Introduction to Third Edition

Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects, Inc. is a non-profit organization whose members and staff include sign language linguists, university professors, social workers and Deaf Nicaraguans. Our mission is to empower Nicaragua's Deaf citizens by fostering the spread of the indigenous signed language throughout the nation. We first began documenting the emergence of Nicaraguan Sign Language in 1986. Over the years, many people have asked us where they can obtain a text book to help them to learn this fascinating language. In an effort to meet this need, the Nicaraguan National Deaf Association (ANSNIC) has published a dictionary with about 1,200 signs depicted with line drawings. ANSNIC also publishes a small children's dictionary with photographs. Both resources are useful.

In 2013, we published our first edition of the *Nicaraguan Sign Language Handbook*. Our first edition featured 875 sign entries preceded by a grammar section summarizing some of the fundamental principles of the language's grammar and syntax. This third edition brings the number of sign entries up to 1100, allowing our handbook to be used as a quick reference guide of frequently used signs. We also continue to expand and revise our grammar section in an effort to discuss some of the fundamental rules of the language in a more detailed manner. Finally, we added our adaptation of Nicaragua's national anthem.

This handbook is intended to serve as a valuable resource for families with Deaf members, for educators, for interpreters, for health care workers, for Deaf people and for anyone who wants to know more about Nicaraguan Sign Language. Our handbook is designed to serve English as well as Spanish readers.

We advise you:

1) Nicaraguan Sign Language is a complex and sophisticated language with thousands of signs and many rules for organizing these signs into sentences. In this handbook, we are showing you only hundreds of signs.
2) In our handbook, we explain some of the important features of the grammar and syntax of Nicaraguan Sign Language. However, for purposes of expediency, the analysis of the language's structure that we are giving you is far from complete.
3) When you are struggling to convey an idea in Nicaraguan Sign Language, your Deaf friend will be patient and forgiving, even if you throw in some pantomime, mangle the signs and mix up the syntax. After all, to Spanish speakers in Nicaragua, Nicaraguan Sign Language is as different from Spanish as Miskito. For most of us, learning a foreign language is never easy, and for people like us Nicaraguan Sign Language might as well be a foreign language. Therefore, learning to communicate effectively and properly in Nicaraguan Sign Language is not a skill that you can learn in a day, or a month, or a year.
4) You cannot master Nicaraguan Sign Language from a book. With this handbook, however, you can learn many signs and you can learn many rules that will help you in your quest to master this language. But, to become fluent, you must interact with Deaf Nicaraguans who are themselves fluent.

5) School administrators: Most children who are deaf come into the school system with minimal sign language skills. The only way these children can acquire sign language fluency is by being immersed in a sign language rich environment. These children need sign language role models who are fluent signers. This means employing adult Deaf Nicaraguans as teachers in your school.
6) Parents with a pre-school deaf child: Ideally, deaf children need to be immersed in sign language as soon as possible. But, for most families, this simply is not practical. Instead, you need to use as many signs as you can with your child in the home. Be creative and be daring. And, do not use just one or two signs at a time. Rather, string them together to express full sentences. If you do not know the sign you need, use a gesture instead. You cannot harm your child by making signs incorrectly, only by not signing at all. Deaf children who use lots of signs with their parents at home usually acquire Nicaraguan Sign Language quickly once they enter a classroom with Deaf teachers.

   Many parents find it very difficult to invent signs while they are also talking. We suggest that when you are signing with your child, RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO TALK! Studies show that parents who struggle to sign and gesture WITHOUT TALKING produce sentences that are substantially richer in language than parents who supplement their signs with speech. Please do yourself and your deaf child a favor: pantomime, grimace, sign and gesture SILENTLY.

7) Every signer uses variations, just like Spanish speakers have different accents and dialects. We have endeavored to depict the signs in this handbook correctly, with a preference for the dialect used in Managua. You may encounter and should respect minor regional differences. Also, Nicaraguan Sign Language, like all languages, is dynamic – there will be changes over time.
8) We use SignWriting extensively in our handbook. We are aware that many users of this handbook are unfamiliar with this writing system for sign languages. In fact, SignWriting is very easy to learn – but someone does need to train you. Even if you cannot read all the SignWriting symbols, you should look at the direction and movement arrows and the eye gaze symbols, along with the photograph of the signer. (Refer to our description of SignWriting immediately after this Introduction.)

When a Deaf child masters Nicaraguan Sign Language, he or she is able to produce signed sentences and understand signed sentences at a rapid pace. For the natively fluent signer, the language flows naturally. For those of us who do not sign natively, an understanding of the language's rules of grammar and syntax helps us to improve our own ability to express ourselves and understand fluent signers.

What is the correct acronym for Nicaraguan Sign Language?

We recommend that you refer to Nicaraguan Sign Language by using the acronym "ISN" – *Idioma de Señas de Nicaragua*.

What is the origin of Nicaraguan Sign Language?

Prior to the 1980s, Nicaraguan Sign Language did not exist. Most deaf children in Nicaragua stayed home and had little opportunity to encounter other deaf children. Of course, being deaf, these children had no access to Spanish or any other spoken language. As these children grew into adulthood, they remained completely "languageless." In the 1970s, a few deaf children attended small special education classes, most notably in Ciudad Dario and Managua, but these programs did not teach a signed language. (Similar educational efforts going back at least to the 1940s focused on speech therapy.) After the 1979 revolution, the new government embarked upon a "Literacy Crusade" aimed at bringing at least a fourth grade education to all members of Nicaraguan society, including children with disabilities. The special education school in Managua was re-opened, but this time with hundreds of deaf students attending academic classes at the Melania Morales Special Education Center in Barrio San Judas.[1] Teachers at this school were not able to communicate using a sign language, but instead tried to teach students to understand Spanish by reading lips, by reading written Spanish, and by using a manual alphabet (fingerspelling). These methods were unsuccessful. And yet, within a few years, a new sign language, with a rich vocabulary and a complex grammar, was created by this student population. How did this happen?

When a deaf child stays at home, the child can survive with minimal communication. The child does not need a sophisticated language because all his or her needs are taken care of by the child's hearing parents and other family members. At home, a single gesture can be used to cover entire events. For example, waving the hand toward the mouth can mean: "are you hungry," "time to eat," "do you like the food?," "that is a mango," "that is a potato," or just about anything else somehow related to food. The hearing family member does the thinking for the deaf child and uses the "food gesture" to mean whatever fits the situation at hand. Similarly, another gesture could mean "sleep," "bed," "go to bed" or "are you sleepy?" Consequently, deaf children left isolated in homes with hearing family members learn very simple gesture systems, and nothing more. Tragically, such children grow into adulthood wholly dependent upon their family members for everything.

At Melania Morales, hundreds of these deaf children, ages 4 to 16, suddenly found themselves in an environment where their communication needs were no longer met by family members. These children were now forced to come up with a better way to communicate with each other. They copied each other's gestures, expanding their repertoires as a common vocabulary began to develop among them. They were not using a language – not yet. But, they were becoming better at communicating their needs and experiences among each other.

[1] Programs for deaf children were also set up in other locations including León, Estelí, Ocotal and a vocational class in Bo. Villa Libertad in Managua. Sign language was not taught at any of these programs, but over time older students from the Bo. San Judas school transferred to the vocational class in Bo. Villa Libertad. There may have been contact between Managua and León students, as well.

Hearing infants have an uncanny ability to acquire first language skills within the first few years of life. Hearing children in typical Spanish speaking homes will speak Spanish fluently by the time they are ready to enter primary school. How children are able to do this is a matter of much scientific study and debate.

In the 1960s, Professor Noam Chomsky at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology argued that children do not learn language the way they learn other skills, such as reading or playing a game of cards. Rather, Chomsky theorized that children are born with an inherited or innate ability to learn any human language. He claimed that the only way that children could so reliably learn grammar, even when their parents were not consistently using full grammatical sentences, was that children come to language learning with certain built-in expectations about how languages work.[2] Chomsky suggested that all human languages are governed by a "universal grammar." In other words, the infant expects the language in his environment to adhere to certain grammatical rules from a preset number of acceptable options. For example, the child expects a rule to distinguish "one" from "more than one" or an ongoing action from an action completed in the past. The child anticipates that the language around him will employ rules for word order to distinguish subjects, verbs and objects from each other in any sentence. Given access to that language, the child will determine which rules apply and how those rules apply. The child needs then only to plug in vocabulary and to memorize the occasional exceptions in order to form grammatically correct sentences.

Unlike spoken languages, all signed languages – and there are many of them – are able to take advantage of three dimensional space to describe thoughts and events. We think that deaf children, through their language instinct, expect certain grammatical structures to apply in their visual language, especially when communication involves a three dimensional concept: *The girl puts the book on the top shelf. The cat sits under the table.* And, indeed, the sign language that emerged in Managua shares many of the grammatical structures that we see in other signed languages. In other ways, Nicaraguan Sign Language has properties that we find in spoken languages like Spanish, or Chinese, or Swahili.

Every time a child acquires his first language, that child is really creating a language. Born with a language instinct, the child is able to determine how the language used by others fits his innate expectations about grammar. If adding *s* converts one *perro* to many, then adding *s* to one *gato* should achieve the same result. The child over time adjusts such generalizations as needed to deal with any observed exceptions and simply expands his vocabulary by memorizing the words used by everyone else. In due course, the language that the child has created matches the language in his environment. (Children growing up in a home where two languages are used have no trouble becoming fluent in both languages.)

What the child cannot do is produce a language in a vacuum. The child may have an innate capacity to create language, but something in his environment has to trigger the process. Furthermore, many studies strongly suggest that as the child grows older, his natural ability to create a first language begins to diminish. It is therefore critical that each child be given the opportunity to acquire first language skills while that child is still young.

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[22] In casual conversation, we frequently have no need to speak using full grammatical sentences.

We can identify four conditions that produced a fertile ground for a new language to take root in Managua and other sites where deaf children came together.

The first language condition was the obvious one: visual access to communication. Hearing children hear speech all around them. Deaf children who grow up in a home surrounded by fluent sign language users have no problem becoming native signers. In Managua, even when teachers were forbidding gesturing in the classroom, the deaf children had access to each other during recess. Moreover, they tended to travel together on the buses each day between home and school.

The second condition was quantity – a sufficient number of children in contact with each other. Would a sign language emerge in a small group of children over a long period of time? Possibly – but in Managua hundreds of deaf children were brought together, and Nicaraguan Sign Language was created in just a few years.

The third condition was need. As noted above, without assistance from their parents, these children needed to find a way to communicate their thoughts and experiences on their own. Further, confronted by the academic challenges of school classrooms, these children had a lot to discuss.

The final condition was the age spread. The deaf children in Managua ranged from age 4 to teenage adolescents. The older children supplied old gestures from home and new gestures they came up with at school in order to create the beginnings of a lexicon. The young children expected there to be some kind of grammar. The teenagers, however, were merely stringing together gestures copied from one another – a form of communication that was called "mimicas" by their hearing teachers. Still, when children observed anything that appeared to be a reoccurring pattern, they mistakenly assumed that this pattern constituted a rule. These children then applied this rule to similar circumstances.

Ironically, the children themselves became the language role models for the teenagers. The teenagers began copying the children! In doing so, a loop was established. Looking for feedback from older students, the children saw only their own generalizations about grammar coming into use. Young children did not have to adapt their generalizations to fit the language model around them. Instead, those generalizations became the prototype. Unlike the Spanish speaking child who re-creates Spanish from the Spanish of his environment, the deaf children in Managua had managed to create an entirely new language.

In 1986, the teachers and administrators at the Melania Morales school were mystified that the children appeared to be using their hands to communicate with each other. That year, the Ministry of Education invited another linguist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Judy Kegl, to come to Managua and explain this unexpected phenomenon. Familiar with Chomsky's universal grammar theories, Kegl quickly realized that the Nicaraguan government had supplied the triggers that would enable deaf children to create a rich, complex and rule governed new sign language. Armed with video cameras, Kegl endeavored to document the birthing of Nicaraguan Sign Language.

"The Nicaraguan case is absolutely unique in history," Steven Pinker, author of The Language Instinct, maintains in an interview with a journalist. "We've been able to see how it is that children — not adults — generate language, and we have been able to record it happening in great scientific detail. And it's the only time that we've actually seen a language being created out of thin air." Lawrence Osborne, *"A Linguistic Big Bang"*, New York Times, October 24, 1999. For a full description: Stephen Pinker, The Language Instinct, The New Science of Language and Mind, Penguin Books (London, UK 1994). And, for a scientific article, we suggest: Kegl, Senghas and Coppola, *"Creation through Contact: Sign Language Emergence and Sign Language Change in Nicaragua"* in Language Creation and Language Change: Creolization, Diachrony, and Development, Michel DeGraff, Ed., MIT Press (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England 1999), pp. 179-237. These articles are available in English only.

In time, the Ministry of Education shifted away from an educational philosophy based upon lip-reading and, instead, embraced the new sign language. Today, the vocational school in Barrio Villa Libertad is long gone, but the Melania Morales primary school in Barrio San Judas is thriving. Schools in many other cities have adopted Nicaraguan Sign Language for use in the education of their deaf students. In some communities, Deaf students are now able to attend secondary school programs, and, in some cases, university classes. More and more interpreters are being trained. And, a few Deaf Nicaraguans have become certified as teachers in pre-schools and primary schools.

The Deaf culture in Managua is vibrant, centered around the Nicaraguan National Deaf Association (ANSNIC). Smaller chapters of ANSNIC are forming in several other cities.

While many deaf children, especially in rural communities, continue to live with limited or total language isolation, Nicaraguan Sign Language has spread to the four corners of the country. And, linguists worldwide include Nicaraguan Sign Language on the list of human languages, spoken or signed.

What is Oralism?

We have found no evidence of use of a signed language or the existence of a Deaf community in Nicaragua prior to the 1980s. Deaf people, of course, existed, but they lived largely in isolation from one another and in linguistic isolation from society, in general. In 1977, a special education program for young deaf children was established in Barrio San Judas, in Managua. In the beginning, children in this school were expected to develop Spanish competency by observing lip movement. This teaching methodology is known as the oral method, or oralism. Hearing educators have disputed the value of an oralist philosophy of education for two centuries. Deaf people generally reject this approach. Most deaf children find lip-reading to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Except in very limited situations, communication in this fashion is confusing, frustrating and ineffective. Children forced in school to use lip-reading often abandon the effort upon leaving school. The oralist approach may yield more favorable results for

children who are hard of hearing and are able to effectively use hearing aids in combination with visual cues to understand speech.

We believe that profoundly deaf children are best served by an education that allows them to acquire fluency in a signed language as their native or first language. We define a "profoundly deaf" child as a child who is unable, even with a hearing aid, to process speech, even if that aid allows the child to respond to other noises. We also recognize that hearing aids for many children are only effective if those children are also receiving a great deal of speech therapy. If speech therapy is unavailable for a hard of hearing child or if due to humidity or cost the child's hearing aid cannot be maintained in proper working order, then we consider that child to be profoundly deaf, as well.

It is our experience that the best deaf signers in the end develop better Spanish literacy skills than children who cannot sign well. Put another way, profoundly deaf children who are not immersed in a signed language usually do not achieve acceptable competency in Spanish, either. Moreover, we are concerned whenever a school program emphasizes Spanish training at the expense of education in other academic subjects (math, science, civics, history, and literature.)

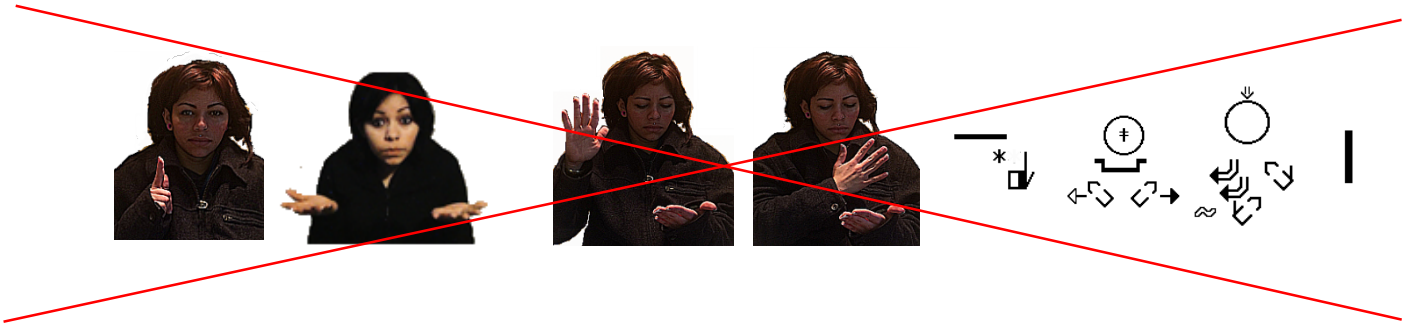
Deaf artist Nancy Rourke shows two Deaf children secretly signing to each other. Note their faces hidden in their hair. Rourke, in her 2012 painting, expresses her opinion that oralism is abusive. (Permission granted.)

What is Signed Spanish?

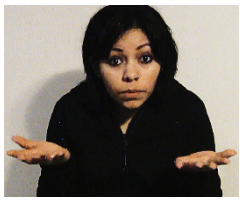
Signed Spanish involves attempting to communicate using more or less Spanish grammar with signs generally but not always from Nicaraguan Sign Language. This may be easier for the Spanish speaker who is unfamiliar with or having difficulty mastering the grammar of Nicaraguan Sign Language. However, Nicaraguan Sign Language is a visual language that uses three dimensional signing space for efficient, elegant and effective communication. By contrast, Spanish, as a speech driven language, is a clumsy way to communicate in three dimensional signing space. When you re-order your signs to fit Spanish syntax and try to somehow modify your signs to be more Spanish-like, you produce a communication system that is cumbersome to use, confusing at best, and often unintelligible.

A common confusion caused by an attempt to mix Spanish with ISN involves the words “tener” and “que.” The Spanish word “que” when coupled with the verb “tener” conveys a meaning of necessity and must be followed by a verb in its infinitive form: “Tengo que estudiar.” (“I need to study.) ISN has a specific sign to convey “need”, followed by a verb, and without any intervening sign.

ISN also has a sign for “tener,” meaning “to possess” and a sign for the interrogative “¿qué?” (“what?”). Unfortunately, some teachers continue to pressure Deaf children to express necessity by signing the Signed Spanish form: “tengo que,” yielding a nonsense sentence: “Poseo ¿qué? estudiar.” (“I possess what? study.”)



The signer in this illustration is mixing ISN with Spanish. Your signing will improve when you are able to ignore Spanish grammar rules that have nothing to do with ISN. Moreover, by adhering to ISN grammar, you demonstrate your respect for the Deaf person’s language – and for the Deaf person. Simply because Spanish speakers use a particular rule does not mean that rule should be forced on users of another language. **Furthermore. we see no evidence that teaching Signed Spanish to Deaf children helps them to read Spanish.**



The sign “qué” is always used as a question in ISN and never used in any other context. Do not use this sign as a substitute for the Spanish word “que” following a verb such as “tener”.

Where Do Signs Come From?

1. Resemblance
2. Initialization
3. Systematic word formation rules within the language
4. Borrowed signs
5. Fingerspelling
6. Dialects

1. Resemblance

Signs often in some way look like a **prominent feature** associated with the concept they represent. For example, the sign for "butterfly" is made with flapping hands.



butterfly

Sometimes, more than one feature is used to make the sign. Consider a duck – what are some of the possible prominent features that could be expressed with hand shapes?

neck band

wing and feathers

beak

webbed feet

How about common behaviors?

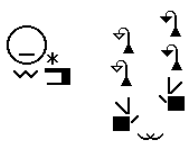
quacking

flying

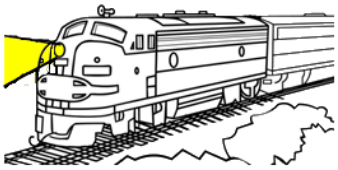
diving

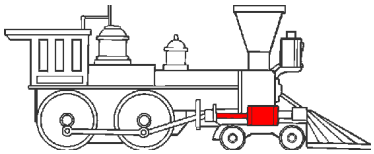
waddling

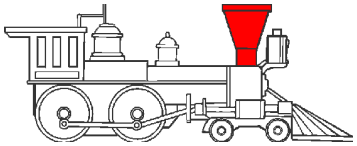
The sign for "duck" resembles 4 prominent features: beak + quacking + webbed feet + waddling.

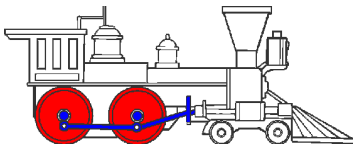



What feature would you pick to sign a train?



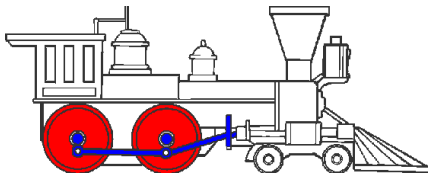




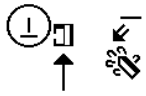


The sign for "train" resembles the movement of a steam locomotive's wheels.

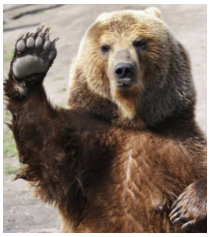
train



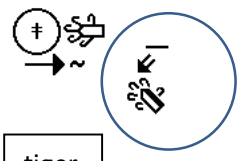
The sign for "bear" resembles the animal's snout plus the rapid movement of his claw. The sign consists of two prominent features. The first relates to physical appearance and the second relates to a common behavior or action.



bear

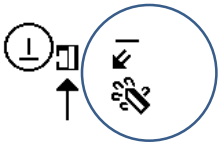


Indeed, the second part of the sign for "bear" encompasses a variety of animals that fall into the category: "animals that swipe with big claw." Other animals in this category include "tiger" and "panda bear."



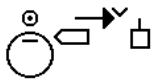
tiger

panda



Not every sign physically resembles its concept, Sometimes, the relationship is more abstract. For example, the signs involved with thinking and learning tend to involve contact with your forehead.

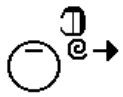
think



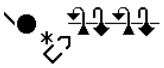
forget

learn

understand

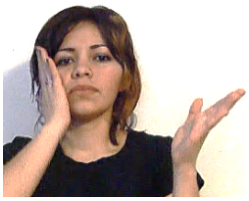
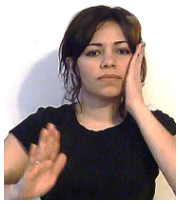
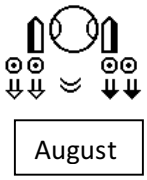


believe

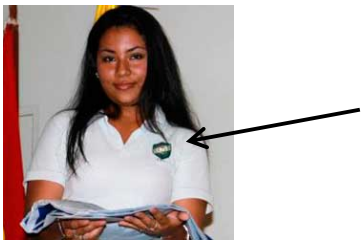
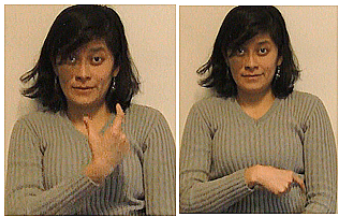
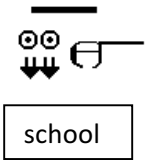


doubt

Frequently, a sign corresponds to a concept in a way that is not immediately apparent. Thus, the sign for the month of August is made by alternately stroking your cheeks – a reference to the practice of smearing grease or motor oil on your face during the Feast of Santo Domingo de Guzmán observed in Managua in August.

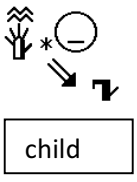




Similarly, the sign for "school" does not resemble the school's outward appearance or classroom activity, but instead relates to the practice of emblazing the school's insignia on student uniforms.

