still part of our repertoire and can still mean physical movement toward a goal. The idea here is that earlier meanings of the term don't necessarily disappear—though they may; instead it is more common to see new uses exist alongside older uses.

GRAMMATICALIZATION AND LEXICALIZATION IN SIGNED LANGUAGES

Grammaticalization and lexicalization in signed languages follow the same principles discussed above. New word formation happens when signers have a discourse need and find some way to express it. If the sign innovation is useful throughout the language community, it may become entrenched in the language as part of the body of words. The key concept I focus on is use: if the novel form is useful and fills a discourse need, it is more likely to become entrenched. This does not suggest that its meaning will be set, but rather that it becomes part of the body of words used by signers in a given community. From there it can also be used in novel ways, thus extending the meaning and leading to further grammaticalized forms. While there are often varied instantiations of a given word, particular forms may begin to take on new and specifically different meanings. The meaning may not be predictable from the form or its parts, but that form will become more set in this emerging lexical item. Most importantly, the new word can co-exist with other uses and with non-lexicalized variants. Thus, while lexicalization refers to the emergence of new words, grammaticalization refers to the emergence of grammatical items, or elements that are part of grammatical categories.

A good example of lexicalization and grammaticalization in ASL, taken from Shaffer (2000), and expanded upon in Janzen and Shaffer (2003), Wilcox (2007), and Shaffer and Janzen (2016), is the future marker. The form began as a gesture. Presumably, it was first described by De Jorio (2000, p. 260), whose original text from 1832 was translated into English by Kendon in 2000. De Jorio stated that the gesture was in use at least 2000 years ago. He described it as the palm of one hand held edgewise moving out from underneath the palm of the other hand to indicate 'departure' or 'fleeing'. We know from the previous cited studies that this gesture regularized through use and entered the lexicon of French Sign Language (LSF) some time prior to 1855. Figure 1(a) shows the LSF word PARTIR indicating 'departure' as it was used in 1855. Figure 1(b) shows the same word from an 1856 LSF dictionary. Figure 1(c) is DEPART/LEAVE in approximately 1913 in ASL, and on the right Figure 1(d) has the modern ASL word glossed here as TAKE.OFF¹.

¹ Upper case word glosses indicate an ASL word. Words separated by a period (e.g., MOVE.OVER) indicate that more than one English word is used to denote a single ASL word. Letters separated by hyphens (e.g., C-A-R) represent fingerspelling. Plus signs (++) denote repeated movement. PRO.1, PRO.2, and PRO.3 are 1s, 2s, and 3s pronouns. POSS.1 and POSS.3 are 1s and 3s possessives. PRO.1pl represents the first person plural pronoun.

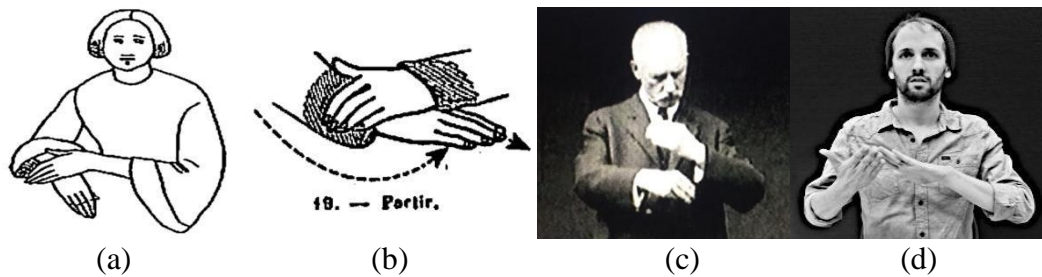


Figure 1: (a) 1855 PARTIR ('depart') (Brouland, 1855);
 (b) 1856 PARTIR ('depart'), (Pélissier, 1856);
 (c) 1913 ASL DEPART/LEAVE as signed by Dr. Edward Fay (*The Preservation of Sign Language*, 1913)²;
 (d) Present day ASL TAKE.OFF ('leave').

The same word, indicating departure or 'go', underwent phonological and semantic change in some LSF constructions taking on a future meaning glossed by Brouland (1855), Pélissier (1856), and Lambert (1865) as FUTUR. This is seen in Figure 2(a). This word, including both uses 'future' and 'intention', is also found in ASL in approximately 1913. It is shown in Figure 2(b) as signed by Robert McGregor from *The Preservation of American Sign Language*, and also in present day LSF FUTUR (Figure 2(c)), as well as present day ASL FUTURE seen in 2(d).

Simply put, this gesture indicating movement in space became a word indicating physical movement in space and then grammaticalized to indicate future time, intention, and even epistemic modality. In future time readings, the ASL word can be modified to add additional temporal meaning, while the epistemic modal use of FUTURE can include facial marking and modified movement that provide additional information about the speaker's commitment to what is being said.

Classifier constructions are CL: plus a handshape label or description. The translation line is an English approximate that does not necessarily represent equivalent grammatical features or lexical categories to those found in ASL. Glosses cited from other sources are left in their original form.

² All references to the 1913 data indicate filmed narratives that were created in approximately 1913. They have been in the public domain and are currently available in *The Preservation of American Sign Language*, ©1997, Sign Media Inc.

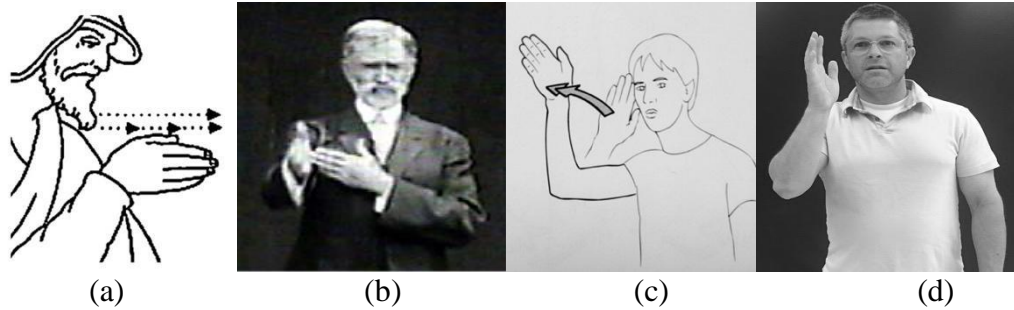


Figure 2: (a) 1865 FUTUR (Lambert, 1865);
 (b) 1913 FUTURE as signed by Robert Hotchkiss (*The Preservation of Sign Language*, 1913);
 (c) FUTUR in present day LSF (Girod, 1997, Tome 3, p. 23);
 (d) present day ASL FUTURE.³

Figures 1(b) and 2(b), which both are found in *The Preservation of Sign Language*, show that the phonologically similar uses ‘depart’ and ‘future’ co-occurred synchronically. Interestingly, variants of the departure gesture described by De Jorio are still in use by hearing people in a number of European communities, such as in the Italian and French examples below.

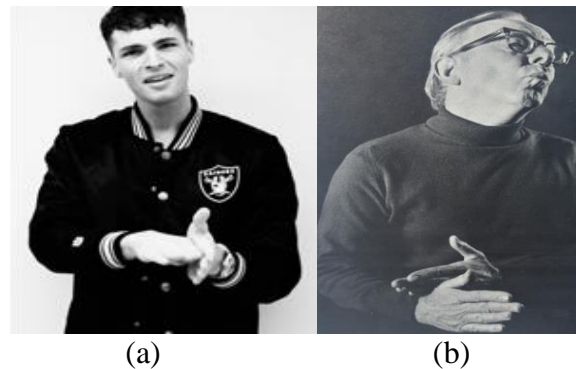


Figure 3: (a) The Italian gesture meaning ‘to depart’ (collected from the internet);
 (b) The French gesture meaning ‘to depart’ (Wylie, 1977, p. 17).

This wrinkle - that gestures can enter the lexicon of signed languages - makes the study of how words and grammar emerge in a signed language more complex and interesting. When studying the origins of words and grammar of spoken languages, one typically finds older words. But for ASL, gestures can become ritualized and entrenched into a new structure that contributes to the lexicalization and/or grammaticalization processes.

³ Present day LSF has a form with articulation similar to that seen in 2(a). It is often said to be FUTUR PROCHE, where *proche* indicates ‘near future’. Of note, the spoken future *proche* form is similar in meaning to the English ‘be going to’ indicating intent.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAN

To better understand the role of gesture in ASL word formation we turn to the word glossed CAN in ASL. In the United States this word is currently used to indicate physical ability, mental ability, general ability, availability, possibility, permission, and epistemic possibility, which refers to the signer's commitment to what he or she is saying (Shaffer, 2002). While not generally considered among "ASL legal terminology" per se, CAN is used in many legal contexts, including some renditions of Miranda warnings, discussions about "conditions of release", and probation rules. This is not an exhaustive list, by any means.