The sign for "child" has two parts: an action resembling an infant sucking a bottle, followed by an indication of the child's height.



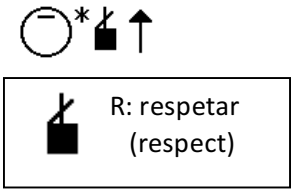


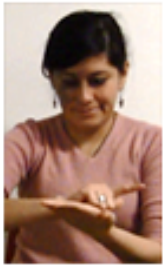
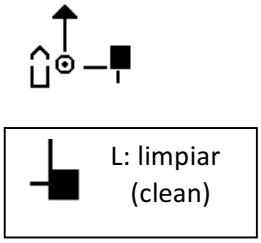
Often you may be able to use resemblance to help you remember the sign. However, you should understand that young deaf children do not make such associations, yet learn these signs nonetheless.

2. Initialization

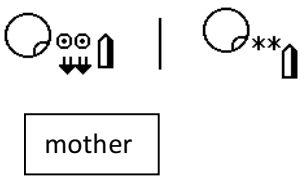
As noted below, Nicaraguan Sign Language features a distinct sign for each letter of the Roman alphabet. Many signs include a hand shape that corresponds to the first letter of the Spanish equivalent for the sign. For example, the sign for "respect" ("respetar" in Spanish) uses the "R" hand shape. And, the sign for "clean" ("limpiar" in Spanish) uses the "L" handshape.

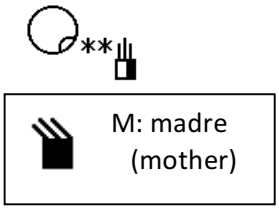




Interestingly, a few signs that originally were not initialized have become so. "Mother." for example, first appeared as a flat palm tapping or stroking the right cheek. The hand shape later transformed into the letter "M" as a variant initialized form.

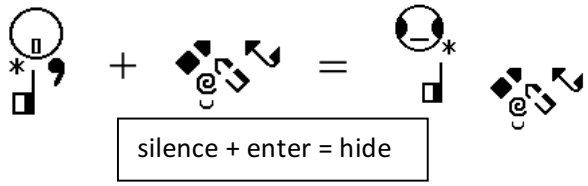



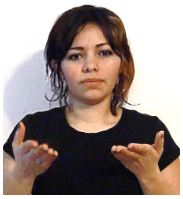



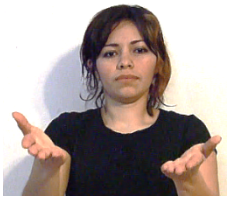
Initialization certainly presents an advantage for Spanish speakers who are trying to memorize signs. Some educators contend that initialization helps Deaf students recognize the Spanish word for the sign in question. However, to a Deaf child who is mastering Nicaraguan Sign Language, initialization is of no particular benefit.

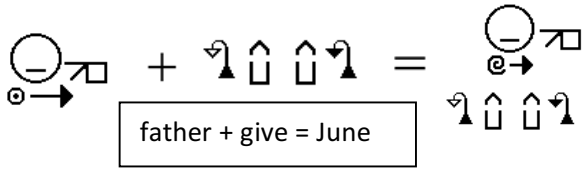
3. Systematic word formation rules

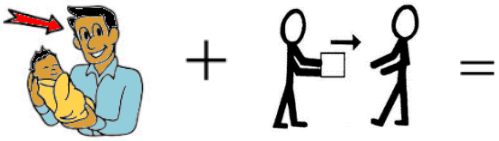
Some signs are formed by combining, or *compounding*, two signs to form a new sign, often with an entirely different meaning. For example, the sign for "hide" combines "silence" and "enter;" the sign for "June" combines "father" and "gift" (because Father's Day always falls in the month of June.)











Many signs, especially certain kinds of verbs, are formed using grammatical elements that linguists call *classifiers* and *classifier clitics*. In this handbook, we will discuss these grammatical labels in detail. We will also devote many pages to explaining *spatial verbs*, which, basically, are verbs that describe action or location occurring in three dimensional space. We will identify three kinds of spatial verbs: *directional*, *locative* and *orientational*. And, we will explain how these verbs are constructed with classifiers and classifier clitics. These rules of sentence construction are quite different from the grammar rules governing Spanish. Nevertheless, if you are able to master the rules for making spatial verbs and if you become familiar with the set of classifiers for this language, you will have the ability to increase your command of ISN dramatically.

4. Borrowed Signs

All languages borrow words from other languages, usually as a result of migration patterns, economic trade or military conquest. For example, the word "chocolate" in English or Spanish comes from the Nahuatl (Aztec language) word "xocoatl."

In recent years, many signs in Nicaraguan Sign Language have been borrowed from American Sign Language (ASL), which is the sign language used by Deaf people in the United States, portions of Canada and several other countries. ASL, in turn, has roots in early nineteenth century French Sign Language.

However, when Nicaraguan Sign Language was emerging as a language during the 1980s, the extent of borrowing from ASL was minimal, and indirect, at best.

There are many reasons for this. First, for much of the decade of the 1980s, contact with ASL signers was unlikely due to the political tension between Nicaragua and the United States at that time. Moreover, the users of a communication system before it has emerged as a true language are more resistant to borrowing words (or signs) from other languages, and Deaf Nicaraguans in Managua were no exception. By contrast, users of an established language are more comfortable about borrowing foreign vocabulary. Indeed, borrowing and change are features of a vibrant, living language. Languages that do not change invariably perish.

During the 1980s, Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries, or Contras, conducted a guerilla warfare campaign in many regions of the country. Their activities discouraged foreigners from coming to Nicaragua. For Nicaragua's emerging Deaf community, this meant their new sign language could develop without contamination by foreign sign languages.

After the Contra War, international interest in Nicaragua's new sign language and new Deaf culture attracted foreigners from the United States and elsewhere to come to Nicaragua. This 2010 photo shows students from Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA standing in front of ANSNIC's office in Managua.

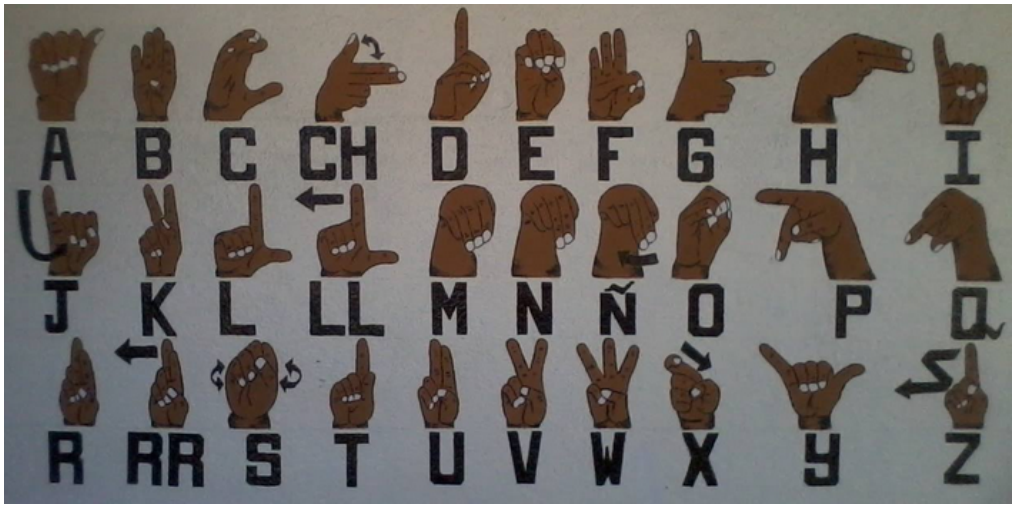
Since the end of the Contra War, contact between Deaf Nicaraguans and Deaf people from the United States has increased. We note also the proliferation of ASL on the internet and television. And, we are mindful that for several decades certain U.S. based organizations have been systematically introducing ASL throughout Latin America, and in Costa Rica and Columbia in particular. Indirect contact from neighboring countries was inevitable.

In the three decades since Nicaraguan Sign Language first appeared, advances in communication technology have been dramatic. This technology continues to empower Deaf people on a global scale. Today, many Deaf Nicaraguans are connected with Deaf friends from many other countries. One result is that these Deaf Nicaraguans are constantly exposed to other sign languages, especially ASL.

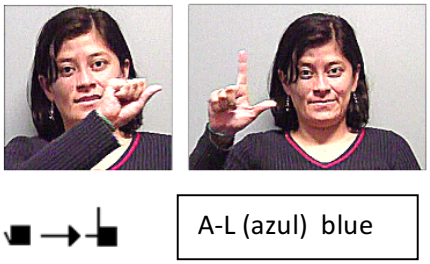
Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects does not encourage contaminating Nicaraguan Sign Language with ASL, but we also recognize its occurrence as part of a natural process of change.

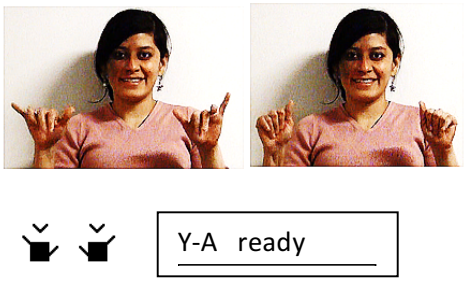
5. Fingerspelling

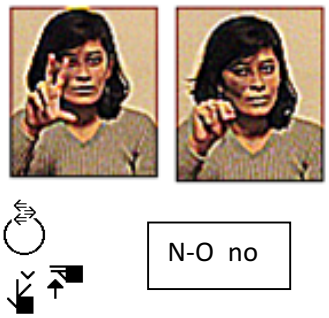
Fingerspelling is often referred to as a manual alphabet. A distinct hand shape represents a different letter in the Roman alphabet. The "fingerspelling" system used in Nicaraguan Sign Language clearly can trace its origins back to Spain where it was used by monks in the early 1400s in their effort to communicate with each other without breaking their vow of silence. This fingerspelling system was adopted by educators of the Deaf in France in the 18th century, and from there spread westward to the United States and eastward to Moscow. Our research indicates that fingerspelling was introduced to Nicaragua from Russian sources by the late 1970s. (The original "F" and "T" were made in the Russian style. During the 1980s, however, the fingerspelling in Nicaragua was changed to conform with the system found in Spanish dictionaries and, incidentally, used by Deaf people in the United States.)

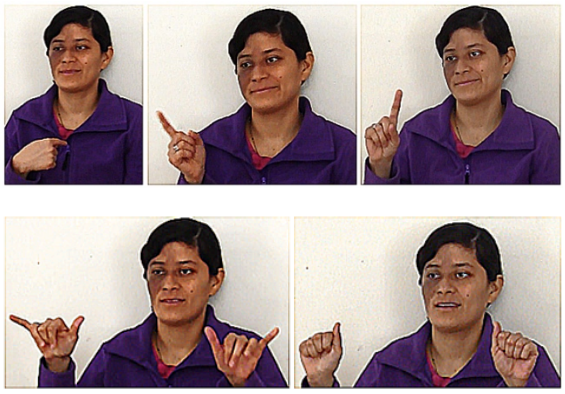


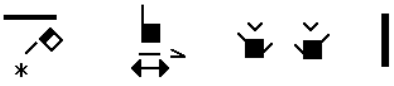
In rare instances, a fingerspelled word becomes so well recognized, even by individuals who cannot otherwise spell, that it may properly be viewed as a *fingerspelled loan sign*. "Y-A," meaning "ya" in the sense of "ready" and "A-L" meaning "azul" or "blue," are examples. By and large, however, fingerspelling is not part of Nicaraguan Sign Language at all, but merely constitutes a means to convey words spelled out in Spanish to persons who hopefully can read the letters. We discourage its use except when signing proper names for people or places.





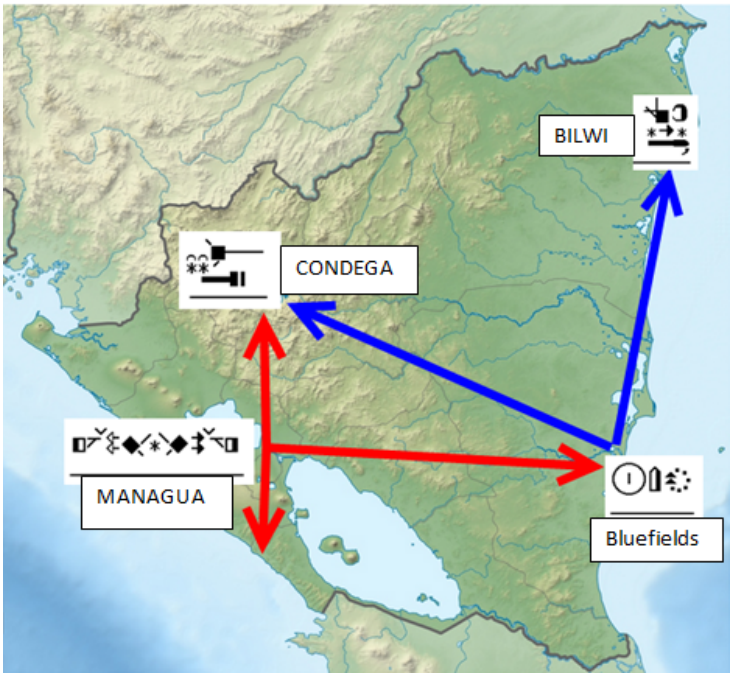






6. Dialects

Nicaraguan Sign Language first emerged in Managua during the 1980s and gradually spread north and south along the country's urbanized Pacific coast. Beginning in 1995, Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects introduced the language to Deaf people residing in the Atlantic Coast by transplanting fluent Deaf signers from Managua to Bluefields. In short order, signs peculiar to the Deaf School in Bluefields were observed. Subsequently, Deaf teachers trained in Bluefields along with other Deaf teachers from Managua brought Nicaraguan Sign Language to Condega.

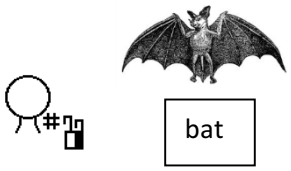


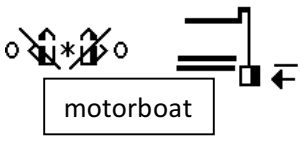
Another Deaf teacher trained in Bluefields teaches in Bilwi. As a consequence, some minor differences between the signs used in Managua and Bluefields/Condega/Bilwi can be expected.

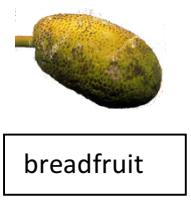
Differences in Dialect

Managua:

Bluefields:







Grammar and Syntax

Two people are able to communicate with each other effectively only when they share the same language code. When a Deaf person signs Nicaraguan Sign Language to you, the Deaf person is using a language code. English is a language code, as well. In some respects, these two language codes are similar, but in many respects the codes are quite different. Our objective is to provide you with decoding strategies – the same strategies that fluent Deaf signers are using when they sign to each other.

As you are trying to produce your own sentences in sign language, be careful not to fall back on your English code. Rather, you must strive to see language the way the Deaf person does.

In the pages that follow, we will be using many grammatical labels that our English speaking readers will remember from primary or secondary school. And, we will be introducing new grammar labels that apply to Nicaraguan Sign Language, and to signed languages in general. For starters, let us review some of the grammatical labels common to the study of English: [3]

syntax and word order– In linguistics, syntax is the study of the rules for the construction of grammatical sentences in a language. Syntax does not simply mean word order, and the terms are not synonymous. Rather, when we are studying the syntax of a language, we are examining patterns. Word order is one kind of pattern. The most common word order in English is subject-verb-object: "The dog bites the thief."

noun –a part of speech or sign that describes a person, place, thing or idea. Examples: "Luisa," "Managua," "table." A *pronoun* (such as "I," "you," "it") serves as a substitute for a noun.

adjective – a part of speech or sign that describes a noun. Examples: "a fast horse," "a brown dog."

verb – a part of speech that describes an action or state of being. Examples: "The man cooks the fish." "I remember the story." In English, because every sentence requires a verb, a *linking verb* (also called a *copulative verb*) can be used to connect two nouns or a noun and an adjective. Examples: "Marlon is a teacher." "I am happy."

adverb – a part of speech or sign that modifies a verb, adjective or other adverb and usually answers the question how?, in what way?, when? or where? Examples: "Yesterday, Amanda went to school." "The dog is very big." "The children played quietly."

preposition – in English, a part of speech that precedes a noun or noun phrase and describes a spatial relationship. Examples: "The cup is on the table." Prepositions combined with nouns also show various other relationships: "The house of Myron is

[3] These traditional labels continue to be useful when discussing the rules of grammar of a language. However, linguists today recognize that the structure of any language is the product of the human mind. In other words, human minds generate the rules that govern the structure of any particular language. Moreover, our minds also generate the rules that appear to govern all natural languages. In our examination of the grammar of ISN, we will be using many terms that would appear in the study of any language within the framework of the modern theory of generative grammar.

green." "This gift is for Miguel." "I like the painting by Yuri." The noun or noun phrase that follows the preposition is called the *complement* or *object of the preposition*. English speakers do not express spatial relationships by placing a special part of speech after the complementing noun. But, for languages that do, this part of speech is called a *postposition.* Nicaraguan Sign Language does not commonly indicate spatial relationships using either prepositions or postpositions.

subject – The subject of a sentence is the person, place or thing that is doing something or being something. If the verb is expressing an action, then the subject expresses who or what does that action. Examples: "Rolando drives the taxi." "The brown dog chases the cat." The subject is usually a noun, but can be a certain form of a verb instead: "Swimming is easy." A *null subject* is a subject that has been omitted from the sentence but can be inferred from the context. Example: In the imperative sentence "Go to bed!", the subject is understood to be "you". English, except in imperative sentences, is not a language that commonly employs null subjects in sentence construction. However, many other languages, including Nicaraguan Sign Language, use null subjects frequently.

predicate – This is the part of the sentence that includes the verb and says something about the subject. The predicate is typically a verb phrase: the verb plus the object and any modifiers. Example: "The man cooks the fish." The actor or subject is "the man." The action or the verb is "to cook." And, what the subject does, that is, the predicate, is "cooks the fish."

object – The object is a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase that receives or is affected by the action of a verb within a sentence. Example: "The cow eats the green grass."

transitive verb – an action verb that has an object to receive that action. In English, the object in this kind of sentence is called the *direct object.* Example: "The girl reads the book."

intransitive verb – in English, another kind of an action verb, but, unlike a transitive verb, the intransitive verb does not have an object receiving the action. Examples: "The girl sleeps." "The man walks to the park." In the latter example, "to the park" is a prepositional phrase that is expressing a spatial relationship.

indirect object – a noun or pronoun that indicates to whom or for whom the action of a verb in a sentence is performed. In English, there are two ways to express an indirect object. Using a preposition, the indirect object usually follows both the verb and the direct object: "The mother gives the present to her child." Using *dative movement*, the preposition is omitted and the indirect object always comes before the direct object: "The mother gives her child the present." Be careful: In the sentence, "I walked to the park," the verb is intransitive and "park" is the object of the preposition "to," but is not the indirect object of the verb.

subject-verb agreement – refers to adjusting the verb to correspond with the person (first, second, third) and number (singular or plural) of the subject. Modern English continues to apply subject-verb agreement, but only in limited circumstances and in the present tense. Examples: "We run to the store." [first person, plural]; and "The man runs to the store." [third person, singular].

verb inflection – in English, refers to changing the verb from its base in order to achieve subject-verb agreement or past tense (adding *–d* or-*ed*) or in order to convert the verb to

a present participle or gerund (adding *ing*). English also inflects other parts of speech. Nouns are inflected to indicate plurality (adding *–s* or *–es*) and adjectives are inflected to show the comparative (adding *–er*) or the superlative (adding *est*).

intonation – in English, refers to varying spoken pitch to distinguish between declarative and interrogative sentences or to focus attention on a particularly important element of the message.

TRANSITIVE VS. INTRANSITIVE VERB

English: *The man cooks the fish.*
Subject: *The man* [person: third; number: singular]
Verb: *cooks* **TRANSITIVE**
Inflection: add *–s* for subject-verb agreement
Object: *the fish*
Predicate: *cooks the fish* The verb is transitive and is followed by a direct object.
Word order: subject-verb-direct object [S-V-O]

ISN sentence structure: similar

English: *The bear stands on the rock.*
Subject: *The bear* [person: third; number: singular]
Verb: stands **INTRANSITIVE**
Inflection: add *–s* for subject-verb agreement
Preposition (to show a spatial relationship): *on*
Complement (object of the preposition): *the rock*
Predicate: *stands on the rock*
Word order: subject-verb-preposition + noun phrase [S-V-P+NP]

ISN sentence structure: very different

As you study Nicaraguan Sign Language, always consider whether these English grammar labels and rules are used more or less in the same way, or in a markedly different way – or not at all!

If you are unsure about how to apply the grammar and word order of Nicaraguan Sign Language in a particular instance, do not fall back on English or Spanish grammar and word order. Your goal is to use the code that the Deaf person is using. When you apply the wrong code, you invariably skew your message. Slow down and use simple ISN structure until you are more comfortable with more complex ISN sentences.

In this edition of our ISN handbook, we are going to limit our discussion to some of the most important rules of grammar and syntax. In the course of our examination of this language, we will be introducing you to many grammatical labels that may be unfamiliar to you. For now, we can summarize some of these rules as follows, with those new labels shown in red:

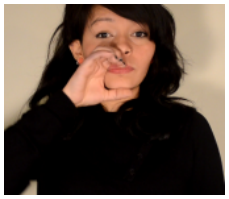
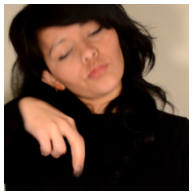
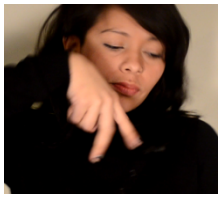
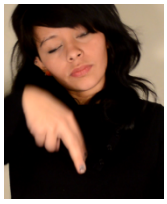
1. The most basic sign order is subject-verb-object [SVO]. Subject-verb-object order generally applies when the verb is a plain verb.
2. Three dimensional concepts are expressed using spatial verbs, which may be directional, orientational or locative. Ground always occurs before figure in a spatial verb. The word order in sentences of this type is usually object-subject-verb [OSV].
3. Nicaraguan Sign Language does not construct predicates with verbs plus prepositional phrases. Instead, the language uses locative and directional verbs to show where the action is happening or where something is located.
4. Classifiers and classifier clitics are used abundantly.
5. To determine the subject and object of a transitive sentence, look at how the signer's head moves and how the signer's eyes gaze.
6. Verbs do not show tense (past, present, future). Instead, Nicaraguan Sign Language uses temporal adverbs ("yesterday," "tomorrow.") Nicaraguan Sign Language also uses "finish" to indicate a completed action.
7. Nicaraguan Sign Language uses serial verbs, for example, "give-accept" and "purchase-receive."
8. Unlike Spanish or English, there is no primary copulative or linking verb in Nicaraguan Sign Language.
9. A number may come before or after the noun. Adjectives or adjective groups that answer the question, "What kind is it?" generally come after the noun.
10. Use role shifting when quoting someone or demonstrating an action from that person's perspective.
11. Dual and plural (three or more) are expressed with quantifiers, by numeral incorporation and by distributed aspect on the verb.
12. Topicalization is expressed in part by word order and in part by more subtle cues, specifically, eye gazing and head tilting.
13. Signs meaning "there," "that." "the," along with many pronouns, are expressed with deictic gestures.

Is it a Sign or is it a Gesture?

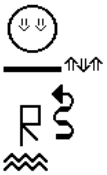
Good story tellers in a speech driven language, like English or Spanish, often enhance their narratives with gestures – an emotional facial expression, a pointing finger, a shrug of the shoulders. Yet, in a signed language, a finger point can be regarded as an adverb of location (meaning "there,") and a facial expression can be integral to making the sign. Certainly, many signs have their origins in various gestures often employed by talking people.

Perhaps the best way to draw the distinction between a sign and a gesture is to consider the function of each. A sign is composed of many elements, each meaningless by itself, but together representing a concept. Handshape, orientation of the hand, motion of the hand, eye gazing and facial expressions are all components of signs or sign language grammar. Languages both

spoken and signed can be supplemented by gestures. We can illustrate this with the following phrase:

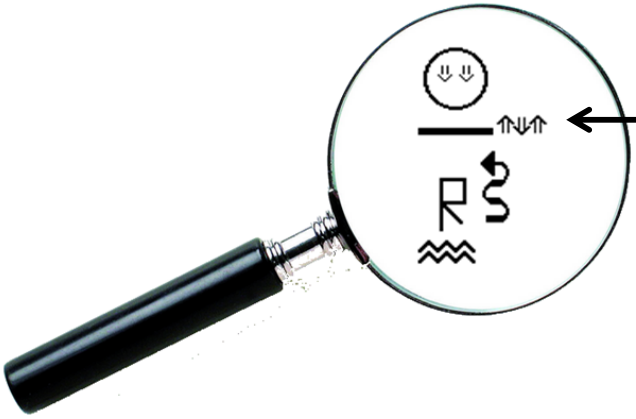









The pig saunters....

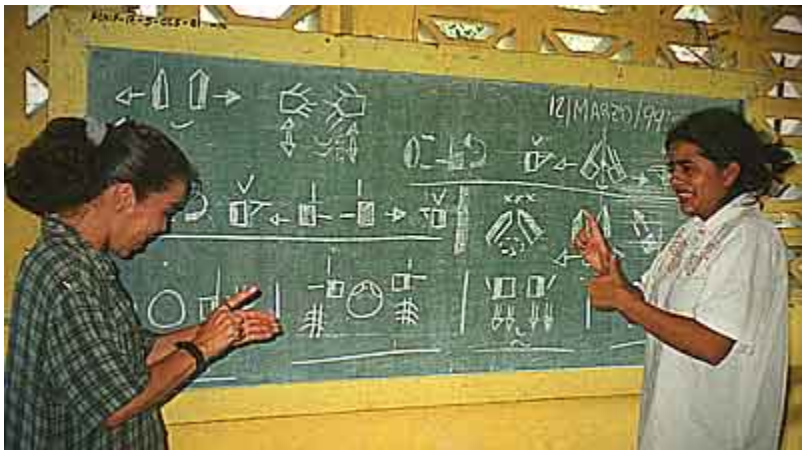
Our thanks to Golden Book Publishing Co. for use of *The Three Little Pigs,* adapted by Alan Benjamin with illustrations by Lilian Obligado (New York, 1988)



The downward eye gaze, the person-by-legs classifier handshape and the ambling movement of the handshape are all components of the sign for the verb "saunter". **The signer is gesturing by raising and lowering her two shoulders, one after the other, to supplement her signing.** Her gesture makes her communication more vivid, but is not really integral to the sign.

Note: So-called *deictic gestures*, discussed elsewhere in this manual, may be properly considered to be signs.

SignWriting



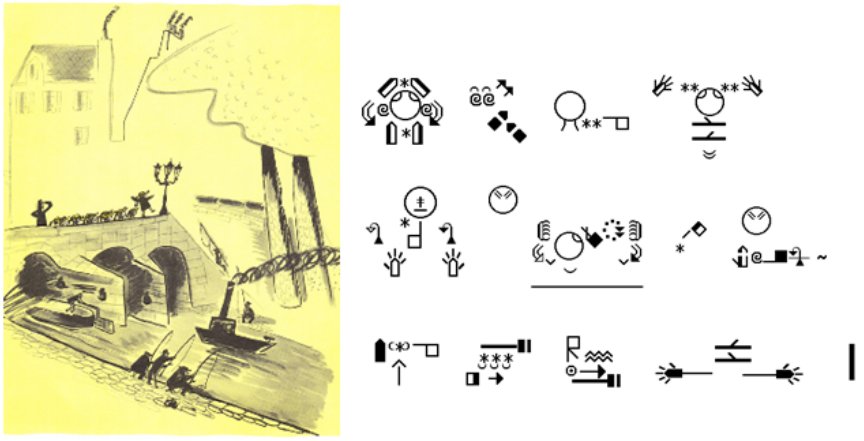
Geography class, Bluefields (1999)

SignWriting is a writing system that can be used to write any signed language, including Nicaraguan Sign Language. SignWriting was first developed in 1974 by a North American, Valerie Sutton, at the request of a signed language linguist at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. A year earlier, Sutton had invented a movement writing system for ballet, called Sutton DanceWriting. In the years since Sutton modified her ballet notational system to represent signs, SignWriting has evolved into an effective and efficient writing system for signed languages. Although some linguists employ SignWriting as a research tool, its real popularity is with Deaf users as a writing system. Today, SignWriting is a registered trademark of Sutton's non-profit organization, the Center for Sutton Movement Writing, Inc., in La Jolla, California. SignWriting is used worldwide, although the level of use varies from country to country and is generally restricted to small groups or individual school programs. For more information, visit www.signwriting.org.

SignWriting uses a code system to represent each signed word in much the same way that Spanish uses a phonemic alphabet to transcribe the sounds of speech that form each spoken word. SignWriting is visually phonetic. Once the student learns the code, he or she can reliably predict how a sign may be written. This code may seem complex to you at first, but with some instruction and a little practice, SignWriting is quite easy to grasp.

Bluefields student reading story in Nicaraguan Sign Language (photo by Susan Meiselas, 1999)

Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects introduced SignWriting in Bluefields in 1996 and integrated SignWriting into the curriculum during those years that we were active in operating a school program for Deaf students in that community. The SignWriting used in this manual is consistent with the writing system that we used in Bluefields. SignWriting at that time could be typed with a computer keyboard using a program called SignWriter. SignWriting and its associated computer programs have changed somewhat since that time. To learn more, see the the Center for Sutton Movement Writing's website.



NSLP instructors taught SignWriting to Deaf students in Bluefields so that those students could enjoy reading stories in their own language. The above illustration is from our adaptation of *Madeline* by Ludwig Bemelmans (copyright 1939 by Ludwig Bemelmans, renewed © 1967 by Madeline Bemelmans and Barbara Bemelmans Marciano. Used by permission of Viking Children's Books, A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group. All rights reserved). Translation: *The poor nun is always worried because Madeline is disobedient – for example, she balances herself on the bridge railing.*

We certainly do not expect you to be able to learn to read SignWriting from this manual. Moreover, all signs are presented in this manual with video frames so that you really do not need to understand SignWriting. To be sure, readers who have sign language literacy skills will find this manual easier to use. However, if SignWriting is too daunting for you, then rest assured that you may simply skip this section entirely. That said, because movement of handshapes is such a critical aspect of Nicaraguan Sign Language, we suggest that you at least refer to our description of the direction and movement symbols.

For those of you who would like to see a somewhat detailed breakdown of SignWriting, here is a reference guide that we hope you may find helpful. You will find that many of the symbols are distinctive and easy to understand. However, in some cases, you may find the distinction between certain symbols may be more subtle. Furthermore, for many signs, the choice of one symbol over another may be a matter of judgment. This is true especially in the case of many facial symbols. For example, should eye gazing be indicated or left to the intuition of the reader?

Each sign is divided into aspects:

1) hand shape
2) hand orientation
3) contact
4) direction and movement
5) dynamics
6) facial location and characteristics
7) body location and shifting

Hand shape and orientation: SignWriting uses three primary hand shapes: flat hand, closed fist and open fist (also called O-hand.) These three shapes are then divided into ten groups based upon finger positions. In all, there are over 600 conceivable permutations. Directional arrows are of two main types to denote movement parallel to the floor or parallel to the wall. However, these arrows are modified to show movement in any direction along a three-dimensional axis either along a straight line or in a variety of curves, loops or spirals. With slight changes, these symbols are used to indicate forearm rotation or wrist movement. There are five symbols to show manner of contact: touch, slap, brush off, rub and grasp. Combined with directional symbols, contact can be varied to show, for example, a circular rubbing or a forward brushing. Dynamic symbols denote whether the sign movements are tense, smooth or abrupt, whether the hands move in unison or alternate. Pay special attention to the different symbols for facial expressions, eye gazing or body movement. These are often critical to understanding principles of the sign language's grammar.

SignWriting is written expressively. When you read the signs in this handbook, imagine that you are standing immediately behind the signer.

In this illustration, the white circle represents the signer's head. The straight line represents the signer's shoulder line. And, the black hand represents the back of the signer's raised right hand, with fingers spread out.

Note that a photograph of the same illustration is shown receptively. The signer sees the back of her hand (shown in black in SignWriting), but you see her palm. Also, you see her right hand on the left side of the photograph.

The first primary hand shape is the flat hand, shown here from the signer's perspective in black (back or opaque side).

The flat hand, with palm facing the signer, is shown in white. Note that the handshape is the same, but the orientation has changed from opaque side to palm side.

Now imagine that you have painted your right hand palm white and the back side of your right hand black. Now, hold your right hand pointing up and parallel to the wall, rotating your hand 90 degrees so that you can see both the front side and back side of your hand. This is called the profile view.

In the above three examples, the flat hand is being held up parallel to the wall. Now, keep the same hand shape, but hold your hand parallel to the floor, then rotate your hand between the three orientations: palm, profile and opaque. SignWriting uses a break in the sign to signify that the hand is parallel to the floor.

flat hand: palm view with break: parallel to floor

flat hands: profile view with break: parallel to floor. Note that with the profile view, you can readily distinguish between the left and right hands.

flat hands: opaque view with break: parallel to floor. Note that with the opaque or palm view, there is no immediate distinction between left and right hands.

So far, we have shown one hand shape, but with six distinct orientations. We can also vary a particular orientation through a full range of rotations, noting awkward or unusual orientations by adding an arm line:

left and right flat hand shapes, parallel to wall, profile view with 45° rotations

left and right flat hand shapes, parallel to wall, palm view with 45° rotations, arms crossed

Note that rotating the profile orientation of the palm hand shape 90° left and down yields the same orientation as the opaque palm hand shape rotated 90° counterclockwise. Both options are acceptable. In this hand book, we generally use the second option.

The other two primary hand shapes are the closed fist and the O-hand.

closed fist hand shape, opaque orientation, parallel to wall

O-hand shape, opaque orientation, parallel to wall

CLOSED FIST (right)
Parallel to Wall
palm: profile: opaque:

Parallel to Floor
palm: profile: opaque:

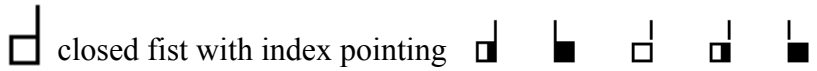
O-HAND (right)
Parallel to Wall
palm: profile: opaque:

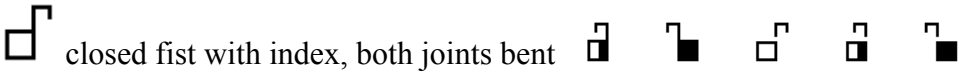
Parallel to Floor
palm: profile: opaque:

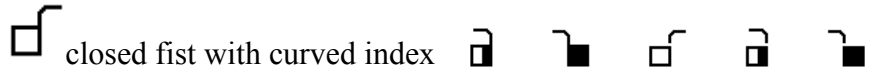
The SignWriting computer program that we use for production purposes divides hand shapes into ten groups, some with sub-parts, for modifying the three primary hand shapes into nearly any conceivable permutation.

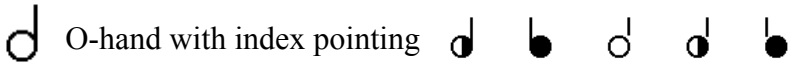
Group 1 covers hand shapes using the index finger:

The break between the fist symbol and the finger indicates that the orientation is parallel to the floor.



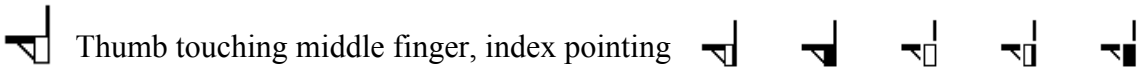


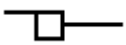




Right hand:

Left hand:

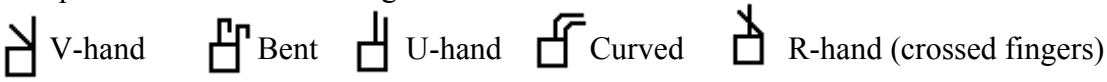




Group 1: index
fist
palm orientation
parallel to floor
*The symbol points left because the signer is pointing to **her** left with her right hand.*

Group 1: index
O-hand
opaque orientation
parallel to wall

Group 2: index and middle finger

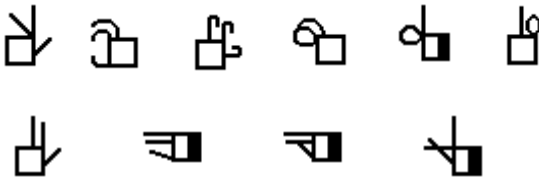


Group 2: index **&** middle
V-hand
opaque orientation
parallel to wall

Group 2: index **&** middle
bent fingers
opaque orientation
parallel to wall

Group 2: index & middle
R-hand
opaque orientation
parallel to wall

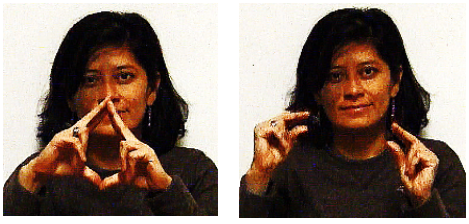
Group 3: index, middle finger, thumb (in palm or profile orientations)



(not used in ISN)

Group 3: index, middle, thumb
3-hand
palm orientation
90° rotation

Group 3: index, middle, thumb
3-hand (both hands)
opaque orientation
parallel to floor

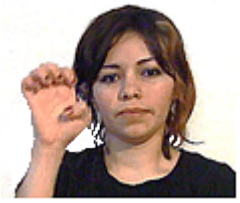


Nicaragua

Group 4: thumb bent inwards with four fingers (spread, bent, together), and fist with bent thumb visible)

Group 4:
4-hand, fingers spread
opaque orientation
parallel to wall

Group 4:
4-hand, fingers together
opaque orientation
parallel to wall



Group 4:
4-hand fist
opaque orientation
parallel to wall

Group 5, part 1: 5-hand

Group 5:
5-hand, fingers spread
opaque orientation
parallel to wall

Group 5:
claw hand
palm orientation
parallel to floor

Group 5:
palm hand,
thumb extended
opaque
orientation
parallel to wall

Group 5, part 2:

Group 5, part 2:
5-hand, fingers
extended, knuckles
partially closed,
profile orientation
parallel to wall

wolf

Group 5, part 3: C-hand

pig

lacking

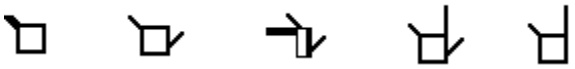
much

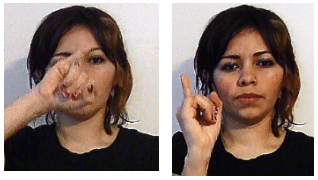
Group 6, part 1

three

mother

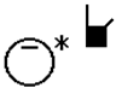
Group 6, part 2





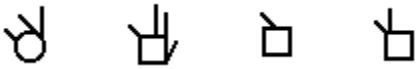
Thursday

airplane



devil

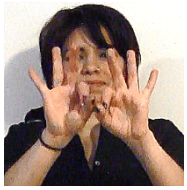
Group 7

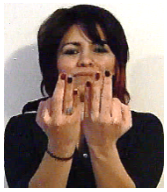


Group 8

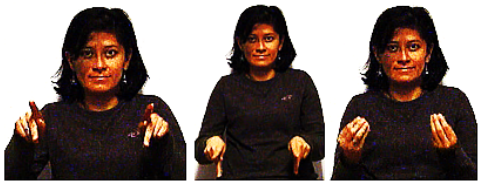
sorry

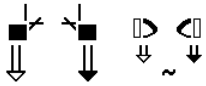
Group 9, part 1





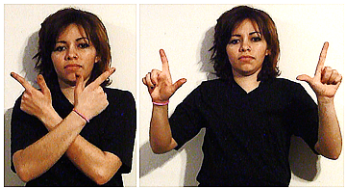
family





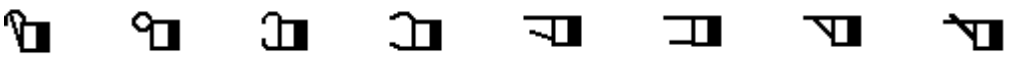
people

Group 9, part 2

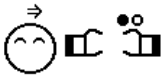


free

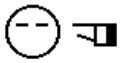
Group 9, part 3



like

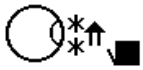


camera

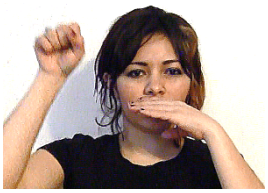


tiny

Group 10



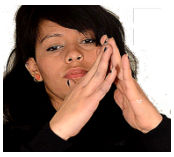
adult



July

Contact: There are five contact symbols:

touch: 



However, to make the sign for "house," your hands should touch twice:

house

grasp: 

hair

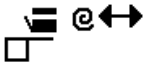
brush off: 

This symbol is usually associated with a directional arrow. For example, in "clean," the right hand L-handshape brushes forward on top of and past the left hand palm.

clean

rub: 

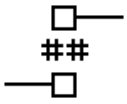
Unlike the brush-off contact symbol, the rub symbol indicates that the handshape remains on whatever it is contacting. A rub symbol denotes a circular motion unless an accompanying directional arrow shows a different movement, as in "practice."



practice

strike (or slap): 

This contact is similar to a touch, but is performed forcefully.

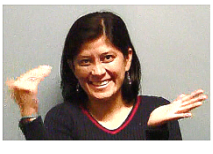


work

A contact symbol placed between two vertical lines indicates that something (usually another handshape) was placed between the fingers of the dominant handshape.

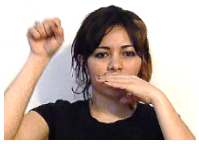
horse

An inverted “u” symbol signifies that the right handshape is making contact on top of the left handshape.



again

touch below:



July

touch behind (from the signer’s perspective):

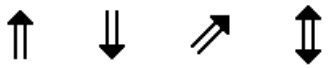
steal

Direction and movement: There are many useful direction and movement symbols. With arrows, always start the movement at the far end of the stem and finish at the arrowhead.

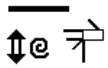
The direction and movement arrow has a triangle and a stem. A black triangle signifies your right hand. A white triangle means your left hand. The third or open arrow means that your hands are both touching each other and moving together. (If the hands were not touching, both a black and white triangle would be used.)

An arrow with one stem means that your hand movement is parallel to the floor. Here, you are moving your right hand away from your body, and your left hand toward your body:

An arrow with two stems means that your hand moves parallel (up, down or diagonally) to the wall. Arrowheads at both ends of the stems show that the movement is back and forth repeatedly:



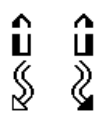
In the sign “need” the bent middle finger rubs the chest in an up and down motion.



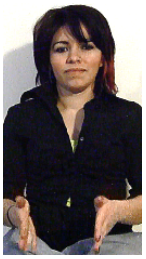
need

Some of the variations are obvious:

bad



woman



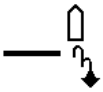
We prefer to use a single stem arrow to show movement left or right that is parallel to the floor, although this movement is parallel to the wall, as well:

This symbol means the hand is going up-away-over, as if you were going up and over a hill:

swim

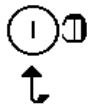
Now your hand moves in an arch toward your body:

In this example, the right hand moves in a double arch backwards past the shoulder:



before

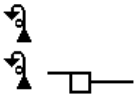
Starting close to your body and moving away, down-under-up:



elephant

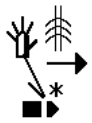
The reverse: starting away from your body, down-under-up and closer:

Up-away-over with a loop:



daily

The next few symbols involve forearm rotations. For this one, hold up your forearm and rotate it back and forth.

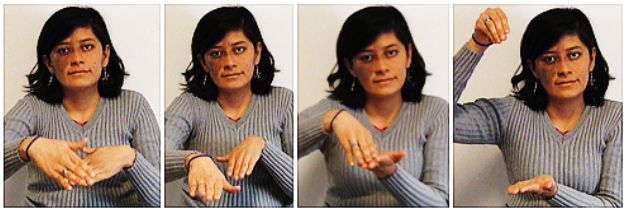


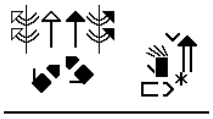
forest

The arrow has two stems, so the hand movement is parallel to the wall. However, the single line means you hold your forearm straight in front of you and parallel to the floor. Rotate your forearm clockwise to the right.

fall

In this example, the right forearm is extended parallet to the floor, as above, but the rotation is counterclockwise. The left forearm rotation is clockwise. The single stem arrows show the follow-through forward motion.

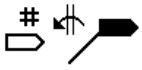




Zona Franca

These two symbols are interchangeeable. Both show the right forearm with two lines, so hold your forearm up and parallel to the wall (palm facing wall). The direction of rotation depends upon the starting orientation of the handshape.

In the example below, the arrow shows a counterclockwise forearm rotation. Note that with the opaque flat hand starting orientation, your right forearm can only describe a counterclockwise arc:

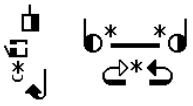


closed

Forearms held up and crossed, with clockwise rotation of the right forearm (double action), but counterclockwise rotation of the left forearm. Although the forearms are touching, a neutral arrowhead is not depicted because technically the rotations are in opposite directions:

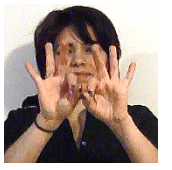
father/mother-in-law

Hand moves from left to right laterally close to the body, then curves forward (away from the body) and moves again laterally, now from right to left and without a forearm rotation:



assistant director

Same as above, but this time with a rotation of the forearm:



family

Forearm is parallel to the floor. Rotation is clockwise and sweeping:

restaurant

Forearm held parallel to your body and rotated away from you:

tomorrow

Forearm held parallel to your body and rotated toward you.

Same forearm rotations as above, one away and one toward your body.

cook

These are wrist actions, as shown by the short horizontal line above the arrows. The left symbol indicates that the wrist bends to the left (which entails a forearm rotation of 90°). On the right, the combination of a short horizontal line above two direction arrows indicates that the wrist bends downward twice.

choose

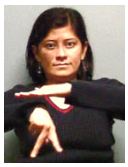
Forward moving with sideways wavy motion:

snake

Circular motion: trace the face of a clock.
Because the motion describes a circle, start and finish as depicted by the arrowhead:

yellow

Circular motion: trace the top of a plate.
The thick dashes show movement close to the body.
Double arrowheads indicate repitition:



pre-school

Circular motion: trace a bicycle tire:

bicycle

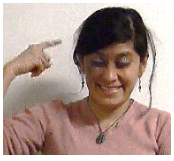
Tight clockwise circular motion (performed by wrist): trace a plate:

Same wrist motion, with two (or more) circles:

two hours

Wrist circular motion: trace a clock:

Wrist circular motion: trace a bicycle tire:



crazy

Rotational movement of the thumbs only:

boat

Note: the diagonal lines \ / depict the hand shape orientation aas half way between vertical and horizontal axis.