The source for CAN in ASL is the older French Sign Language word FORT meaning 'strong' that was originally a gesture (Wilcox and Wilcox, 1995; Shaffer, 2000). De Jorio (2000), who referred to the gesture as *robustezza* (robustness), described it thus:

Elbows thrust outwards, hands formed as fists held horizontally, the one opposite the other. With this pose, with the elbows bent sharply, it seems that one wishes to indicate broad shoulders as a sign of strength; sometimes in addition, the chest is thrust outwards, the head held up straight. (p. 344)

Through use, the gesture entered the lexicon of French Sign Language, where it underwent phonological changes seen below, as well as semantic generalization. Semantically, 'physical strength' led to the interpretation of 'physical ability' for the word CAN, which then generalized and other uses developed in both LSF and ASL.

Figure 4(a) shows the 1856 French Sign Language word FORT, meaning 'strong'. Figure 4(b) shows the LSF word glossed as POUVOIR ('can') from the same dictionary. Interestingly, Figure 4(c) shows another variant of POUVOIR from 1855. This indicates that there was synchronic phonological variation of the word as it was being grammaticalized.

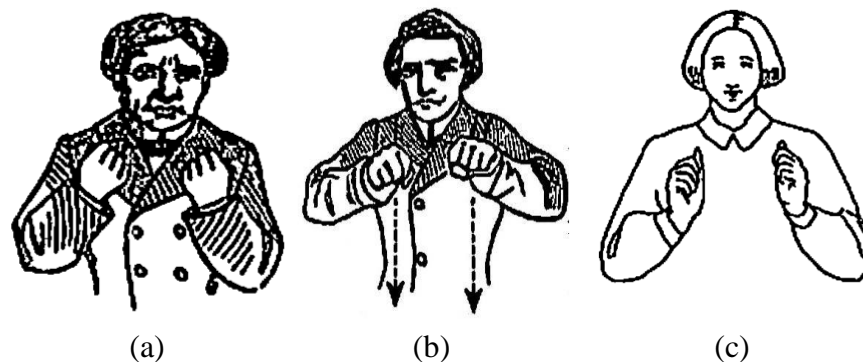


Figure 4: (a) FORT ('strong') (Pélissier 1856);
 (b) POUVOIR ('can') (Pélissier 1856);
 (c) POUVOIR ('can') (Brouland 1855).

In another example of synchronic variation, the Reverend Dr. John B. Hotchkiss (again from the *Preservation of Sign Language*) states:

- (1) BUT TRUE PRO.1, PRO.3, PRO.3 EAT++ (2h-alt) FOR STRONG SO AS
 PRO1. CAN DO LIVE GOOD
 ‘We eat for strength so that we can do good.’

Figure 5(a) below shows us Dr. Hotchkiss’ production of STRONG, while Figure 5(b) shows us his use of CAN. The phonology of each is quite similar, yet the meaning is clearly different. This is a reminder that language change happens through use and that similar forms can and often do co-exist synchronically.

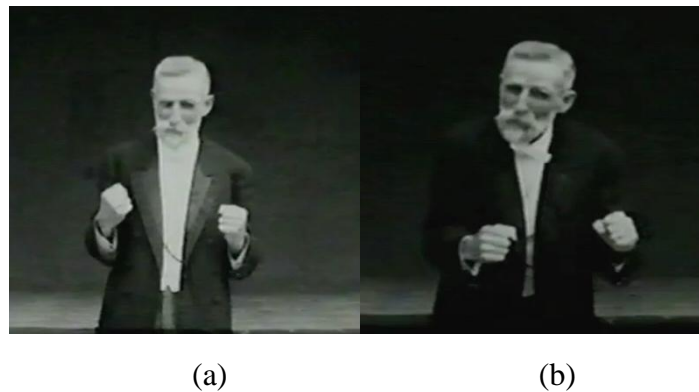


Figure 5: The Reverend Dr. John B. Hotchkiss (as seen in *The Preservation of Sign Language*, 1913) in approximately 1913 signing (a) STRONG and; (b) CAN.

NECESSITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAN'T

Not surprising to users of ASL, CAN'T, which is seen below in Figure 6, and CAN have a different gestural and thus lexical source and development. Put another way, CAN'T is not simply a form of CAN plus a negative marker. Instead, CAN'T appears to come from a gesture indicating ‘insistence’. This path from gesture to language was explored by Shaffer (2002) and further explained by Wilcox and Shaffer (2006) who stated that the ‘insistence’ gesture was described by De Jorio (2000, p. 308) and used as far back as classical antiquity to indicate ‘in this place’ and ‘insistence’. Dodwell (2000) also discussed this gesture, which he called “an imperative” (p. 36). He stated that it “consists of directing the extended index finger towards the ground” (p. 36). According to De Jorio (2000) the gesture was previously described by the Roman orator Quintilian in the first century A.D.: “...if pointed as it were face downwards toward the ground, it expresses insistence” (p. 308).

The gesture, seen in Figure 5(a) indicating ‘insistence’, is thought to have entered the lexicon of LSF and was then glossed IL FAUT. This is shown in Figure 6(b) from 1855 LSF. Present day LSF IL FAUT is seen in Figure 6(c). With a variation in production, the word also entered the lexicon of American Sign Language where it developed more generalized uses for necessity, commonly glossed MUST and SHOULD (Shaffer, 2002).

In LSF IL FAUT developed a negative form with the meaning ‘must not’ seen in Figure 6(d) (described in Shaffer, 2002). In present day LSF and Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) its meaning is still limited primarily to prohibition. However, present day ASL uses the identical form glossed CAN’T which has generalized to include inability, unavailability and related meanings.

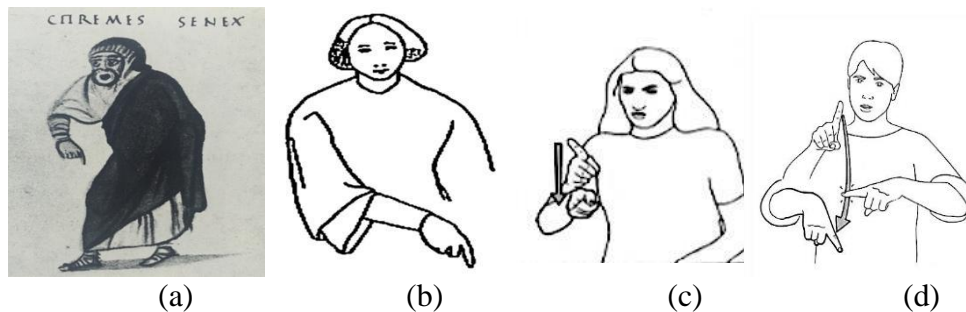


Figure 6: (a) A Roman gesture for ‘insistence’ (Dodwell, 2000, p. 36);
 (b) 1855 LSF IL FAUT (Brouland, 1855);
 (c) Present day LSF IL FAUT (‘must’) (Girod, 1997, Tome 2, p. 66);
 (d) Present day INTERDIT (‘must not’) (Girod, 1997, Tome 3, p. 214).

LAW IN ASL

LAW in ASL appears to have a fairly clear history. It developed from the French word LOI (‘law’) (as seen in Figure 7(a)). While an earlier gestural form has not yet been identified, the word appears to depict the referencing of a document. It is apparent that the word has undergone phonological changes, likely as it developed newer uses, since the root form LAW is the basis for many words including: LAWYER, LEGAL, ILLEGAL/PROHIBITED, and IN-LAW. It may also be related to other words with a similar configuration such as CONSTITUTION, RULE, and so forth.

Figure 7(b) is an image from Long (1918, described below) and Figure 7(c) depicts the present day LSF word LOI.