For some signs, the fingers bend either at the middle joints or the knuckles. SignWriting shows this with open or opaque dots for the middle joints or little "v" symbols for the knuckles.

Finger bends at middle joint –

bend from open to closed: ● bend closed twice: ●●

bend from closed to open: ○



look



understand

In this manual, you read the knuckle bend symbol from top to bottom. Thus, the symbol ⌄ means that the fingers go from open to shut, while the symbol ^ indicates that the fingers start closed and open up. The action repeats once or many times, depending how often the knuckle symbol is used.


eat

Alternating fingers are shown by two rows of knuckle-bend symbols.


walk

In this example, the knuckles for the thumb and pinky finger are closing and opening, causing the thumb and pinky finger to repeatedly touch.


dolphin

Dynamics: Symbols called dynamic markers indicate if hand movement is slow, fast, tense or alternating.

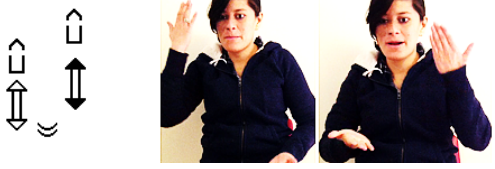
This symbol signifies that both hands are moving in the same way at the same time. However, because this kind of movement is the most common, we rarely use this symbol.

open

Note that the sign for "open" can be written with or without this dynamic marker.

This symbol shows that the hands are not moving in the same direction at the same time, but, rather, are alternating.

In this example, the direction arrows show that the hands are moving up and down. The "alternating" dynamic marker indicates that one hand goes up as the other moves down.



maybe

This symbol means that one hand moves then stops, followed by the other hand, usually with the action repeating.

wall

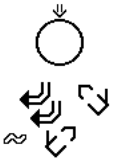
Fast motion:

break

Very fast motion:

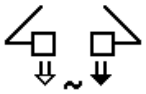
money

Slow (or relaxed) motion:



study

Tense motion, or, movement ends abruptly:



man

pay attention

Handshape wiggles:

Pacific Ocean

Often the distinction between a tense dynamic marker and a fast dynamic marker is subtle and may depend upon the judgment of the writer.

Facial location and characteristics: Eye gaze and head tilt movements are critical in sign language grammar. The most common symbols in this handbook are shown below:

Eyes gaze upward, downward, diagonally to your right.

Eyes gaze to your left.

Eye gaze peering straight ahead.

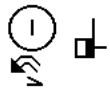
Head tilts up.

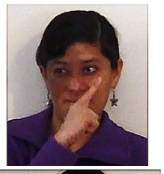
Head turns to the right.

read

Facial signs:

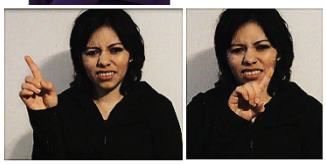
The sign involves the nose:





ugly

scrunched nose (common with interrogatives):



where?

eyes wide open:

racoon

The sign involves one or both open eyes:

look

squinting eyes:

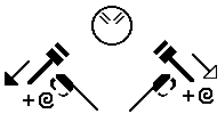
cry

eyes shut:

pray

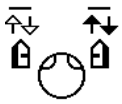
raised eyebrows:

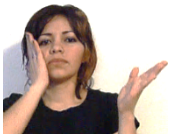
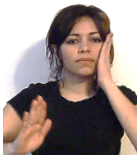
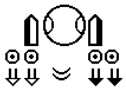
angry or serious eyebrows:

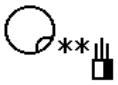


brave

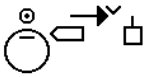
top of head:    dinosaur

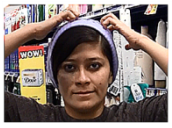
upper side of head:   burro

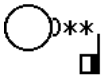
side of head:    August

lower side of head (cheek area):  

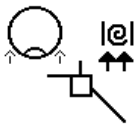
mother

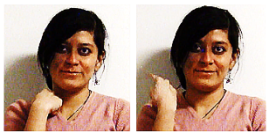
forehead:   forget

hair:   shampoo

right ear:   hear

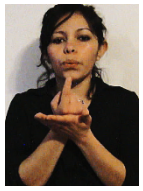
chin:   wrong

chin juts forward:    think

neck:  always

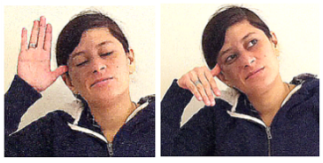
behind head:  Argentina

neutral mouth:  good

cheeks puffed out:  candle

cheeks sucked in:  skinny

exhales  tornado

frown:  sad

open mouth (vertical):  color

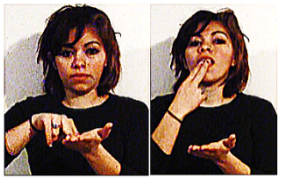
gritting teeth:  cold

chomping teeth: smacking lips:  talk

upper teeth over lower lip:  squirrel

puckered lips:  kiss

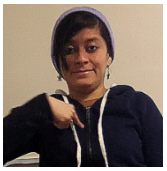
tongue sticking out:  hot

tongue out and against lower lip (and centered) :  sugar

Body location and shifting:

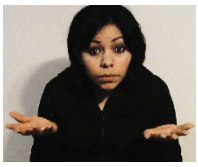
Body signs include the shouldline and waistline.

Sign made near shoulder line:



me

both shoulders raised:



how?

shoulder twists to the right (a role shift):

shoulder line moves forward twice

it depends

shoulder line moves backwards:

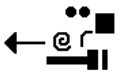
tilted head and shoulder:

sleep

Sign made near waist line:

Spain

Sign involves forearm
(thicker arm symbol stresses arm
as part of the sign, but both examples
essentially have the same meaning):



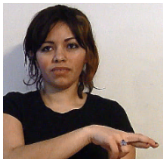
worm

Punctuation: There are are a variety of punctuation symbols in SignWriting, including the following:

period: comma:  question mark: 

comma (between items in a list):

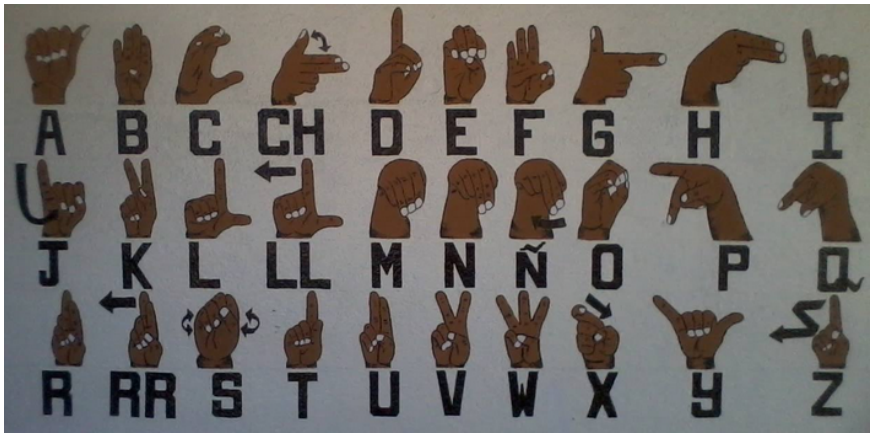
For proper names, we underline the sign: Rivas 

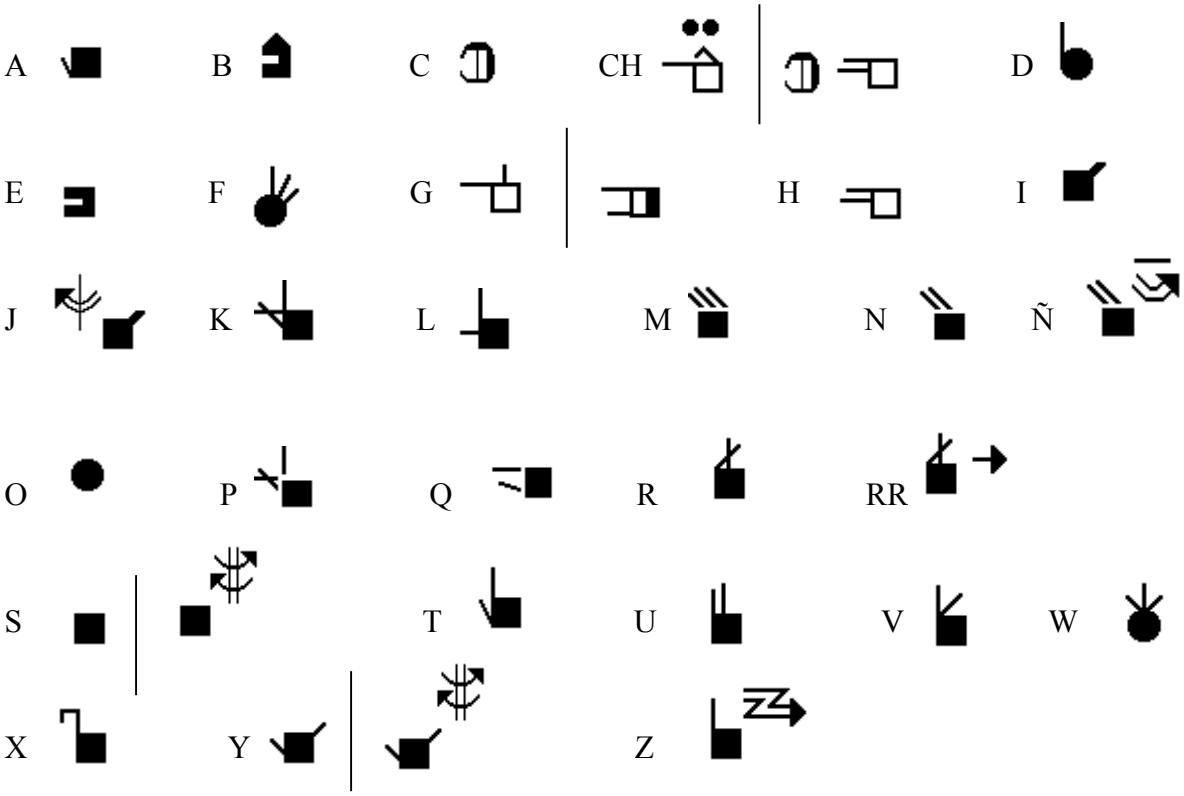


In our stories, we precede a clause with the serious eyebrow symbol to indicate that the text answers a prior (usually rhetorical) question: 

FINGERSPELLING

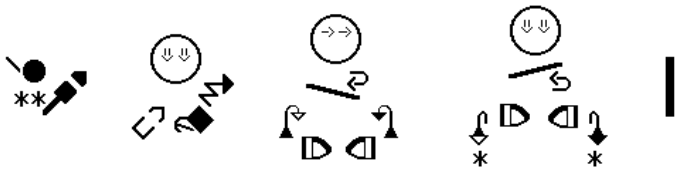
As noted in the introduction, fingerspelling is useful for spelling out Spanish (or English) words or for spelling proper names in a spoken language, but otherwise is not sign language.





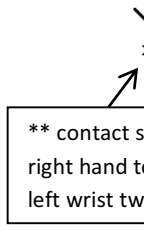
In this handbook, we present sentences written with signs horizontally and from left to right. In some countries, users of SignWriting have adopted a top to bottom vertical format.

horizontal, left-to-right



The doctor writes a note and gives it to me.

vertical, top-to-bottom

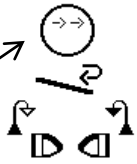


handshape: O-hand with index finger extended, parallel to floor

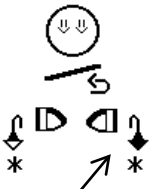
** contact symbol – right hand touches left wrist twice

eyes gaze downward

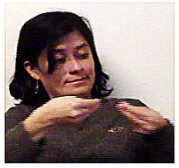
right hand direction and movement: zigzag



Eyes gaze (and head moves) right; body shifts right. Note that SignWriting is written expressively , that is to say, from the signer's perspective. We see the right hand on the left side of the photo; however, we write the right hand symbol on the right side of the frame.



direction and movement symbols (arc: up-toward the body-down) Note that the left hand arrowhead is white, the right hand arrowhead is black.



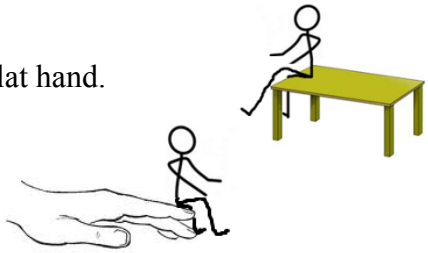
punctuation

Classifiers

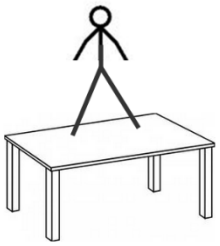
Classifiers: *Classifiers* are extremely common in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Classifiers are handshapes (sometimes involving distinctive movements) that appear in certain kinds of verbs. After a signer indicates some particular thing, classifiers can be used in verbs that show where the thing is located, what it looks like and where and how it moves. Classifiers represent living things, too, especially people. In the case of a physical object, the classifier may resemble its surface feature, depth or general shape.

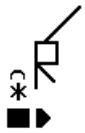
Let us consider two tangible objects: a large rock and a flat table. In English, we could say: "I see a rock. I sit on it." The word "it" refers back to the "rock" but does not tell us anything about the thing. By contrast, the classifier for "rock" would give us a sense that the rock is both round and solid. The classifier for "table" would indicate an object with a flat surface.

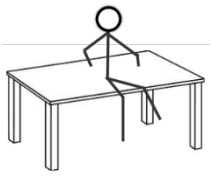
The classifier for the rock is a fist.
The classifier for the table surface is a flat hand.



A standing person classifier is made with two outstretched fingers pointing downward (middle and index), suggesting two legs. By bending those "legs," the classifier becomes a sitting person.



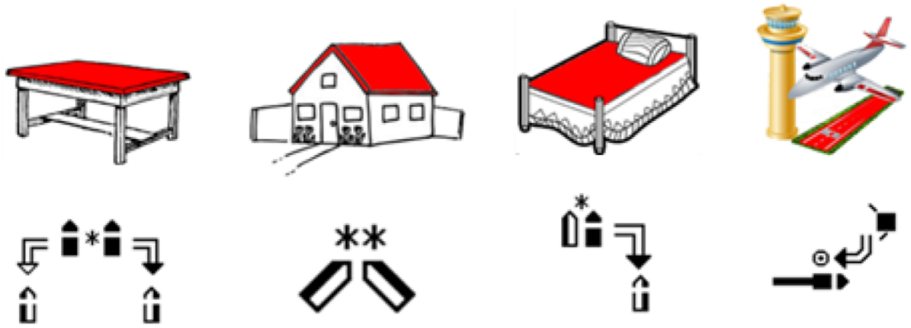




The classifier in these three examples is called "*person-using-legs*", or, if applicable, "*person-using-arms*". This classifier could be a person standing, sitting, walking, jumping, or climbing:

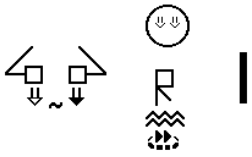
While we will be focusing upon verbs, you should recognize that signs for most nouns also contain classifiers within them. The sign for "horse," for example, consists of the person-using-legs classifier astride a horizontal flat hand classifier (representing the body of the horse).

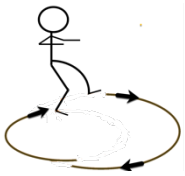
Examples of signs using the *flat surface classifier*:



There are two rules to guide you in producing and using classifiers when constructing a verb: 1) Classifiers appear in verbs that show where and how the person or thing moves or where the person or thing is located. 2) The classifier relates back to an already specified person or thing, that is to say, the classifier relates back to an *antecedent noun* (or noun phrase).

Let's begin with a simple sentence:

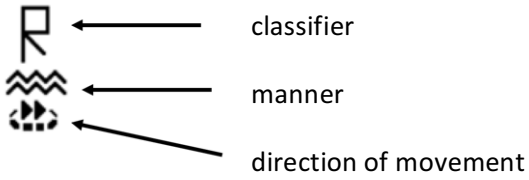




The man is walking in circles.

This sentence is made with two signs. The first sign, "man," is a noun and is the subject of the sentence. The person-using-legs classifier appears in the second sign, the verb, and corresponds to the "man." Therefore, the first sign is the antecedent noun for this classifier.

The verb in this example consists of three components: a classifier , a *manner*, and a direction of movement. The classifier is the handshape that signifies a person-using-legs. Manner refers to the movement of the handshape: a wriggling of the two extended fingers. The direction is the circular path that the sign is describing.



Consider this sentence: "The butterfly flies to the flower."

The subject of the sentence is "butterfly," which is a small flying insect. Before the signer can use a classifier for the subject, she must first express the sign for "butterfly" either in her sentence or earlier in her narration. In this sentence, the subject appears in the second sign. To show the movement of the butterfly, the signer uses the small-flying-insect classifier (shown in blue).

small-flying-insect classifier

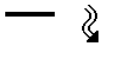
Third sign: small-flying-insect classifier spirals down and lands on the flower

Let us look at the third sign more closely. As you can see from the photograph, this sign is made with two hands. The right hand makes a classifier that corresponds to the butterfly and the left hand makes a classifier that corresponds to the flower. The fingers of the right hand are not moving, so in this case we do not see a manner. We do not observe manner in the classifier for "flower," either. As the SignWriting shows, the classifier for the butterfly ultimately comes into contact with the classifier for the flower. This tells us that in making this sign, your left hand appears first. We say that the left hand is the *ground* and the right hand is the *figure*.

In the context of this sentence, the ground is simply the thing to which the figure moves. In other contexts, the figure might be located at a particular ground and not moving at all. Also, the ground does not have to be inanimate, but could be a person. The key point to understand is that the ground serves as an anchor point for the movement or location of the figure.

In the context of figure and ground, we define *ground* as that thing or person located in space that serves as the anchor point for the movement or location of the figure. We define *figure* as either the thing that moves in a verb of motion or the thing that is located in a verb of location. (These kinds of verbs will be discussed in the next sections.) In our example sentence, the classifier for butterfly is the *figure of the verb*. Looking at the entire sentence, we could also say that the butterfly is the *figure of the sentence*, and the classifier in the verb corresponds to the figure of the sentence. For convenience, when we refer to a *figure* or *figure classifier,* we mean the classifier in the verb that corresponds to the figure of the sentence. (In generative grammar, the term *theme*, referring to the entity that is moved or located in space, is commonly used. For our purposes, we treat the terms *figure* and *theme* synonymously.)

Default and privileged classifiers: In some instances, a classifier may closely resemble its antecedent noun (or *referent*). In our butterfly example, the classifier for the butterfly is the small-flying-insect classifier. If your Deaf friend substituted "bee" for "butterfly", she would use the same classifier. However, if she omitted the antecedent noun altogether, then you should assume by default that the small flying insect is a fly. After all, the sign for "fly" and the classifier for small-flying-insect are nearly identical. Constructing a verb with a classifier that so resembles its referent would be redundant. Thus, we say that the small-flying-insect classifier is the *default classifier* for a "fly."



sign: fly
construction: small-flying-insect classifier with shaking manner and downward movement

classifier: small-flying-insect
default classifier: fly

The fly flies to the flower.

Similarly, the sign for “airplane” consists of an airplane-like handshape with directional movement. The classifier for "airplane" is the same handshape. In the sentence “The airplane is flying,” you would not sign airplane twice. Rather, you would use the default classifier to construct the subject and verb in one sign. However, unlike the small-flying-insect classifier which represents a large set of small flying insects, the airplane classifier has only one potential referent: "airplane." A classifier with only one item in its set is called a *privileged classifier*.

sign: airplane
privileged classifier: airplane

The airplane is flying.

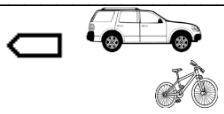
The airplane spirals downward.

Here are some frequently used classifiers along with their default meanings:

DESCRIPTION	CLASSIFIER		EXAMPLE	DEFAULT
Flat surface			table top	
Round solid object			boulder	
Round flat object			coin	
Handling classifier: round cup/glass			soda bottle	glass

Handling classifier: coffee cup    hot coffee mug cup

---

Vehicle   taxi

---

Person-using-legs/arms   man person walking

---

Small flying insect    mosquito fly 

Viscous liquid    toothpaste

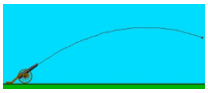
---

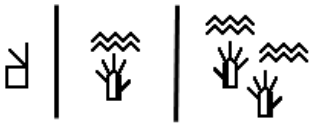
Airplane   airplane

[*privileged classifier*: has only one item in its set]

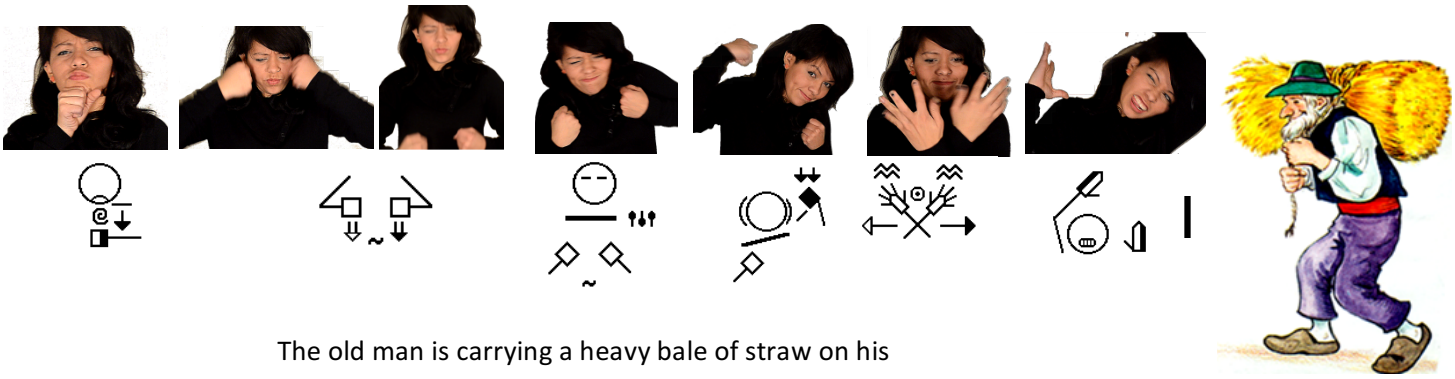
Twisted object   electric wires

---

Person, trajectory,
or long, thin object   telephone poles  person 

Variant: can be quantified:
for example, two people,
several people,
many people  

Is the signer in the following illustration using pantomime or signing to express the “heavy bale” and to express the verb “carry”?



The old man is carrying a heavy bale of straw on his back.

The signer is making *productive signs* using two handling classifiers:  and 

Sign language dictionaries available in Nicaragua today, including this one, list only a thousand or so signs. However, with handling and shape classifiers, signers are able to produce signs as needed for the particular situation. With productive signing, the number of potential signs is infinite.

Classifier Clitics: Let us look again at our sentence about the butterfly:

The butterfly flies to the flower.

As you know, in Nicaraguan Sign Language, signers frequently use classifiers when creating verbs. In the third frame, the left hand is shown in red. The left handshape is a closed-C classifier and vaguely resembles flower petals. This classifier relates back to the noun "flower," the first sign in this sentence. We previously stated that this left hand classifier was called the ground -- the anchor point for the movement of the right hand figure.

The verb in our example is called a *sentential verb.* Figures, grounds, locations and actions all come into sentential verbs. In short, these verbs often convey a great deal of information. For this reason, we consider these verbs to be complex. Verbs in Spanish or English sentences are dramatically limited by comparison.