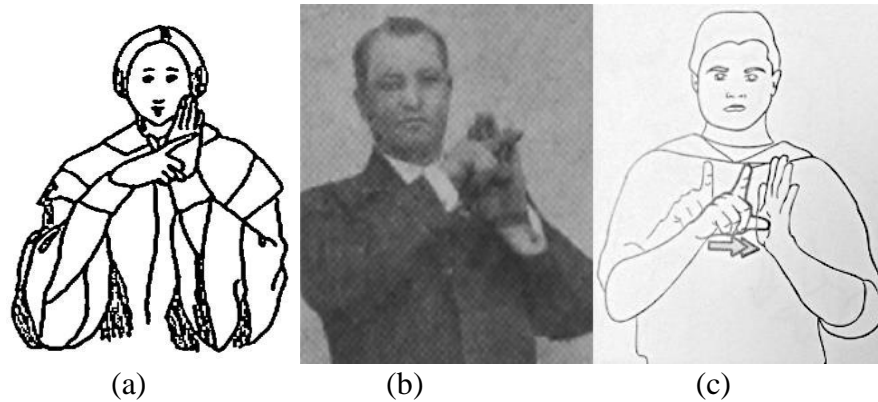


Figure 7: (a) 1855 LOI ('law') (Brouland, 1855);
 (b) 1918 ASL LAW (Long, 1918);
 (c) Present day LSF LOI ('law') (Girod, 1997, Tome 3, p. 214).

Long describes the word seen in 7(b), which he glosses LAW:

Law. Hold up open left hand, fingers up, pointing the thumb toward you; lift up the forefinger of right "G" hand and throw it against the palm of the left near the end of the fingers; strike the palm this way several times but each time striking it lower down. For "lawyer" add sign above described for "-er." (p. 219)

JUSTICE AND RELATED CONCEPTS

The ASL word JUSTICE is used as the basis for many ASL legal terms such as COURT/TRIAL, JUDGE, (the verb), and JUSTICE/INJUSTICE, and has a gestural origin as well. De Jorio (2000) called the gesture *giustizia* and described its use in 19th century Naples. He noted:

Thumb and index finger joined at the tips, forming a cone, the hand turned downwards. The tips of the index finger and thumb held in contact, pointing downwards in the form of a cone, the other fingers disposed in any way and held still with the arm forward: this arrangement constitutes the gesture and indicates *giustizia* ('justice'), *giusto* ('just'). [...] The origin of the present meaning is not difficult to discover. Everyone knows that the balance is the emblem of justice, since its function is to guarantee the exactness of physical weight. This is adapted to moral ideas, distinguishing in a certain sense what is just or correct form and what is not. (p. 233)

Figure 8 shows Plate XIX, No. 3 that corresponds with De Jorio's description.

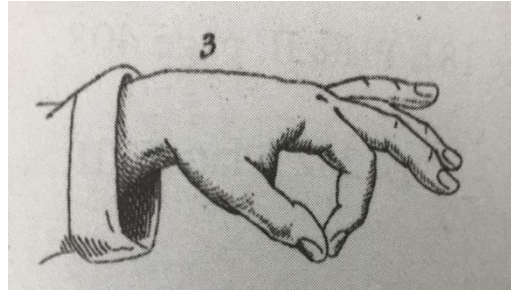


Figure 8: The handshape for the 19th century Neapolitan gesture *giustizia* ('justice'). Plate XIX, No. 3 from De Jorio (2000).

De Jorio (2000) went on to describe the various uses of *giustizia*:

Our gesture taken in the sense of justice, or of someone who administers it, [...] even has its superlative. When one wants to say that someone is a very just person, then the same gesture is done with both hands, held firm and on the same horizontal level. Such a posture imitates the position of the two pans of the scales when the balance is perfect. When this is so, when the scales are lifted up by the fulcrum, the two pans remain still and on a level with one another. The word *giusto* 'just' can also be taken in a more extended sense, to denote 'optimum', 'perfect', 'exact', 'accomplished'. While beyond the scope of this paper, the gesture *giusto* is a likely candidate as the gestural origins of the ASL words commonly glossed as PERFECT, and PRECISE. (p. 234)

In his 1918 dictionary, Long described the ASL word that he called "Judge, Weigh a thing, Consider":

Judge, Weigh a thing, Consider, etc. Place end of finger in center of forehead as in "think," then with hands assuming "F" position, balance them on either side as if they were the two sides of a pair of scales. (p. 47)

Figure 8 (a) shows Plate VII, No. 136 referenced by Long's description, and Figure 8 (b) is present day LSF la JUSTICE:

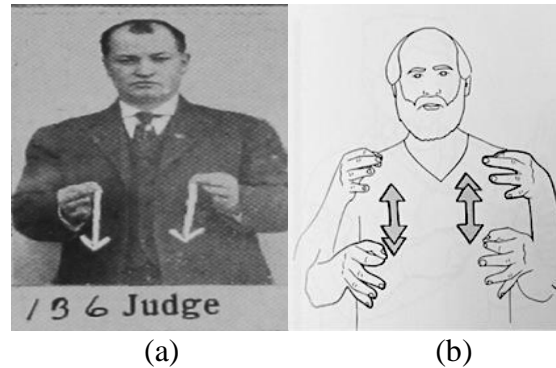


Figure 9: (a) 1918 ASL JUDGE (Long, 1918);
 (b) Present day LSF la JUSTICE (Girod, 1997, Tome 3, p. 215).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RIGHT

The word commonly glossed as RIGHT in ASL (human, civil or legal) has a more complicated history. It is clear that it developed from an earlier French form glossed DROIT, seen below from Pélissier (1856) in Figure 10(a) with its companion word TORTUEUX. Lambert (1865) also documents the pair, which are glossed DROIT and TORDO (seen below in Figure 10(b)).

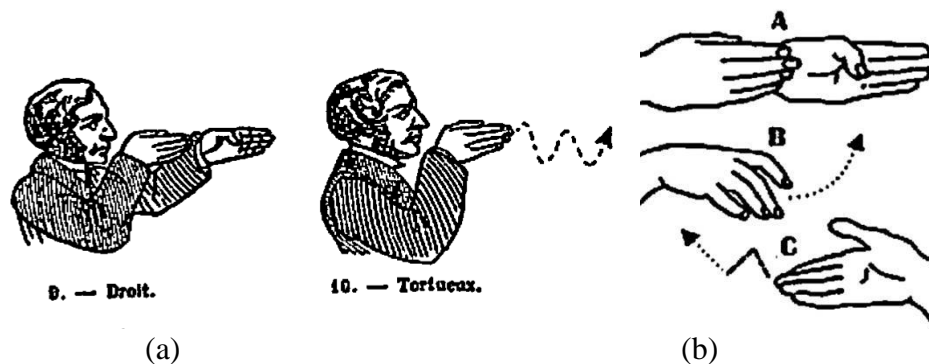


Figure 10: (a) DROIT and TORTUEUX ('straight' and 'warped'/'twisting') from Pélissier (1856);
 (b) DROIT and TORDO ('straight' and 'twisting') from Lambert (1865).

In this context, we are to understand the words in each pair above to be opposites: 'straight' and 'warped/twisting'. However, 'straight' does not cover the full and varied meaning of the French word *droit*. French *droit* has many related meanings both alone and in constructions, making it another rich example of lexicalization and grammaticalization. *Droit* does mean 'straight', but it also means 'right' (as opposed to left), 'right' as in 'to be allowed to', 'right' as in 'proper', and

‘right’ as in ‘my rights’ (human, civil and legal). English *right* has developed all of those meanings as well.

This polysemy, in other words: the coexistence of multiple meanings, is not surprising as evidence suggests the English word meaning ‘right’ (as opposed to ‘wrong’) grammaticalized from an earlier Germanic form meaning straight as in, “Of a route or course: direct, going straight towards its destination” with an overlapping meaning of ‘fitting, appropriate, proper’ (from the Oxford English Dictionary online edition). There is also evidence of Old English uses indicating “Of a person, disposition, etc.: disposed to do what is just or good; upright, righteous.”⁴ Also of note, in American⁵ and British legal contexts *droit* refers to ‘a legal or moral claim’, lending further evidence to the shared history of English *right* and French *droit*. While limited by the available evidence and the glossing choices made by Pélissier and Lambert at the time, it is quite likely that the sign DROIT followed a grammaticalization path similar to that described above for French and English.

Further evidence for this claim comes from Long (1918, p. 75) who described the words glossed RIGHT and WRONG as phonologically similar to DROIT and TORTUEUX/TORD. These words are also spatially juxtaposed in Long’s dictionary and are shown in Figure 11(a) and 11(b) below:⁶

RIGHT: Hold out the open left hand, palm up; diagonally across the palm push the right open hand with the edge touching the palm. The sign may be made straight across. (p. 254)

WRONG: Push the hand across as above but in a zigzag way instead of a straight line. (p. 255)

⁴ The English word *wrong* developed from an Old English form (which itself developed from an Old Norse form) meaning: Having a crooked or curved course, form, or direction; twisted or bent in shape or contour; wry (Oxford English Dictionary online edition).