Linguists say that these complex verbs are *sentential verbs* because, like sentences, they convey a great deal of information: who does what to whom, where they did it, how they did it, and so forth.

In our example, this flower-like classifier cannot function as an independent sign but must link with the small-flying-insect classifier that forms the figure in the verb. Seemingly, the two classifiers have combined to create a new sign: "small insect flies to flower-like object." But, sign language linguists explain that, in reality, our minds are seeing two different signs separated by a very weak boundary. In linguistics, a *clitic* is a part of a sign or word that has meaning but cannot function independently. Instead, the clitic must be attached to a host -- another sign or word. The ground classifier in our example is called a *classifier clitic*. This simply means that while the classifier carries its own meaning, the classifier cannot stand alone as a separate sign. Instead, the ground classifier must be attached to its host -- the rest of the verb.

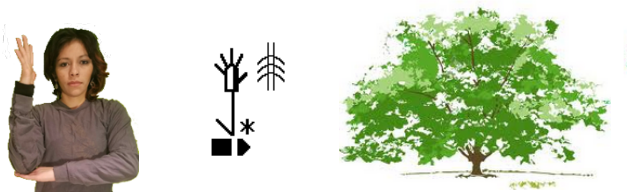
To be a successful user of Nicaraguan Sign Language, you will want to accustom yourself to constructing sentential verbs with classifier clitics as often as possible. Accordingly, we will be analyzing these verbs very closely in the ensuing sections and we will introduce to you numerous grammatical labels concerning these verbs. We will also scrutinize classifier clitics in much greater detail and, in due course, expand upon our definition of this grammatical label. For now, however, we just want you to be able to recognize classifiers and classifier clitics when you encounter them in sentences.

Let us try another sentence with a sentential verb that has a classifier clitic: "The boy climbs up the tree."

The first frame shows the noun "tree." The second and third frames show the "boy." The final two frames depict the verb and include both a figure (blue) and ground (red) classifier. We see that this Deaf woman uses her right hand for the figure classifier -- specifically, the commonly used person-using-arms classifier. Figure classifiers are generally made with the *dominant hand*, which for most people is the right hand. Stated another way, when you are constructing a sentential verb requiring two hands, use your left (non-dominant) hand to make the part of the sign that does not move -- the ground. (Left-handed people use their right hand for the ground.)

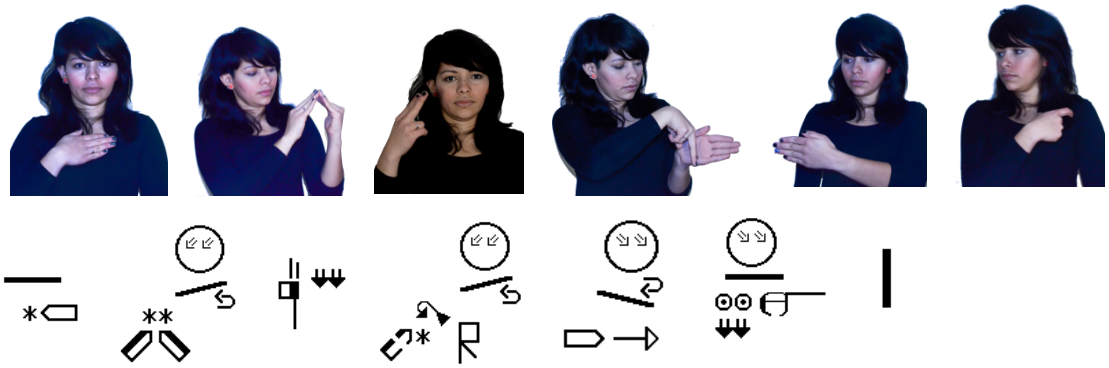
But, there is a dilemma here. The classifier clitic in the verb is a tree-shaped-object and is made with the left hand held vertically. This handshape is also a component of the noun sign "tree." However, the sign for "tree" is normally made with the left hand held horizontally and right hand

held vertically. The Deaf woman anticipates that if she makes the sign for "tree" normally, she will then have to switch to her non-dominant hand to make the classifier clitic.

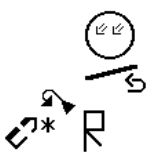


She resolves this problem by using a mirror image sign. She reverses her hands when initially signing the tree.

Here is an example of a classifier clitic in a somewhat more complex sentence:



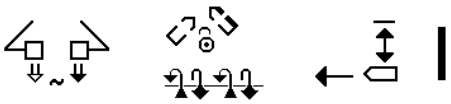
I go by taxi from my house to school.
(At my house, I hail the taxi. I get into the taxi. I go by taxi from home to school.)



"Person-using-legs" classifier "enters" "vehicle" classifier clitic. Note that the person classifier antecedent "I" is implied from the context. (The sentence features a *null subject*.)

Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location

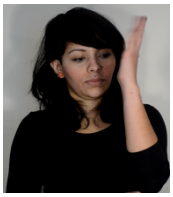
Spatial Verbs (directional): In English, subject-verb-object [SVO] is the most common word order both in sentences with transitive verbs followed by direct objects and in sentences with intransitive verbs followed by prepositional phrases with indirect objects. In Nicaraguan Sign Language, this SVO order often occurs in simple sentences. (See our discussion of Plain Verbs in a later section.)



The man cooks the fish.
ISN sign order: SVO

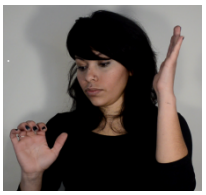
However, there are many types of sentences for which SVO order cannot be used. Consider again the sentence used in the previous discussion of classifiers and classifier clitics:

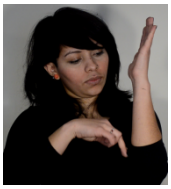
The boy climbs up the tree.
ISN sign order: OSV

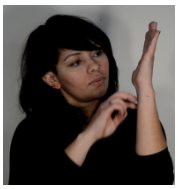


- OBJECT-

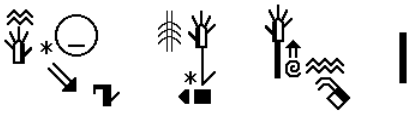
--------- SUBJECT ----------





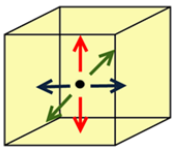


---------- VERB ----------



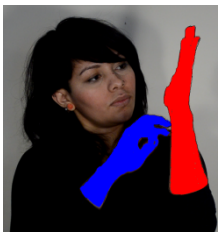
variant: The boy climbs up the tree.
ISN sign order: SOV

In the English version, the subject noun is the "boy" and the action verb is "to climb." The English verb is intransitive and does not take a direct object, but is followed instead by a preposition and noun complement, "up the tree." The verb in Nicaraguan Sign Language describes a contact: on the side of the tree; a change in location: from the base of the tree to the top of the tree; and the direction of the action: climbing upwards. Such verbs are called *spatial verbs* because the signer is describing movement in three dimensional space.



The spatial verb sign in this example incorporates two classifiers: a component of the "tree" sign and the "person-using-arms" classifier. Therefore, the antecedents to these classifiers typically should be identified beforehand. When you place the grammatical object at the beginning of the sentence, then sign the actor, and conclude with the spatial verb, this condition is satisfied. In fact, in sentences involving spatial verbs, signers tend to place the object sign at the beginning of the sentence, yielding an OSV sign order. However, an SOV sign order also satisfies the requirement to identify the antecedents of the verb's two classifiers, and is therefore permissible.

Now focus on the final sign. There are two critical parts: the ground (in red) and the figure (in blue). Because this figure is in motion, we will use the label *moving figure*. The ground within the verb is expressed by a classifier clitic meaning "tree." The moving figure is a person-using-arms classifier that is climbing up this grammatical *ground.*



On closer examination, you will see that the signer makes the classifier clitic first and then shows the movement of the actor classifier. We can sum up this very important rule as follows: *Within a spatial verb, ground must precede figure*. Spatial verbs are not sentences, but you may find it helpful to view these verbs as very sentence-like, corresponding to the signs of the larger main sentences.[1] Note that the sign order in the main sentences are not necessarily OSV. However, these sentence-like spatial verbs are always characterized by an OSV order.

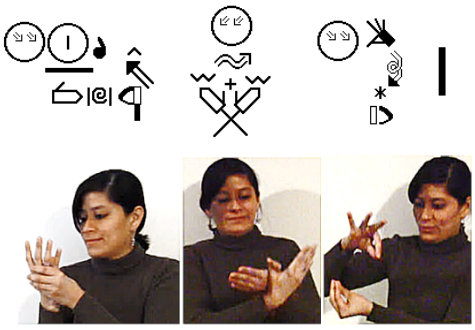
Within a spatial verb, ground always precedes figure.

Pay close attention to how the signer in this example uses her eyes, especially when signing the spatial verb. Note that she gazes directly at the moving figure classifier as her right hand fingers "climb up the tree."

[1] Recall our brief discussion of *sentential verbs* in the previous section.

When you are signing a sentence with a spatial verb sign, follow the moving figure classifier with your eyes. Eye gazing, often coupled with head tilting, is an integral component of the grammar of this sign language. Your Deaf friend needs to process communication input quickly and effectively. Eye gazing and head tilting furnish cues that enable fluent signers to accomplish this.

Use of three dimensional space is very important in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Consider our example from the previous section: "The butterfly flies to the flower."



The butterfly flies to the flower.
ISN word order: OSV

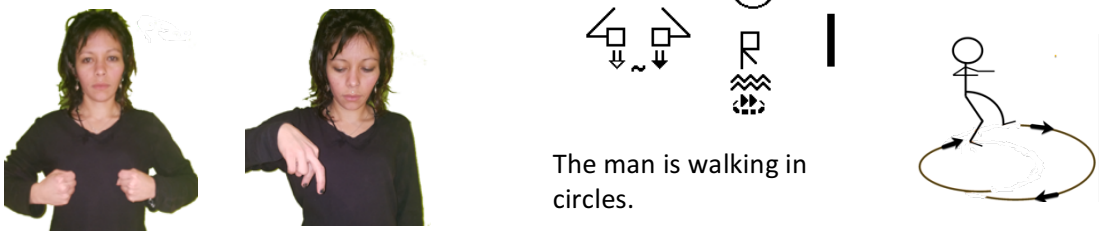
Here the signer physically signs the flower at a specific location – to her right. Further, she turns her head and gazes at her hands. Her eye gaze and head movement serve to cue us to focus upon and remember that location. In the second sign, she needs both hands to make the sign for butterfly. She places the butterfly slightly to her left. Her head turns slightly left and her gaze shifts to the new location because she wants us to see what she is seeing. Her butterfly literally moves across her chest toward the location of the flower. She tracks its flight with her eyes, helping us to see in our own minds the route the butterfly is taking. In the final sign, the butterfly alights upon the flower. The signer's eyes direct us to follow the moving figure classifier through the remainder of the flight until the small insect reaches the location of the ground.

The signer takes advantage of three dimensional *signing space* to convey direction and movement.

Our last two examples involved spatial verbs with classifier clitics that functioned as grounds. Spatial verbs are not always this complex. So long as the signer is using signing space to describe a three dimensional concept, the verb is a spatial verb. Compare these two short sentences:

The man is waiting.

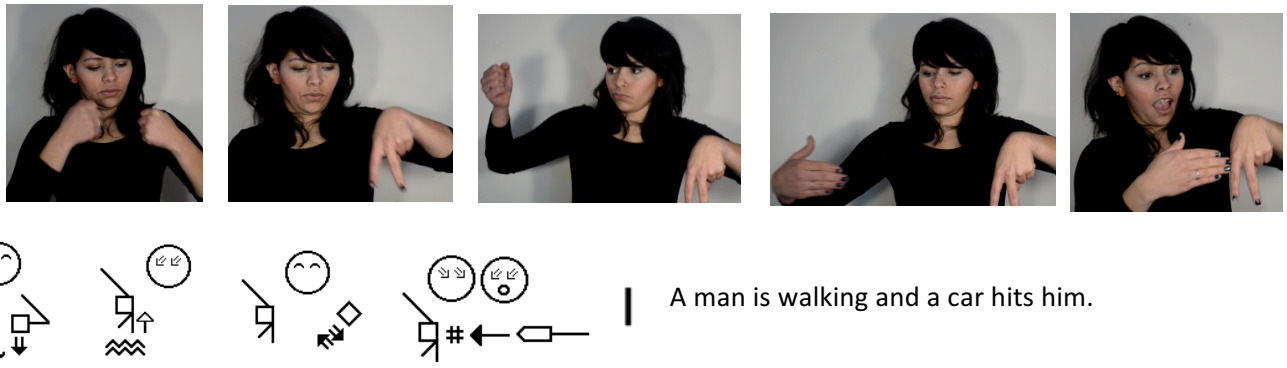
In this first sentence, the verb is describing an action, but does not show any direction nor a specific location in three dimensional space. The verb is not a spatial verb.



The man is walking in circles.

In this sentence, there is an antecedent subject ("man") and a figure classifier is a component of the verb. However, there is no antecedent object and, therefore, no ground within the verb. Nevertheless, the verb describes movement along a circular path. Consequently, the verb is a spatial verb.

Let us examine the sign order of another complex sentence:



A man is walking and a car hits him.

There are several ways to translate this sentence from Nicaraguan Sign Language to English, but perhaps the closest translation divides the sentence into two clauses. The important thing to

remember is that English and Nicaraguan Sign Language grammar, and, for that matter, Spanish and Nicaraguan Sign Language, are quite different. Sign for word translations rarely work.

This signed sentence contains four signs. The first and second signs inform us that there is a man who is walking. Is the first sign the subject of the sentence or do the first two signs together function as the object?

Note that in the second sign, the classifier (person-using-legs-walking) is made with the left hand, which is the hand usually reserved for ground signs. In the third sign, the left hand has become stationary, with the right hand introducing the car. The final sign is a spatial verb featuring the vehicle classifier as the moving figure which strikes the ground person-using-legs classifier.

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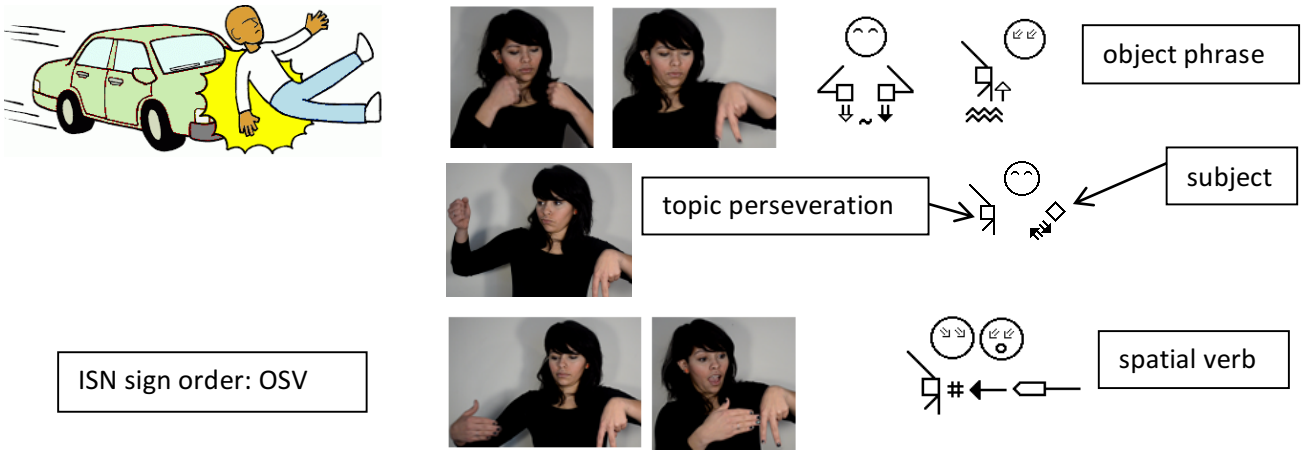
Therefore, we see that the walking man is the object of the sentence, and, as is generally the case with sentences with spatial verbs, the sign order is OSV.



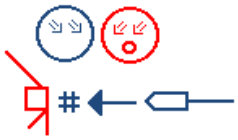
Let us look at the third sign again. The standard sign for "car" involves both hands mimicking the action of a driver who is grasping a steering wheel. Sometimes, however, you can convey your message just as effectively using one hand if your other hand is somehow occupied. Imagine that you are holding a shopping bag in your left hand while trying to hold a conversation in sign language. Although your left hand is occupied, most of the signs you make with your right hand should be understandable, especially in context. Linguists call this *encumbered signing*. In the sample sentence, the left hand is occupied by its need to serve as the person-using-legs classifier. The left hand at this point is stationary since the viewer needs to focus on the right hand. We could say that the left hand is standing by for the moment. (The linguistic term is *topic perseveration*.) The left hand remains at its location in preparation to become the

ground component of the final sign – the spatial verb. Note that while the left hand is stationary, we understand that the man in reality is walking, and not standing, when the car strikes him.[2]

The sign "car" is normally made with two hands.

Encumbered signing: In this case, the left hand needs to stand by to become the classifier clitic in the impending spatial verb.

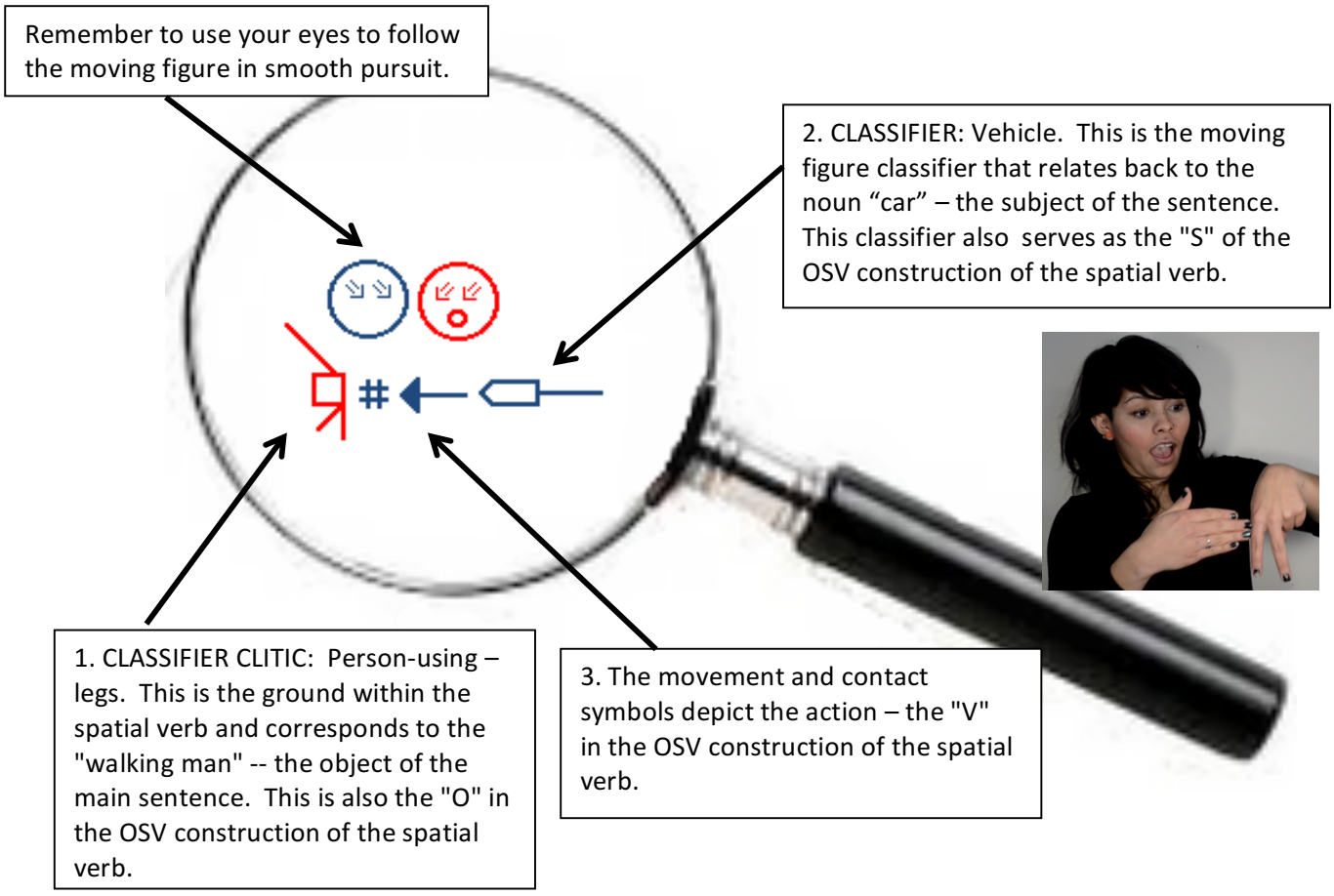
As always, when you are signing a sentence with a spatial verb sign, follow the moving figure with your eyes. The moving figure classifier is the actor, and the ground classifier is located at the point (or points) where the particular action sequence will end.



Read the facial features signs left to right. The blue eye gaze (with an appropriate head tilt) follows the moving figure classifier (also in blue). The signer's eye gaze (and head tilt) change to track the collision of the vehicle classifier with the stationary classifier clitic.

When signing a spatial verb with a source location or a goal location or both, your eyes must follow the moving figure. This eye gazing is called *smooth pursuit*.

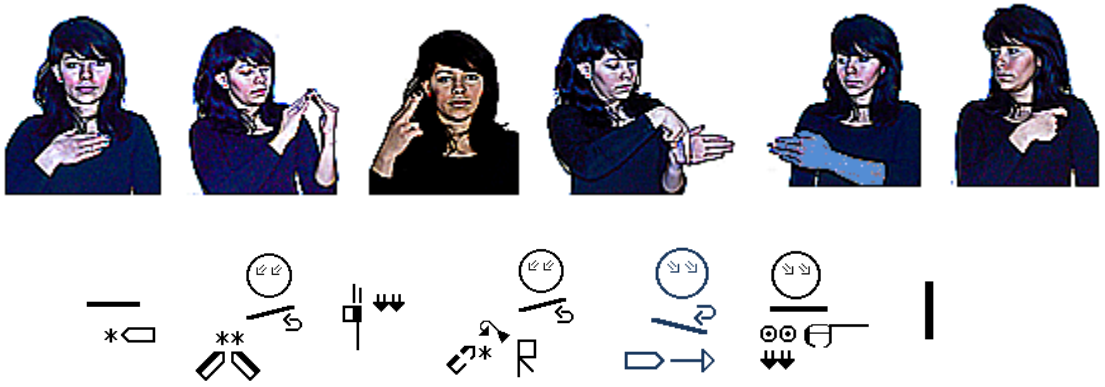
[2] Return to the example: "The boy climbs up the tree." Do you see topic perseveration?



In the past four examples, we have considered sentences with the following verbs: walking-in-circles, climb-up, fly-to/land-on and crash-into. In all four cases, these spatial verbs showed direction. In the case of the boy climbing the tree, the verb showed both the starting or *source* location (base of the tree) and the ending or *goal* location. With the butterfly, however, the source location was omitted. We know our flying butterfly originated from somewhere else, but the signer wants us to focus on the flower. Likewise, with the car collision, we do not really know where the car came from; we are directed to focus on the impact.

Spatial verbs that show direction are called *directional verbs*. Directional verbs always show movement in three dimensional space. Often, these verbs show source location, goal location, or both.

Let us look at a series of sentences with both source and goal locations.



I go by taxi from my house to school.

The movement in the signing space is from house (on the signer's left) to school (located on the signer's right). The signer not only tilts toward and gazes at the source location, but makes the sign for "house" in that space.