⁵ Black’s Law Dictionary, 9th edition.

⁶ Higgins’ dictionary (1923:7) has a form similar to the word described as right, and shown in Long’s 1918 dictionary. He glosses the word ALL RIGHT, but describes it as: “The right hand edgewise pushed out across left supine palm”. This is followed by the parenthetical: (Correct (Right)). This is the first evidence of a two-word gloss for the word, and may signal the semantic changes leading to the addition of the colloquial ‘alright’ seen in present day ASL.

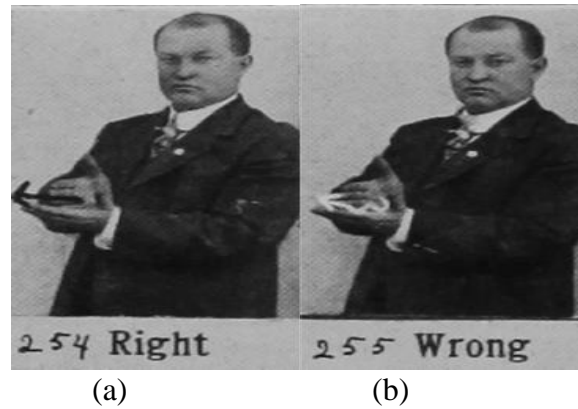


Figure 11: (a) 1918 ASL RIGHT (Long, 1918);
 (b) 1918 ASL WRONG (Long, 1918).

The films included in *The Preservation of American Sign Language* also provide evidence of the form with the meanings ‘right’, ‘proper’ and ‘correct’ in use around 1913. In example (2) below Dr. Thomas F. Fox translates a portion of the Gettysburg Address into ASL (*The Preservation of Sign Language*, 1913):

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met here on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

In his rendition of the final sentence “It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this,” Dr. Fox signs:

(2) TRUE ALL TOGETHER AGREE RIGHT FOR PRO.1pl DO THAT
 ‘It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this’

RIGHT as signed by Dr. Fox is seen below in Figure 12.



Figure 12: Approximately 1913 RIGHT ('proper') as signed by Dr. Thomas F. Fox (*The Preservation of Sign Language*, 1913).

Similarly, in 1913, Dr. Hotchkiss relates his memories of Laurent Clerc's time at the American School for the Deaf in Hartford Connecticut. He tells a story of Clerc urging the students to use correct English grammar. He begins the story with (*The Preservation of Sign Language*, 1913):

(3) ONCE PRO.1 REMEMBER PRO.3 CLERC GO ENTER INSTITUTE
 STAND STORY SPREAD DEAF ABOUT IMPORTANT MOST
 PRO.3 KEEP READ WRITE ORDER ORDER YOUR WORK RIGHT
 'Once, I remember, Clerc came to our school to lecture about the importance of reading and writing correctly ordered English sentences.'

Figure 13 below shows Hotchkiss signing RIGHT ('correct') from example (2) above.



Figure 13: Approximately 1913 RIGHT ('proper' or 'correct') as signed by the Reverend Dr. John B. Hotchkiss (*The Preservation of Sign Language*, 1913).

In the same segment, Dr. Hotchkiss relates a story where Clerc asks a young boy to have a campus steward bring him some fire wood. The boy assures Clerc he will and runs off to play, promptly forgetting his promise. Clerc receives no fire wood. After several days, Clerc approaches the boy and admonishes him for forgetting to complete the task. Finally, the boy asks

Clerc for forgiveness. Hotchkiss signs the following which, as in the Higgins description from footnote 4, suggests that semantic generalization of RIGHT may have been happening in the early 20th century. Figure 14 shows this production of RIGHT.

- (4) IMMEDIATELY CLERC FACE SMILE BRIGHT
 RIGHT FORGIVEN FORGIVEN
 ‘Immediately Clerc smiled, his face brightened.
 (He told the boy) All is right, you are forgiven. You are forgiven.’



Figure 14: The Reverend Dr. Hotchkiss signing RIGHT in approximately 1913 (*The Preservation of Sign Language*, 1913).

In another film from *The Preservation of Sign Language*, Dr. Amos Draper shares his recollections of the signing of the charter for Gallaudet College. He states:

- (5) PRO.1 FEEL POSS.3 DEAF HOPES PROGRESS.UP LEVEL RIGHT
 GOOD.
 ‘I believe that deaf people’s hopes for a better education is right and good.’

Still referencing the signing of the Gallaudet charter, he then says:

- (6) PRO.1 DECIDE PRO.1 SELF PUT.DOWN POSS.1 NAME ON THAT CL:
 traces edges of a document A-C-T AND PRO.1 HOPE FUTURE TIME
 SHOW THAT RIGHT
 ‘I have decided to put my signature on this act and am hopeful that future generations will prove it to be right.’

The images for example (5) and (6) appear in Figure 15 below.

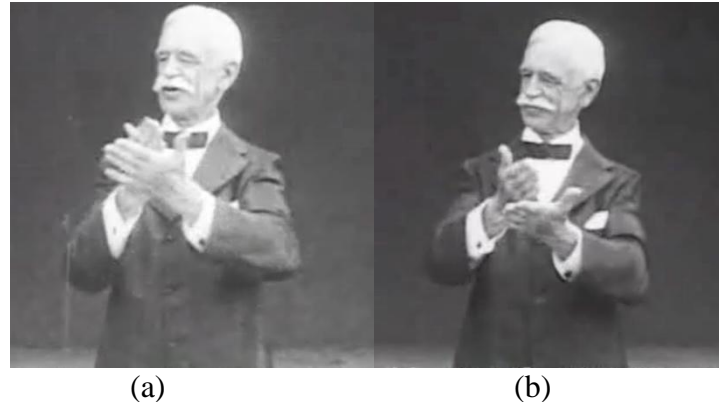


Figure 15: Dr. Amos Draper signing (a) RIGHT ('proper') and;
(b) RIGHT ('right action') (*The Preservation of Sign Language*, 1913).

As discussed earlier, both the French and English origins of 'rightness' are known to relate historically to a sense of 'straightness'. Given this, and given the available diachronic evidence from both 19th century French Sign Language and early 20th century American Sign Language, I hypothesize that the forms found in Pélissier's and Lambert's dictionaries likely began as iconic gestures. Taking this hypothesis further, I believe that this 'straight movement along a path', is part of an image schema. 'Straight' has been previously described as an image schema based on ASL data (Shaffer 1995) and more generally and thoroughly explored by Cienki (1998). Image schemas described initially by Johnson (1987) and others are recurrent patterns, shapes, or regularities in our actions, conceptions, and perceptions. "...These patterns emerge primarily as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of our bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions" (Johnson, 1987, p. 29). This image schema (and by extension the image schema of 'warped') then led to the forms seen in Pélissier's and Lambert's 1850s dictionaries along with Long's dictionary in 1918 and in the films from approximately 1913.

RIGHT had a range of early meanings including 'proper' and 'correct'. RIGHT became the word used by signers of present day ASL to indicate their human, civil, and legal rights, and a similar form (with reduplicated movement) came to mean 'alright'. Another form also emerged in ASL with the meaning 'right' (correct, not wrong) and ultimately has become the more common form seen when expressing 'right' (as opposed to wrong). Long's 1918 dictionary provided that word glossed there as CORRECT, EXACT.

"Correct, Exact. Holding the left "G" hand pointing out, the "G" up, strike it on the top with the right "G" hand held in a similar position" (Long, 1918, p.74).

DISCUSSION

I add RIGHT knowing that may be a bit controversial among ASL/English interpreters working in legal settings. My goal is not to advocate for the use of RIGHT, nor am I cautioning against its use. My aim is to describe the historical development of a set of words from available evidence and to suggest (following Janzen and Shaffer, 2008 and 2013) that interpreters are best served when we view communication intersubjectively. When people communicate, we continually assess comprehension and construct our utterances based on how we think the message will be best understood, in that moment, by that person.

CONCLUSION

During interaction, people come together with their own background experiences and schema. They attempt to share their understanding with the person they are talking to. The words and phrases they choose are based on their own experiences with life and language. This experience provides the resources with which to construct their utterances, and determines how they construct meaning from their perspective. Their experience is part of the larger meaning construction of all users. Again, this is an intersubjective view of language, where meaning is negotiated. This negotiation takes place at the micro level between discourse participants, and at a macro level across discourse settings, leading to language change. What a word means at any given moment, then, is merely an agreed upon meaning. What something means changes through use, via metaphor, semantic extension and language contact. Language use leads to language change.

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