"I get into the taxi." – The sign order is OSV: object "taxi" – subject "I" – verb "get into." As we saw in the previous section about classifiers, the vehicle classifier in this spatial verb relates back to the "taxi". The person-using-legs classifier relates back to the null subject "I", which we are able to infer from the first sign "my" and from the context. Again, note the smooth pursuit as the signer gazes directly at the moving figure boarding the stationary taxi.

When you view the sentence as a whole, the blue spatial verb serves as a directional verb showing source (home) and goal (school). In English, you express location relationships using prepositions and objects of prepositions. *But, in Nicaraguan Sign Language you do not organize sentences with prepositions. Instead, you use a spatial verb that merges the action and the preposition.* This may seem confusing at first, but try this: think of the English "enter in" and "depart from" as one word. Moreover, "to touch" becomes "to touch-on;" "go" becomes "go-from/to." Accordingly, you should interpret the blue sign: "go by vehicle-classifier from/to."

You should be aware that moving figures are usually produced with your dominant hand, which we will presume is your right hand. The left hand is used in this sign, however, because the moving figure in the previous sign is the person-using-legs classifier, with the left hand

functioning as a ground. In the interests of making a *smooth transition* from ground to moving figure, you need to continue using your left hand to represent the taxi.

In Nicaraguan Sign Language, action and spatial relationship ("from", "to", "on", "at", and so forth) are merged within the spatial verb. The grammatical term "object of the preposition", common in languages that use prepositions to describe spatial relationships, is not applicable. But, the object of this kind of sentence is not a direct object, either. Linguists prefer the label "*locative object*" to describe the sign that specifies a location.

The signer was able to physically make the sign for "house" in the signing space on her left. She does not make the sign for "school" in signing space to her right simply because this sign must be made near her left breast. Nevertheless, she clearly places her goal location in her right side signing space with a turn of her head and a strong eye gaze.

Verbs with Auxiliaries: In the next examples, our signer travels by bicycle instead of taking the taxi:

Option #1 ("bicycle" as a noun)

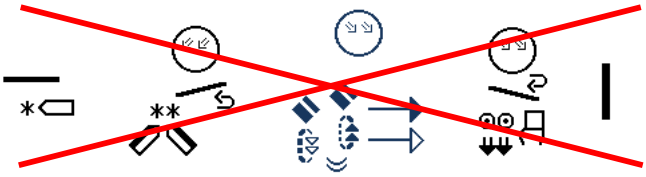
I go by bicycle from my house to school.

Option #2 ("bicycle" as a verb")

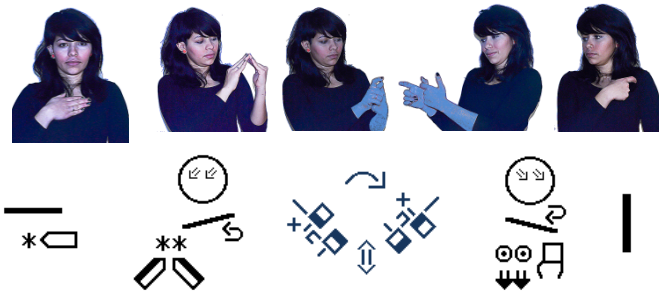
I go by bicycle from my house to school.

In option #1, the signer identifies the mode of transportation with a noun, “the bicycle,” and then uses the vehicle classifier to make a spatial verb. In option #2, the sign for bicycle is used in its action sense, “to go by bicycle,” and therefore functions as a verb. However, by itself the “bicycle” sign cannot show direction; therefore, this verb sign needs help to become a spatial verb. The signer points to the source and then points to the goal. Viewing the three signs in sequence, the meaning becomes "go by bicycle from there to there." The three signs ("bicycle," "source-there," "goal-there) act cooperatively to form, in effect, one verb. The two pointing signs in this compound verb construction are called *auxiliaries*.

You might be tempted to dispense with the auxiliaries altogether and instead add directional movement to the sign “to go by bicycle.” The result, however, would be cumbersome and awkward, and for that reason not allowed.



Interestingly, the verb sign “to run” does not need auxiliaries to show direction of movement. Can you see the reason?



I run from my house to school.

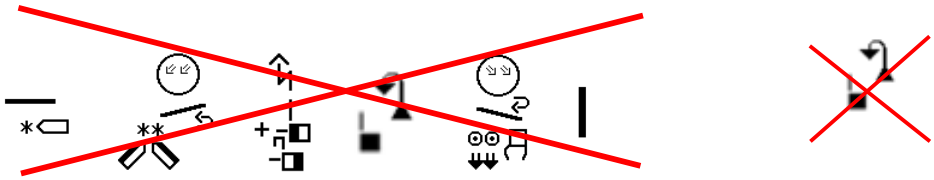
The index finger movement in the sign "run" is similar to the finger movements in verbs that incorporate the person-using-legs classifier, e.g., "walk". Verb signs constructed this way do not require auxiliaries to show direction of movement. It is permissible, but not necessary, to supplement a verb sign like "run" with auxiliaries.

Caution: Do not fall back on English grammar to show a spatial relationship. The auxiliaries in Nicaraguan Sign Language convey the concepts source and goal. Do not substitute this auxiliary verb with a gesture to indicate the prepositional concept "to."

Permissible:

I run from my house to school.

Incorrect:



Adverb of Location: Let us try another comparison: "The man is walking." and "The man walks to the park."

The man is walking.
ISN sign order: SV

The man walks to the park.
ISN sign order: OSV

In the first sentence, we see a subject and verb, but no spatial relationship. The sentence is not made with a spatial verb. By contrast, the second sentence involves a goal location, the "park". The signer first sets up the park in a set location, in this case by using a pointing adverb (meaning "there.") The signer then indicates the subject. Finally, the signer must use a spatial verb that utilizes a moving figure classifier. The signer gazes in smooth pursuit as the person-using-legs classifier moves to a goal location established not by a classifier clitic, but by a pointing adverb. We call this pointing adverb an *adverb of location.*

In linguistics, an adverb that establishes a spatial or temporal aspect of an utterance is called a *deictic adverb.* The pointing adverb that sets up a goal location in space is a deictic adverb, but may also be called an *adverb of location*. (As will be discussed later, words like "now" or "yesterday" indicate temporal aspect and are called *time adverbs, but are* also classified as deictic adverbs.) (Nicaraguan Sign Language also uses so-called deictic demonstratives and pronouns, as we shall see in a later section, when we discuss the concept of *deixis* in more detail.)

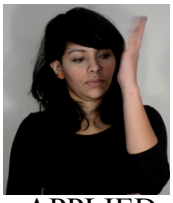
A verb that incorporates a locative relationship is called an *applicative verb*. A spatial verb in Nicaraguan Sign Language is an applicative verb. In a sentence with an applicative verb, the object is called an *applied object* and appears twice: as an antecedent noun and again as a classifier clitic within the spatial (applicative) verb.

Applicative verbs occur with high frequency in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Applicative verbs appear in English, too, but only in limited situations – and are rarely part of Spanish grammar. Consider the English sentence: "The mother gives the book to the child." "The mother" is the subject; "gives" is the verb; "the book" is the direct object; and "to the child" is the prepositional

phrase with "the child" as the object of the preposition. Now, consider the alternative English word order: "The mother gives the child the book." In this sentence construction, elementary school grammarians would suggest that the preposition "to" is implied. However, another explanation is that the verb "gives" has, in effect, sucked in the preposition. The verb incorporates the locative relationship – the definition of an applicative verb. And, "the child" is an applied object. (Nicaraguan Sign Language uses a very different construction for this sentence – as we will see later in our discussion of serial verbs.)

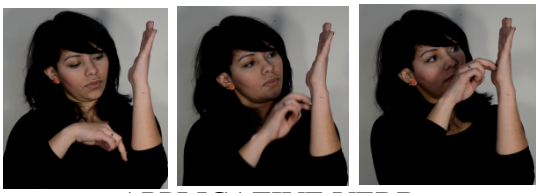
Let's go back to an earlier example to show how Nicaraguan Sign Language features verbs that, in effect, suck in or incorporate prepositions ("up," "down," "to," "from," "at") to show spatial relationships.

The boy climbs up the tree.
ISN sign order: OSV
Or, to be more specific:
applied object/antecedent noun – subject – applicative verb (creating a locative relationship by presenting a moving figure classifier and a ground classifier. The ground classifier is an applied object/classifier clitic.)



APPLIED OBJECT

--------- SUBJECT ----------



----------APPLICATIVE VERB ----------
(CLASSIFIER CLITIC = APPLIED OBJECT)

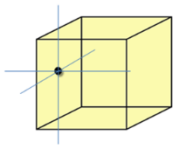
Linguistic researchers Judy Kegl , AnnSenghas and Marie Coppola compared the frequency of applicative verbs (that is, sentences with applied objects as both antecedent nouns and classifier clitics within verbs) in utterances by homesigners versus ISN signers in Nicaragua. They discovered that homesigners almost never construct utterances with applied objects (under 2% frequency). By contrast, applied objects appear in 25% of the sentences signed by native ISN signers. This research shows that classifier clitics are integral to the grammar of Nicaraguan Sign Language. Consequently, we cannot overstress the importance of mastering the use of classifier clitics for effective signing. Kegl, Senghas and Coppola, *"Creation through Contact: Sign Language Emergence and Sign Language Change in Nicaragua"* in Language Creation and Language Change: Creolization, Diachrony, and Development, Michel DeGraff, Ed., MIT Press (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England 1999), pp. 179-237.

PRACTICE: Here is a one sentence excerpt from a signed narrative of the story of the *Three Little Pigs*. See how many grammatical labels you can find.

"The wolf looks up, forms an idea, climbs up the house and onto the roof, looks down and climbs to the top of the chimney."

Our thanks to Golden Book Publishing Co. for use of *The Three Little Pigs,* adapted by Alan Benjamin with illustrations by Lilian Obligado (New York, 1988)

Spatial Verbs (locative) and Body Incorporation



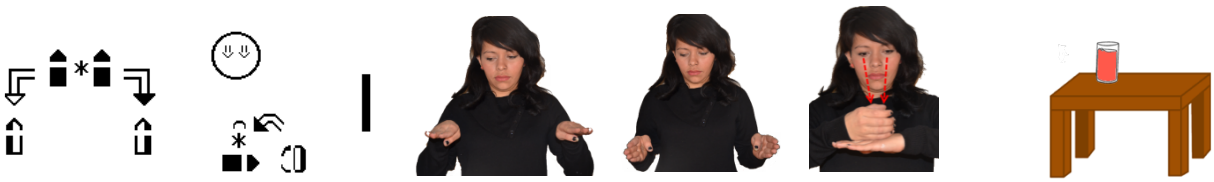
Locative Verbs: In the previous section, we discussed spatial verbs that were directional – that is, the verb showed direction and movement in three dimensional space. A *locative verb* is a spatial verb without direction and movement. Instead, the spatial relationship involves a single specified location. The verb explains the relationship. Consider two similar English sentences:

"The book is on the desk."

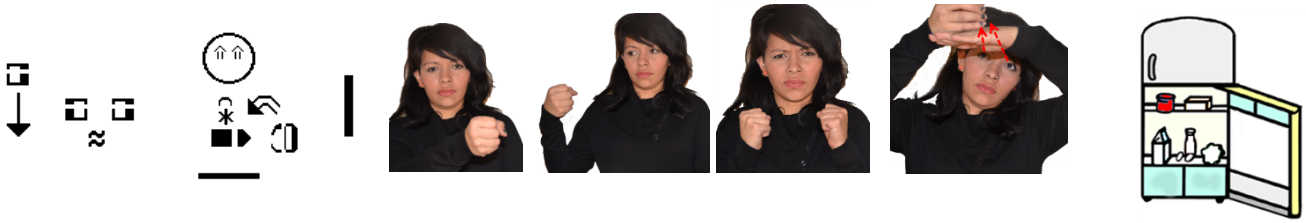
"The book is inside the desk."

In both sentences, the book shares space with the desk, but with a slightly different relationship.

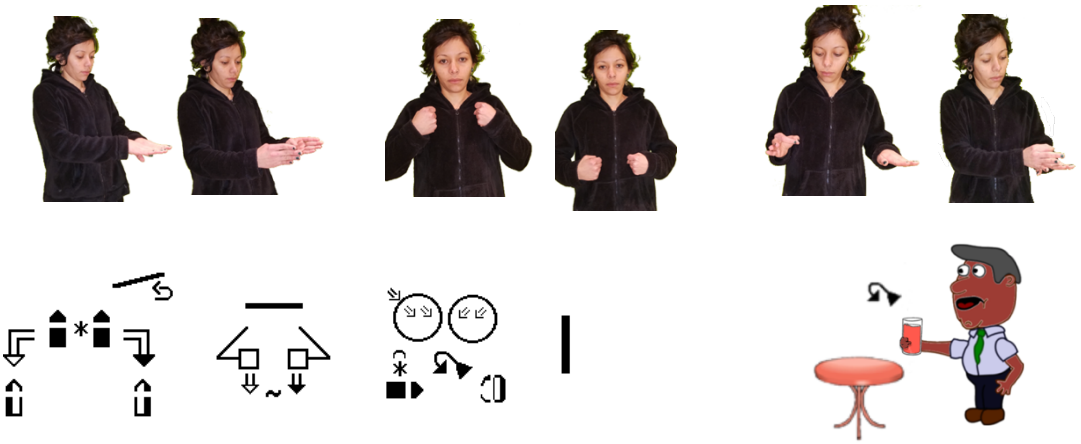
To better see the difference between a locative and directional verb in Nicaraguan Sign Language, let us consider the following three sentences:



The glass is on the table.



The glass is on the top shelf of the refrigerator.



The man puts the glass on the table.

In the first sentence, you are not interested in how the glass came to be on the table. The point is that it is there – ON the table. In English, you express this with the verb "to be" and a preposition ("on.") But, Nicaraguan Sign Language uses neither "to be" nor prepositions. Instead, ISN treats the concept "BE ON" as a locative verb. The verb is expressed with minimal movement.

The sign order of the sentence is ground-figure. The ground is "table." The figure is a handling classifier. There is no antecedent noun because this particular handling classifier is the default classifier for "glass." Within the spatial verb sign, "table" is expressed with a flat surface classifier. Pay careful attention to eye gazing. With a directional spatial verb, the figure makes a path for your eyes to follow. There is no path in a locative spatial verb, but there is still an end point. Your gaze should be focused on the specified location.

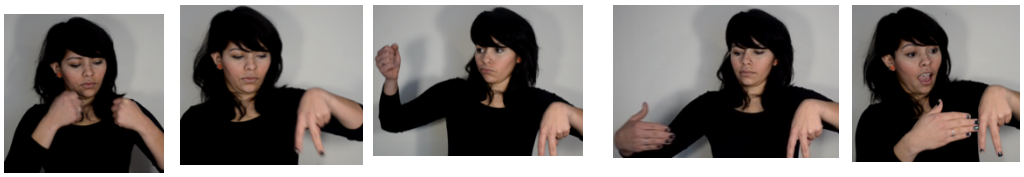
In the second sentence, your left hand ("the top shelf") is raised above your shoulder and your eyes are focused on this higher hand position. Thus, only the location of the locative verb "BE ON" and consequent eye gaze have changed.

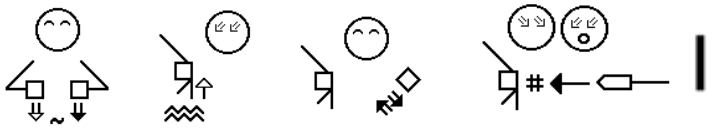
By contrast, the spatial verb in the third sentence is not locative. Rather, the movement is directional, proceeding from a starting location to an ending location. And, in expressing this sentence, you want your Deaf friend to know not merely that the glass is on the table, but more importantly, that the man is the person who puts it there. You begin by signing the ground in a fixed location. We have written a body twist to the left to emphasize this, but in practice this twist can be made subtly. Next, you make the sign for the actor – "the man." Note that this sign is made to the right of the table's location. Finally, you express the directional verb by making the ground with a classifier at the table's location, placing the glass at a distinct starting location – on your right where you located the man – and moving the glass to the table. When you first make the sign for the glass, assist your Deaf friend by noting the starting position with an eye gaze or a head tilt or both eye gaze and head tilt together. The spatial verbs in all three illustrations are essentially identical; however, because you want your friend to understand that

this time the verb is directional, you need to follow the glass classifier with your eyes throughout the movement of the figure.

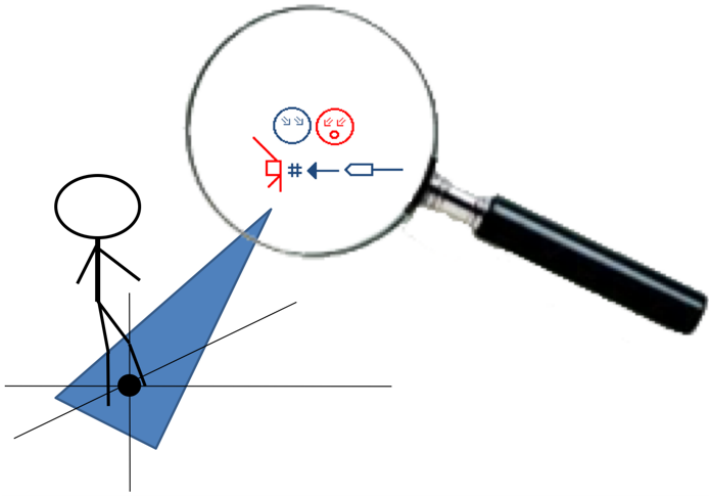
In the above example, the figure classifier is initially made at the location of the subject. In this way, the verb *agrees* with the subject (*subject agreement*). The figure then moves to the location of the ground (*object agreement*).

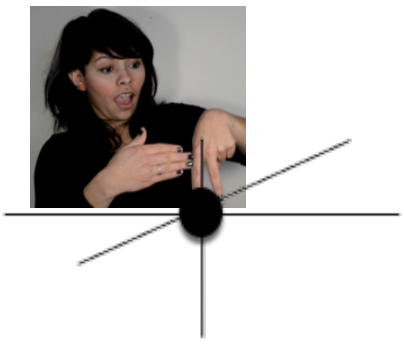
Classifier clitics are locative verbs: We have discussed how to construct directional and locative verbs using classifier clitics. However, to avoid confusion, we have not treated classifier clitics as actually being verbs. Let us now increase the magnification level of our lens and take an even closer look at a classifier clitic.





A man is walking and a car hits him.





Under closer scrutiny, we see that the ground defines a point in three dimensional space. The signer is indicating that the walking man is at a set location in the street when the car strikes him. On a conceptual level, the classifier clitic tells us: "The man is at this intersection of lines in a three dimensional world."

We have already stated that action and spatial relationships (including "at") are merged within spatial verbs. At the beginning of this section, we defined a locative verb as a spatial verb that shows a single specified relationship but lacks direction and movement. This is exactly what a classifier clitic accomplishes. In this example, the figure made by the dominant hand is the car The classifier clitic establishes the anchor point for the movement of that figure. However, when we increase our magnification, the man becomes a figure who is at an intersection in signing space. Thus, the classifier clitic meets the definition of a locative verb.

Remember that when you use a classifier clitic to construct a spatial verb, you are attaching (or 'cliticizing') a ground sign to a figure sign. In fact, conceptually, you are attaching a locative verb to either a directional or another locative verb. You might say: "The car hit the man who is there in the street," or "The glass is on the table which is there." Obviously, such translations sound awkward in English. However, in ISN, a visual language, the concept is conveyed efficiently.

Body Incorporation: There is a set of locative verbs in Nicaraguan Sign Language that involve a feature known as *body incorporation*. For example, the sign for "to hurt" is made by repeatedly opening and closing your right hand, as if your fingers were able to radiate pain. (Add a grimace for effect.) You can make this sign at or near different body locations: head for a headache, neck for a sore throat and so forth. In this way, the verb establishes the location of the pain.

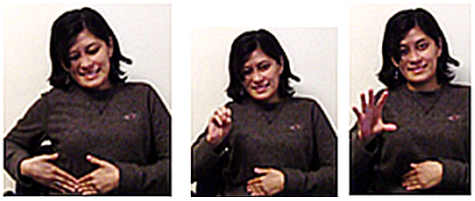
headache

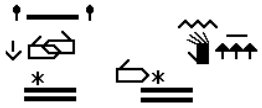
sore throat

Note that the sign itself does not change – just the location where you make the sign. In the two illustrations above, the signer points to the location of her pain and follows with the "pain" sign, thereby creating, in effect, a single or compound sign. Touching the site of the discomfort with the closed "C" hand shape is a variant of the sign.

Variant form: 

In the next illustration, the signer produces a slightly different compound to signify a stomachache. One explanation, of course, is that compressing your abdomen with your hands is a universally recognized gesture for abdominal pain. Indeed, years ago the abdominal compression gesture alone constituted the entire sign.





stomach ache

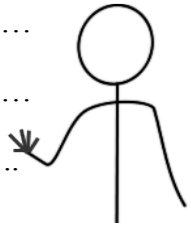
Clearly, our signer has made a generalization for this locative verb: for her, all pain signs are made with compounds: touching/pointing + radiating pain hand shape, signed in the general vicinity of the pain. For signs associated with abdominal pain ("stomach ache," "menstrual cramps,") the specific location is indicated by pressing against the abdomen. She does not need to make the "pain" half of the compound sign at the precise location of her discomfort.

"Pain" half of the compound is made in the general area of the discomfort.

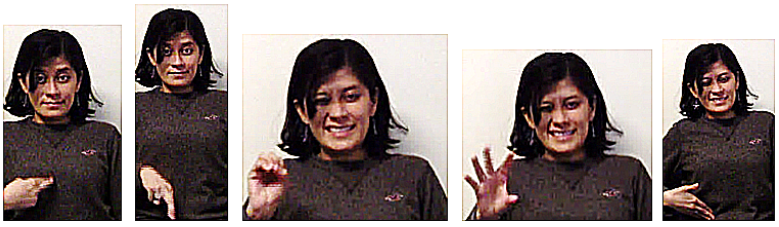
head pain……

neck pain……

torso pain…..



menstrual cramps



Inflecting Verbs, Serial Verbs and Role Shifting

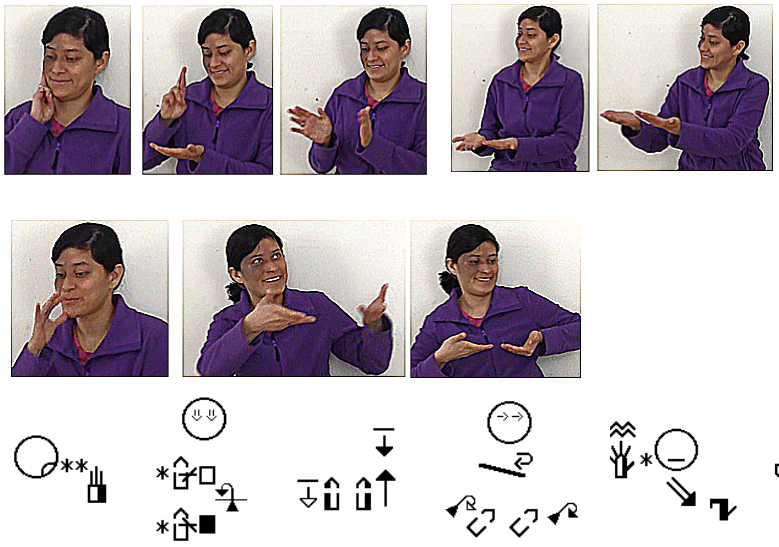
Spatial verbs agree with locations in space. *Inflecting verbs* agree with "person" in the grammatical sense, that is, first, second, or third person. To inflect a verb simply means to change the verb in some manner. In English, for example, we inflect or change verb endings to show tense. English verbs also are inflected for subject agreement, but only in the third person singular present tense ("I walk," but "he walks.") By contrast, Spanish verbs are inflected for subject agreement in all persons: "yo ando, tú andas, él anda, nosotros andamos, vosotros andáis, ellos andan" – and that is just the present tense.

English and Spanish feature distinct subjective pronouns based on person (first, second and third) and number (singular or plural) and, to varying degrees, verbs are inflected to match the person and number of the subjects. Person and number are important features of inflected verbs in Nicaraguan Sign Language, as well. However, verbs in Nicaraguan Sign Language distinguish between two persons (*dual action*) and more than two persons (*plural action*). (We see a similar distinction in American Sign Language, and, indeed, verb inflections for dual and plural are grammatical features of signed languages in general.)

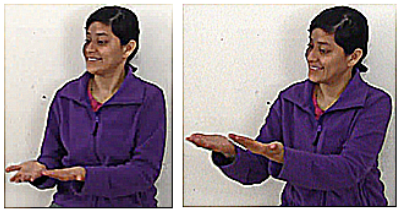
ENGLISH	NICARAGUAN SIGN LANGUAGE
first person singular (I) first person plural (we)	first person singular (I) first person dual (you and I) first person plural (you, you and I)
second person singular (you) second person plural (you)	second person singular (you) second person dual (you and you) second person plural (all of you)
third person singular (he. she, it) third person plural (they)	third person singular (he, she, it) third person dual (they: 2) third person plural (they: more than 2)

In Nicaraguan Sign Language grammar, number is divided into three categories: singular (1), dual (2), and plural (defined as "more than 2"). Verbs are inflected accordingly.

In Nicaraguan Sign Language, you do not change verb endings to indicate subject agreement. However, the signer does alter verb forms to show agreement of the verb not only with the subject person (the actor), **but also with the object person (the recipient).** This is accomplished by inflecting or changing the direction of movement of the sign. You also show *singular, dual* and *plural action* this way. Consider the following sentence with the inflecting verb "to give":



The mother gives the gift box to the child.



The verb "to give" starts at the body of the signer who has assumed the role of the mother, the subject of the sentence. The hands then move to the location of the child, the recipient of the gift. In this case, there is only one recipient. If there were two children (dual number), then you would repeat the verb action, but with the two recipients placed in different locations. (We will illustrate this later in this section.) Hence, the verb is an inflecting verb.

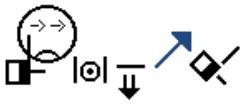
The verb "to give" often occurs as a *serial verb*, which means that the verb is paired with another verb. "To give," for example, optionally can be followed within the same sentence by the verb "to receive". Serial verb combinations ("give-receive," "buy-exchange") occur frequently in Nicaraguan Sign Language. In this sentence, you need to step into the position of the child so that you can "receive" the gift. When you were the mother, you placed the child to your right by inflecting the verb, by twisting your body and by gazing to the child's location. Now, you adopt the child's perspective, again by inflecting the verb ("receiving" the item from your mother's location on your left), by twisting your body to face your mother and by gazing upward (because your mother is taller than you.) Stepping into the shoes of the participants is called *role shifting*. You will find that role shifting is a very helpful technique when telling a narrative in Nicaraguan Sign Language.

Role shifting may be accomplished by –
head tilting;
torso twisting;
eye gazing;
inflecting the verb;
a combination of the above.

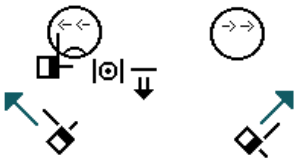
Note, by the way, that the verb "to give" is made with a handling classifier. In this case, you are giving a box, so you make the verb with a flat surface hand shape. If your present were a soccer ball, you would use a claw hand shape as part of the verb. For a generic gift, we have seen the verb "to give" expressed with just a closed hand shape.

Let us consider another inflecting verb: "to gossip." Your subject actor might gossip to a friend or to several friends. In these cases, the verb action is the same, but the distribution of recipients changes: one recipient (third person singular), two recipients (third person dual), or many (third person plural). In linguistic terms, you need to inflect the verb to show its *distributive aspect.* Your subject could also be someone who gossips repeatedly. You would inflect the verb for this, as well, through *temporal aspect*.

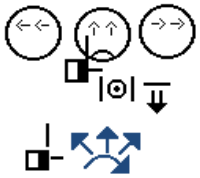
distributive aspect:
one recipient



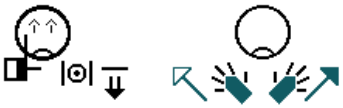
distributive aspect:
dual recipients



distributive aspect:
many recipients
[The verb motion
is made **three times only**,
even if there are more
than three recipients.]



distributive aspect:
another way to show
many recipients: quantify
the person classifier



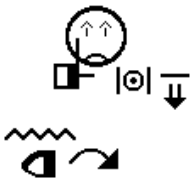
Why do you think the verb motion is limited to three times, even when there are more than three recipients?

Most of us find it difficult to process more than three identical motions and you may find it cumbersome to make the same motion too many times. (Try signing this with 14 recipients.) In other words, repeating an action more than three times tends to yield cognitive overload.

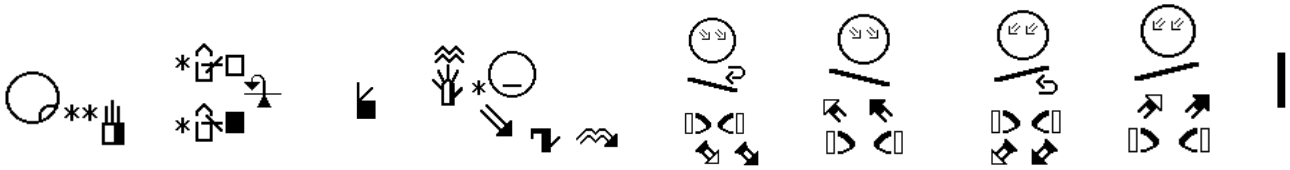
We see the same verb motion limitation in other signed languages. This comes as no surprise since motions that cause cognitive overload to a signer in Managua will pose the same problem to a signer in Singapore.

temporal aspect:
repeatedly
[Make the verb
two or more times.]

temporal aspect:
another option to show
that someone gossips
repeatedly:
compounding ("gossip"
+ "yapping")



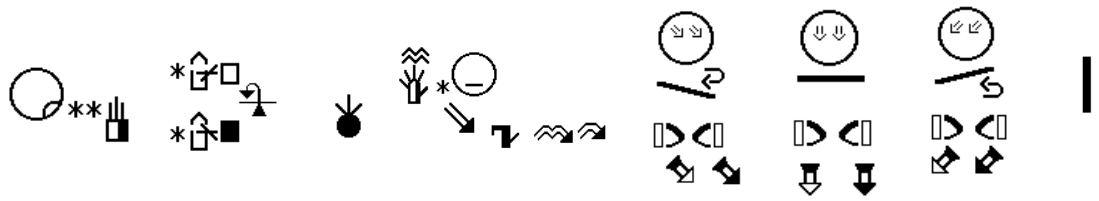
Returning to our first example, we can see how role shifting changes with distributive aspect. To express that the mother gives a gift to one child, the signer uses a serial verb, "give-receive," and accomplishes the role shift from the giving mother to the receiving child by a combination of role shifting techniques: the mother gazes downward and the child gazes upward; verb inflection: a downward motion when the mother gives, and another downward motion when the child receives; head tilting: downward for mother and upwards for child; and torso twisting from the giver to the receiver. Now we will vary the sentence to add a second child:



The mother gives presents to two children.

Look closely at the role shift. When there is only one child, the signer swings around from mother to daughter. But, with two children, too much torso twisting would be awkward. Instead, the signer twists once to show the act of giving and receiving at one location (the first child), then twists back to the show the act of giving and receiving at a second location (the other child).

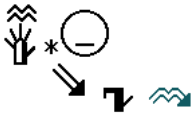
With three children, our signer (sometimes) dispenses with the serial verb altogether and simply inflects the verb "to give" to show its distributive aspect:



The mother gives presents to three children.

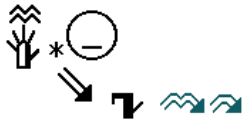
Nicaraguan Sign Language rarely modifies a noun from its singular form. The sign for "children" is an exception to this rule. Note that the sign for "child" is distinctly different from the sign for "children":

child



children

The motion of the final handshape signifies more than one child.

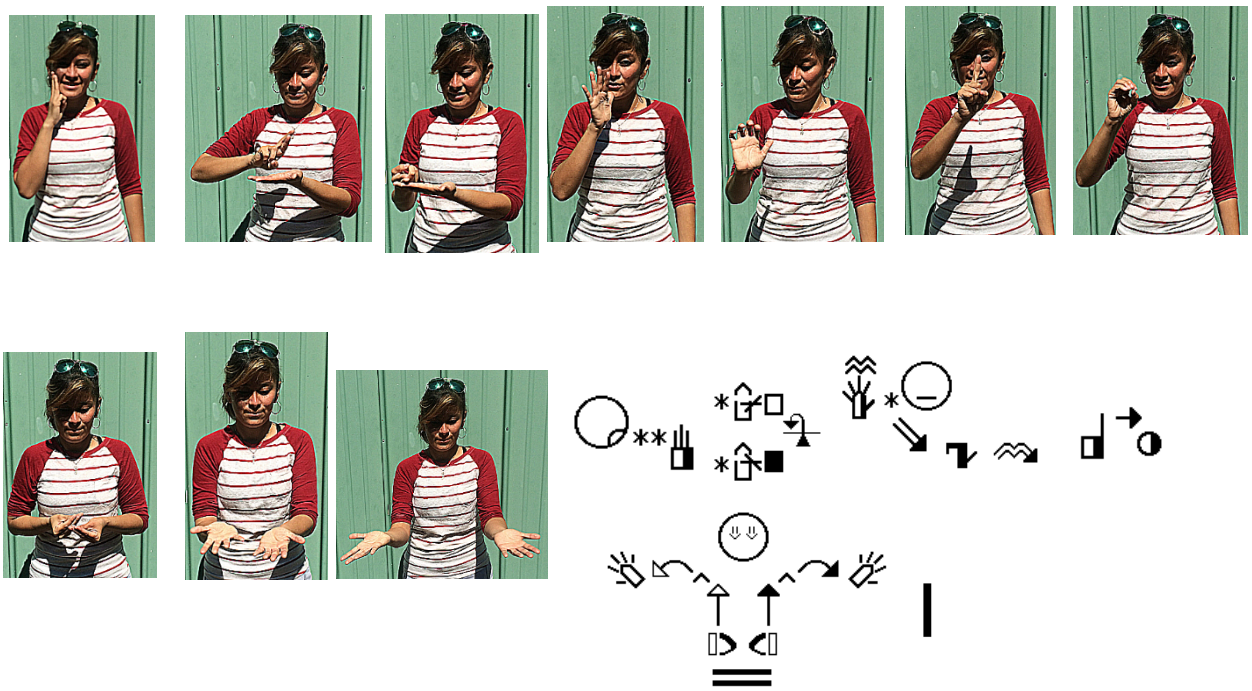


In the example with the three children, our signer has changed the sign for "children" to show that there are several children receiving the gifts. The signer's choice to do this represents, we think, an unusual but clever variant of the sign.

With five children, the signer uses the sign for "five," but role shifts with verb motions only three times.

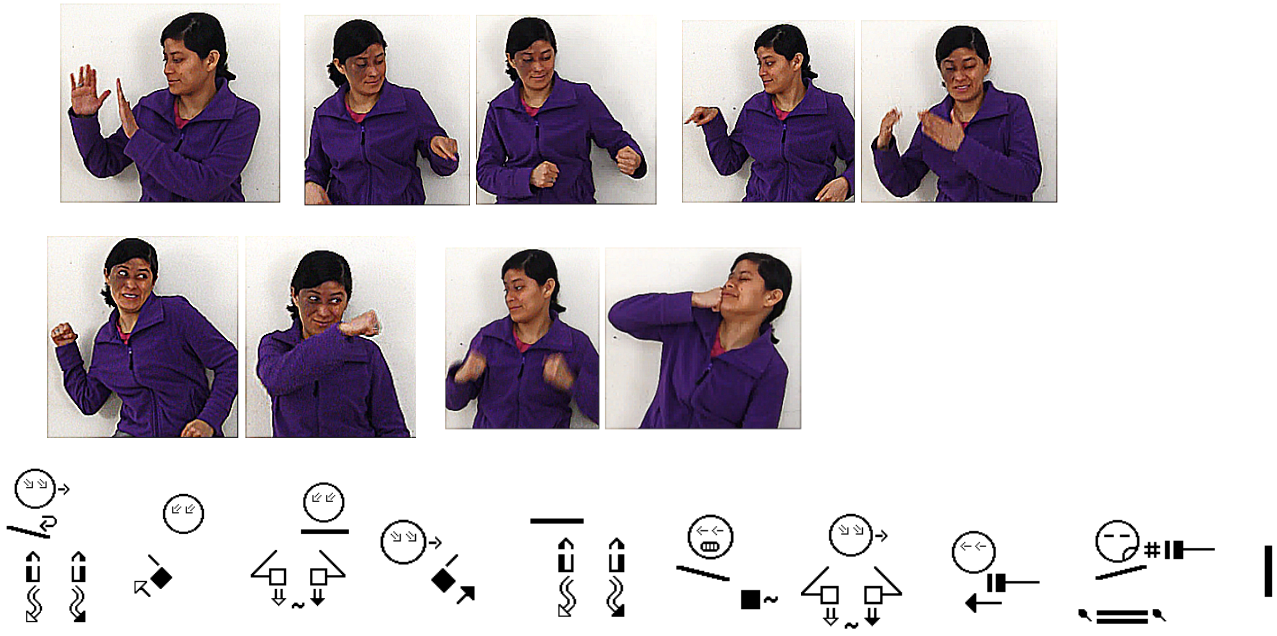
With distributive aspect, plurality is expressed by three verb motions.

Finally, to convey a great number of children (ten, in this example), our signer inflects the verb by quantifying the person classifier in order to indicate that there are many recipients.



The mother gives presents to ten children.

Here is another example of role shifting:



The woman hits the man in the face.

The actor or subject is the woman. The signer sets up the woman in space on her right side. Note that she uses four techniques to achieve this: body twisting, head tilting, eye gazing and physically signing "woman" in the space to her right. Next, she places the man in the space on her left side, this time by pointing to the new location, then signing "man" nearly in that location. (We will revisit the pointing gesture in a subsequent section.) She also employs eye gazing, a subtle head tilt and a slight body twist to reinforce her message. Now she role shifts, becoming the woman. The verb action is a spatial verb, and, more specifically, a directional verb. With her eyes, the signer directs us to follow the fist from its source to its goal – the man's previously fixed location. However, to show the precise impact point (the man's face), the signer has to shift to the role of the man and accept the blow.

Note that the man is the object of the sentence, but that his face is the grammatical ground.

Spatial Verbs: a linguistic analysis

Directional verbs, as we explained above, show direction and movement either from a source location or to a goal location or from one to the other. For example, in the sentence "The woman runs to the store," the verb sign takes the actor and us with her to the store. A locative verb shows location only. We could say that the locative verb answers the question "Where?"

Let us consider an intriguing way to analyze spatial verbs in Nicaraguan Sign Language. This analysis may seem difficult at first, but is really quite basic. Just remember: Nicaraguan Sign Language is neither English nor Spanish. If you truly want to be able to sign well, you have to learn to organize language the way a Deaf person does. Otherwise, you will lapse into imposing your English or Spanish rules of grammar on the sign language. After all, you cannot use Russian grammar to speak Spanish. Similarly, you cannot construct understandable sentences in Nicaraguan Sign Language if you fall into the trap of using the rules from the wrong language.

All spatial verbs have three components: movement, termination and location. We can say that each of these components has a value.

There are three values for movement:

1) from
2) to
3) nothing (i.e., no movement)

There are four values for termination (beginning or source terminal and/or ending or goal terminal):

1) being at (or, since you should be thinking like a Deaf person, use the verb "at")
2) being on (verb: "on")
3) being in (verb: "in")
4) being oriented toward (verb "oriented toward")(more on orientational verbs in the next section)

Finally, there are infinite values for location. In other words, location could be anywhere, so we simply assign location a value of "x."

Now, let us try this analysis with some sentences using directional and locative verbs.

Example 1: The man jumps off the table.
Movement value: from
Termination value: on
Location value: the table

Example 2: The cat jumps out of the box.
Movement value: from
Termination value: in (because the cat was in the box.)
Location value: the box

Example 3: The woman runs to the store.
Movement value: to
Termination value: at
Location value: the store

Example 4: The cup is on the table.
Movement value: nothing
Termination value: on
Location value: the table

Example 5: The cat is in the box.
Movement value: nothing
Termination value: in
Location value: the box

Example 6: The woman puts the cup on the table.
Movement value: from and to
Termination value: on
Location: the table

Looking at verbs in this way, some directional verbs have movement from a location or from within a location, some directional verbs have movement to a location or into a location, and some directional verbs have movement from one terminal to another. Location verbs have no movement value, but they do have termination and location values.

Now, let us try to use this information to help you in a practical way. Let us sign that the cat is inside the box. The image we create in our minds is the same whether we are English speakers or Deaf signers. The difference is how we express this image through language. In English, we would choose an existential verb ("to be") and a preposition ("in") to show the relationship between the cat and the box. Our Deaf friend, however, is as confounded by the function of the verb "to be" as you might be by the idea of using "in" as a verb and not as a preposition. With practice, you might find it easier to think of "in" as verb with no movement value (a locative verb), a termination value of being inside, and a location value "x = the box."

Try a sentence with a spatial verb that is directional: "The cat jumps out of the box." Think location; sign "box." For the verb, you will make a classifier for the box (flat shaped side) and a classifier for the cat (two- legs-bent). The moving figure classifier is not a default classifier, so you must identify beforehand its noun (the cat) either in your sentence or earlier in your narrative. Now, quickly – movement value: from; termination value: in; location: flat shaped classifier. When you assemble these components, the result is predictable and understandable: a moving figure that conveys a specific action (jumping) and relationship (in from the box). Note that conceptually the termination value (in) precedes the movement value (from) in this scenario.

Finally, let us see how this technique can be very helpful when you wish to express a more complicated image: "The cat jumps out of the box and onto the table."

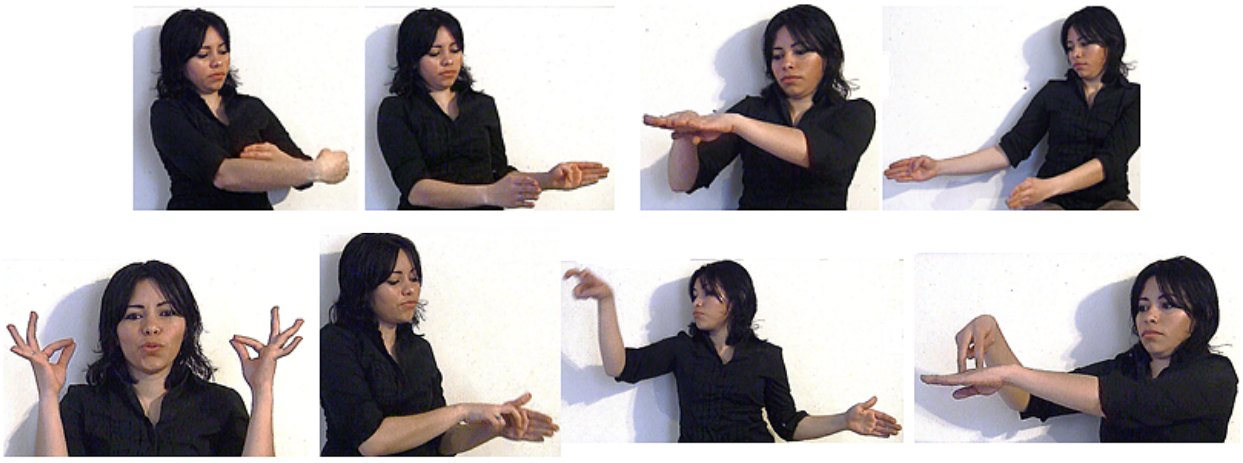
Option #1 **(grammatically incorrect sequence)**:

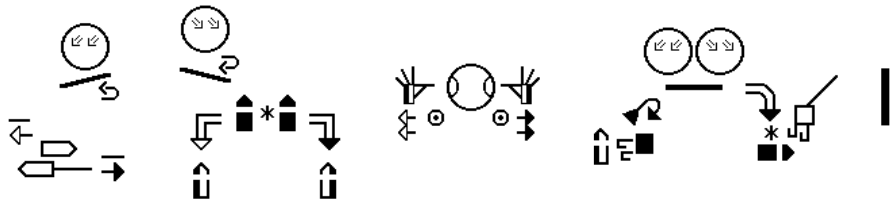
1. object noun #1: **box**
2. actor noun (subject) (before the moving figure classifier can appear): **cat**
3. moving figure/spatial verb (directional): classifier clitic: vertical flat-sided surface classifier + two-legs-bent classifier: **in from** source location
4. object noun #2: **table**
5. moving figure/spatial verb (directional): classifier clitic: horizontal flat surface classifier + two-legs-bent classifier: **to on** goal location

Why is option #1 grammatically incorrect? The problem with this sequence is that splitting a spatial verb with a noun is prohibited. Therefore, you must sign the second object noun before you make the spatial verb. When you apply both this rule and our technique, you again will produce a sentence that is grammatically and syntactically correct.

Option #2 (grammatically correct sequence):

1. object noun #1: **box** -- signed in location "x-left" (remember to use eye gaze, head tilt and a distinct signing space)
2. object noun #2: **table** – signed in location "x-right"
3. actor noun (subject) (before the moving figure classifier can appear): **cat**
4. moving figure/spatial verb (directional): classifier clitic: vertical flat-sided surface classifier + two-legs-bent classifier: **in from** source location **to on** goal location





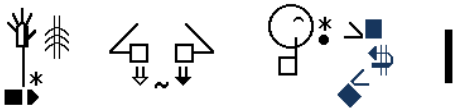
Spatial Verbs (orientational)

Verbs in which the orientation of the hand shape changes depending upon the actual position of the associated goal location are called *orientational verbs*. The most common orientational verb is "to look." Thus, the subject of a sentence looks horizontally at the television or up at the airplane or down at the ground. The hand shape does not change, but the orientation of the hand does. As you can see in the examples below, the goal location means the area where the actor is looking. It is not important whether or not there is a specific object in that location.

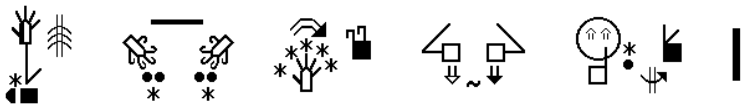


look

variant form



The man looks around the tree.

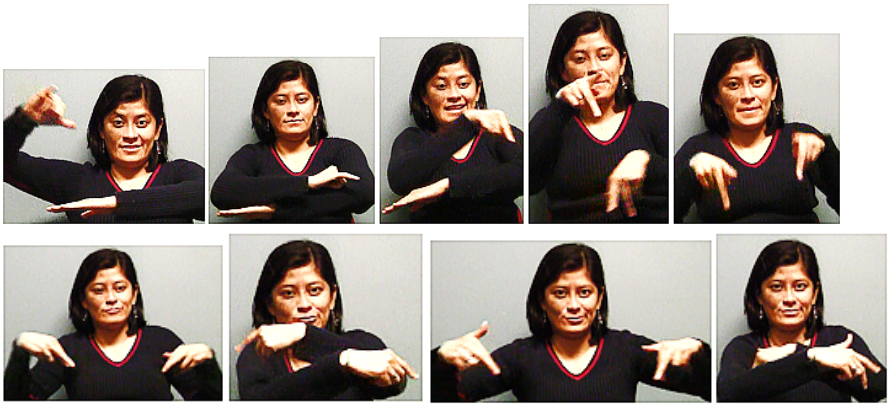


The man looks at the monkeys in the tree.

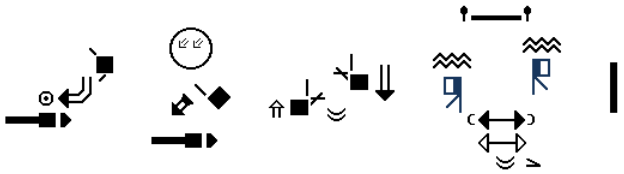
The monkeys look down.

Sometimes you can choose to express duality or plurality of the subject by changing the orientational verb to a two handed sign.

Sometimes, a spatial verb can be both a directional and orientational verb at the same time. Consider the following sentence:



At the airport, there are people walking briskly back and forth.



The verb "to walk" is directional because the signer shows the person-by-legs classifiers moving briskly from source to goal locations. The verb is orientational because the signer has adjusted the orientation of the verb handshapes so that the classifiers for the people are shown passing each other. This sentence presents an interesting dilemma. As we have stressed previously, with spatial verbs your eyes should follow the moving figure from source to goal location in smooth pursuit. Here, however, the signer's hands are passing each other going back and forth. Consequently, this signer cannot gaze upon both hands simultaneously. She must employ other methods to show verb agreement from source to location. She achieves this in two ways. In her second sign, she points to the classifier she has made to represent the floor of the airline terminal and with her eyes directs us to that location. (As mentioned in a prior section, we call this pointing sign an *adverb of location*.) Then, as she makes the verb, she tilts her body slightly forward.

Incidentally, the signer in the above example has substituted the traditional sign phrase for "people," literally, "many persons," with a shortened version. In grammar, we call this a *sign simplification*.

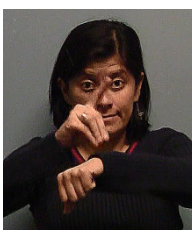
Plain and Copulative Verbs

Plain Verbs: When we began our discussion of verbs, we stated that subject-verb-object [SVO] word order often occurs in simple sentences in Nicaraguan Sign Language, In practice, this means that the language's underlying rule order is SVO *unless another rule acts to force a different construction.*

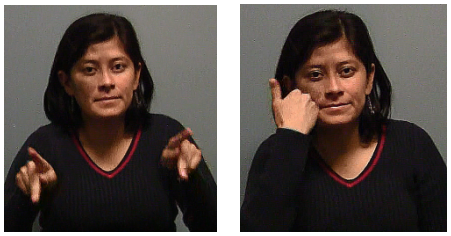
We have discussed some of the scenarios that require you to construct your sentences with different word orders. Our examples involved sentences in which the verbs were directional, locative, orientational, inflecting or serial.

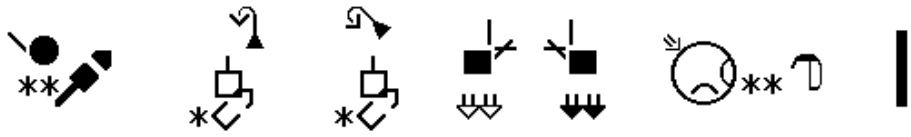
When you are not dealing with spatial or inflecting verbs, when you need not concern yourself with spatial agreement, and when you are not dividing your attention between ground and moving figures, then you are left with *plain verbs*.

With plain verbs, you do not make your signs in different three dimensional locations to show agreement with the subject and object. As a result, SVO word order becomes the primary means for distinguishing subject nouns (or subject noun phrases) from object nouns (or object noun phrases.)


SUBJECT


VERB [expressed with distributive aspect]

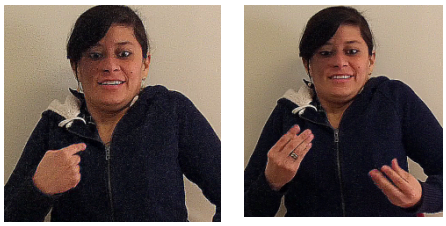

OBJECT PHRASE

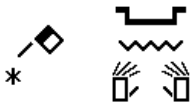

The doctor helps the sick people.

As we stated much earlier, the syntax of this sentence is SVO both in Nicaraguan Sign Language and in English. Indeed, even in complex sentences in English, the fundamental SVO syntax usually does not change. By contrast, with Nicaraguan Sign Language other rules are acting on the word order all the time. In most conversations, straightforward examples of SVO syntax do not occur very often.

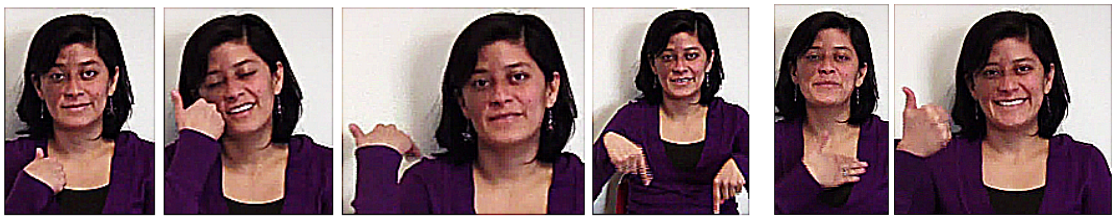
Copulative Verbs. In our first section, we defined "predicate" as the part of the sentence that includes the verb and says something about the subject. Usually, the predicate is a verb phrase: the verb plus the object and any modifiers. For example, in the sentence "The man cooks the fish," the subject is the actor ("the man,") the verb expresses the action ("to cook,") and the predicate describes what the subject does ("cooks the fish.")

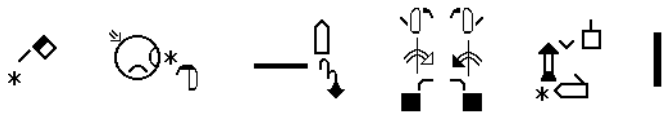
In many sentences, there is no action at all. Rather, the sentence expresses some kind of state of being. In this case, some languages, including English and Spanish, require a verb to link the subject with the predicate. This kind of verb is called a *copulative verb*, also called a *linking verb*. The copulative verb in English is "to be." This verb appears in two forms in Spanish: "ser" and "estar." However, there is no corresponding copulative verb in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Instead, the predicate follows the subject without the appearance of any verb at all.





I am afraid.
(Note: the ISN sign for the Spanish verb *tener* should never be used to link a state of being term, such as *sed* [*thirst*] or *miedo* [*fear*] with a subject.)

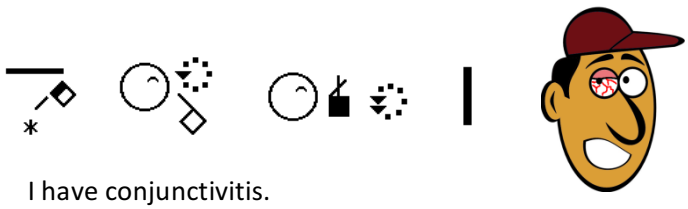




I was sick; now I am better.

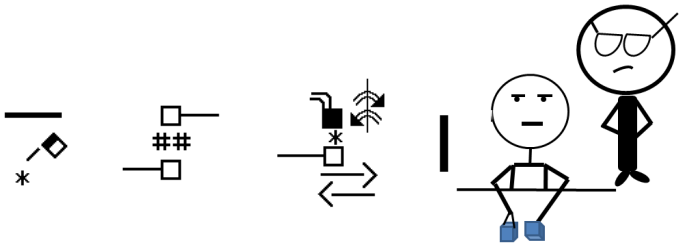
Nicaraguan Sign Language does not use a sign that corresponds to the English copulative or linking verb "to be".

There are many verbs in English that serve a similar function as the primary copulative verb, "to be." Examples include: "I feel sad," "I have conjunctivitis." Nicaraguan Sign Language does does not use a verb in such cases.



I have conjunctivitis.
[I-eye-red]

Similarly, in the sentence below, the English verb "to work" functions very much like the copulative verb "to be" when coupled with the preposition "as" to link the actor with her occupation. Nicaraguan Sign Language drops the preposition and treats the verb as a plain verb, yielding the traditional SVO order.



I work as a supervisor.
[I-work-supervisor]
(Note: An alternative English interpretation for this sentence might be: *My occupation is supervisor*, or, simply, *I am a supervisor.* However, using the verb *work* to link an actor with her occupation is a common construction.)

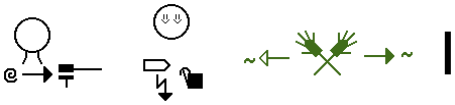
Tenses: past, present and future

The question of how Deaf signers in Nicaragua express tense (past, present, and future) requires further study. However, we are able to share with you some observations from the data we have collected.

1. It appears to us that verbs do not change form to indicate past, present or future tense.

2. To show a completed action, you may add the sign "finish" (green), usually immediately after the verb.

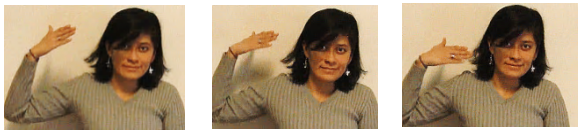
I finished working.



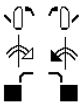
I finished writing the exam.

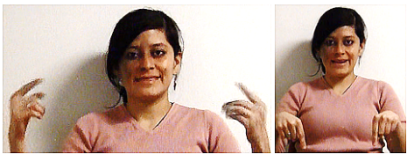
3. Generally, you should use signs called *time adverbs* to express past tense. Here are some examples:

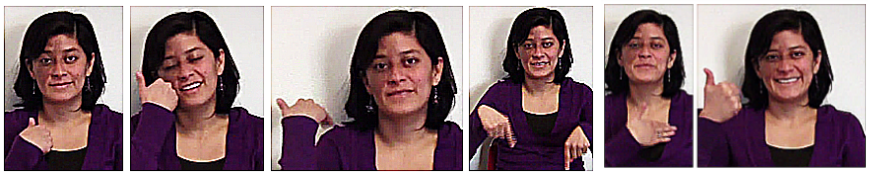
Past tense ("before"):



Present tense sign ("now"):







I was sick; now I am better.

In the sentence above, the signs “before” and “now” (green) are used to show the change of the signer’s health over time. There are no verbs in this sentence because Nicaraguan Sign Language never uses copulative verbs.

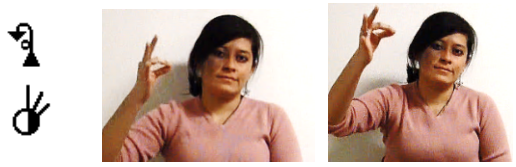
Past tense sign (“before”)**:**

The woman drives the car that she bought from the man.

In this sentence, the time adverb “before” introduces the relative clause. Note that the verb “to drive” is present tense by default or from context. Incidentally, the sign for “drives the car” is a default classifier. And, “bought” is a serial verb.

4. You can express future actions or events by expressing the sign meaning “in the future” or by specifying a time or date, for example, the sign “tomorrow.”

Future time adverb (“in the future”):

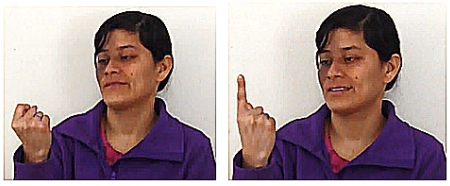


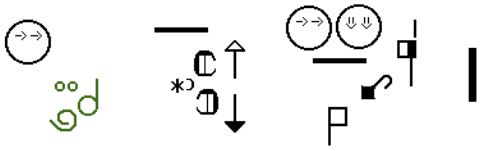
Future time adverb (“tomorrow”):

I think perhaps tomorrow everyone will depart from here to the pool.

5. Use the sign “falta” for impending events.

Impending event sign (meaning, “not yet”): (See the Negation Section for other usages of the sign “falta.”)

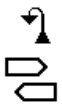


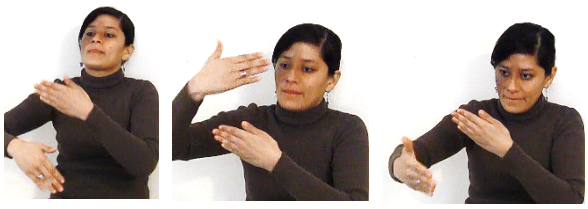


The bus is coming, but is not here yet.

6. We recommend that you tell stories in chronological sequence separating events with the sign “afterwards.”

Sequence sign (“afterwards”):





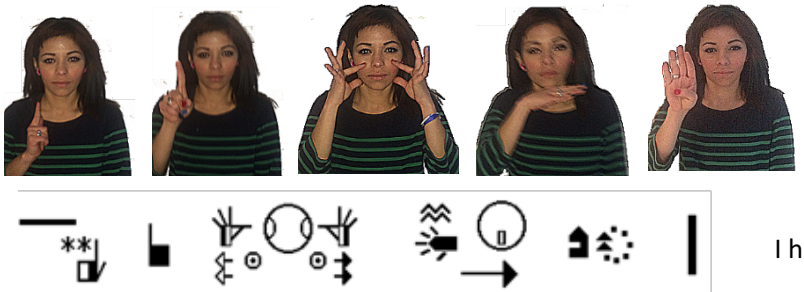
Topicalization, Adjectives, Quantifiers and Numeral Incorporation

A *noun* is a word that denotes a person, animal, place, thing or idea. An *adjective* is a word (or group of words) that describes a noun by answering the question: What kind is it?

Many grammar books classify numbers and other terms of quantity (such as "some" and "many") as adjectives, as well, since these words also describe a noun. However, these terms answer the question: How many are there? Linguists generally prefer to use a separate label for such terms, and in this manual we will call them *quantifiers*.

Similarly, *demonstratives* ("this," "that," "these") describe a noun by answering the question: Which one is it or which ones are they? Such terms are adjective-like, but should be considered a distinct grammatical label.

Let us consider the following sentence in Nicaraguan Sign Language:



I have one white cat.

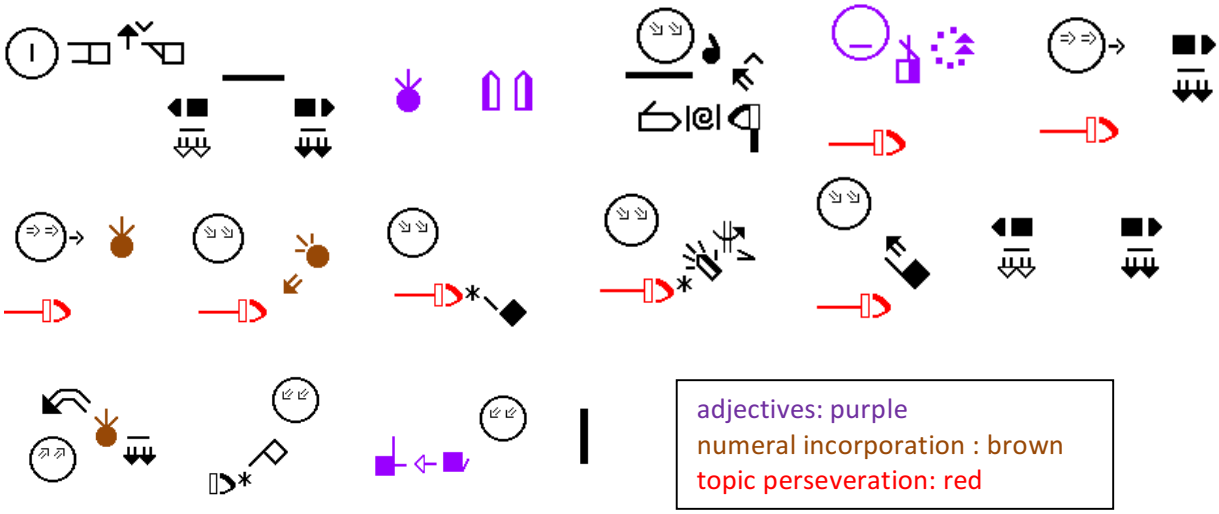
In this example, "cat" is a noun. The noun is preceded by a numerical quantifier, in this case "one". "Color" + "white" is an adjective group that answers the question, "What kind is it?"

In Nicaraguan Sign Language, a cardinal number ("1,2,3...") can come either before or after the noun. **Adjectives or adjective groups that answer the question, "What kind is it?" generally come after the noun.**

Note that the color of something is often expressed as an adjective group, for example, color + white, but this is optional.

In the next sentence, you will see the number "three" sign taking on different grammatical roles.

The three little birds fly to the red flower and then to the blue flower.



adjectives: purple
numeral incorporation : brown
topic perseveration: red

The first sign is “bird,” which is a noun and the subject of the sentence. Note in the photograph that the signer’s eyebrows are raised. The sentence involves movement through space, so we can anticipate that the sign order will be ground before figure and not subject-verb-object. As we have seen, in similar circumstances you usually set the stage (the ground) first, and then express the movement of the actors in relation to that stage. Linguists explain that the ground occupies the *topic* position which always comes before the spatial verb. **Marking the topic position by raising your eyebrows is a grammatical feature of Nicaraguan Sign Language.** The eyebrow movement may be rather subtle sometimes, but natively fluent signers adhere to this rule without having to think about it. In our sample sentence, the signer has elected to put special emphasis on the birds, and, accordingly, has placed them in the topic position ahead of the ground, that is, the red flower.

Topicalization moves an object noun or noun phrase to the front of the sentence and marks that sign or signs with a special facial expression – a raising of the eyebrows. English speakers are familiar with an equivalent process. Consider the following exchange: “Do you have any dogs?” “Dogs, oh yes, I have three.” In the response, the object noun “dogs” occupies the topic position. Signers topicalize nouns in this fashion, as well. However, one could argue that in Nicaraguan Sign Language topicalization also occurs every time a signer places ground before moving figure.

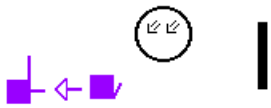
The signer may choose to topicalize both the subject and object of a sentence. In this case, the subject noun will occupy the first topic position, ahead of the object. (The sample sentence we are using for this discussion is taken out of context. We had shown our Deaf signer a picture of a butterfly flying from red flower to blue flower. And, as expected, she topicalized the red flower and then signed “butterfly.” We then presented different subjects: “a bird,” “two birds,” and finally, “three little birds.” The image of three little birds on one flower is intentionally strange, but useful to demonstrate that the rules of grammar in Nicaraguan Sign Language are consistent. With this testing methodology, we would expect the signer to place added emphasis on the subject birds, precisely as she has done.)

The second sign is the quantifier “three”. This sign is immediately followed by an adjective – “little”. According to the topicalization rule (which, as perhaps you have guessed, is another way of explaining the ground before figure rule), the object must come next. Here, the signer places the flower at a set location to her right. The flower is modified by the adjective “red” which follows the noun. Notice that while the signer is using her right hand to sign the color, her left hand is standing by (topic perseveration) to serve as the classifier in the clitic that will be a component of the spatial verb.

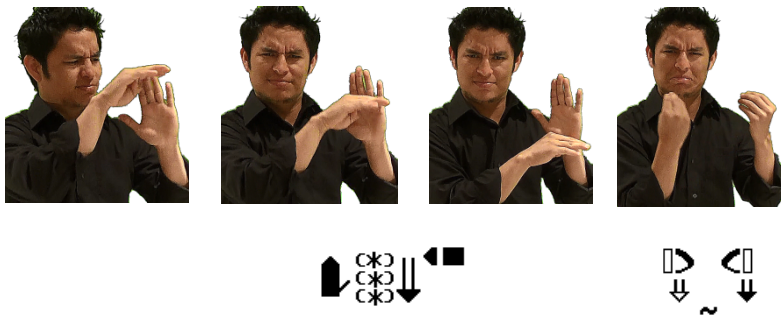
The sign for “bird” involves two hands flapping at opposite sides of the body. This makes it rather difficult to make the sign in a source location away from the body. The signer solves this dilemma by using a flat hand flapping classifier to represent the bird, now located to her right. Note that her head tilt and eye gaze also direct us to this location. The wing-like classifier is now replaced by a quantifying or numeral classifier which moves toward the goal location. (The middle two signs are really one sign. We split them into two signs in order to show the change of head movement and the smooth pursuit by means of eye gazing.) At the last moment, the quantifying classifier becomes a trajectory classifier as the birds (the moving figure) land on the plant (stationary classifier clitic, a component of the spatial verb).

Next, completed action of the spatial verb is shown with a tense marker: “finish”. The birds now continue their flight to the next source location, first with a trajectory classifier, then with a flat surface classifier (resembling flapping wings), quickly followed by the numeral classifier. (The linguistic term is *numeral incorporation*, which means a numeral classifier occupies a figure or *theme* position.) This time, the numeral classifier flaps as it moves toward the new source location. Because the signer used a numeral classifier when she signed the flight to the first flower, according to the rule of *dual agreement*, she must now use this numeral classifier when signing the flight to the second flower. Finally, the quantifying classifier is replaced by the trajectory classifier just as the goal location is reached.

The last sign is the adjective (“blue”), which comes right after the spatial verb, and modifies the noun “flower”, which is represented by the ground classifier within the spatial verb. Note that all the action has been from right to left, and the signer underscores the point by signing the mirror image of “blue” with her left hand.

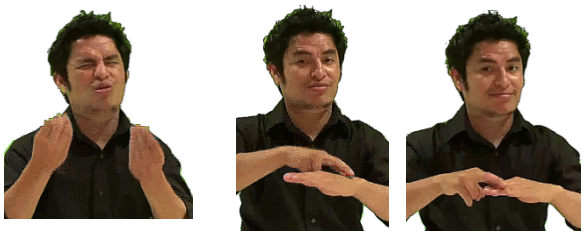


Besides numbers, some of the other quantifiers also may appear either before or after a noun. Consider the following examples:



Quantifier: many

Translation: a long list (list with many items)



Quantifier: many

Translation: many rules

Quantifier: all

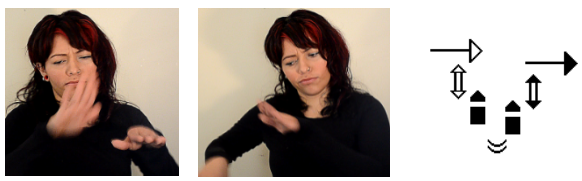
Translation: All Deaf (were) curious....

NOTE: This quantifier sign also appears frequently as a pronoun: all or everyone

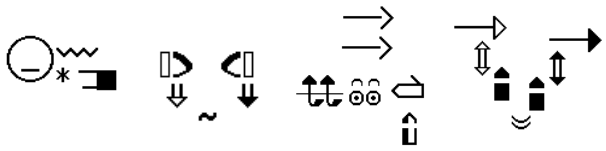
Quantifier: more or less

Translation: similar, more or less the same

By contrast, the adjective "various", which describes kind more than quantity, predictably follows the noun. This sign often appears coupled with "many" and "different", as in "various birds", that is to say, "many different birds" or "a variety of birds".

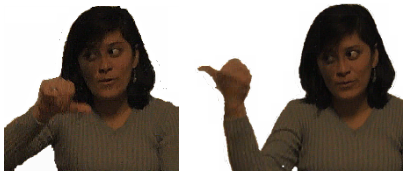


various



a variety of birds

You may also express the concept “various kinds” by signing “other” several times after the noun.



various

Deictic Gestures

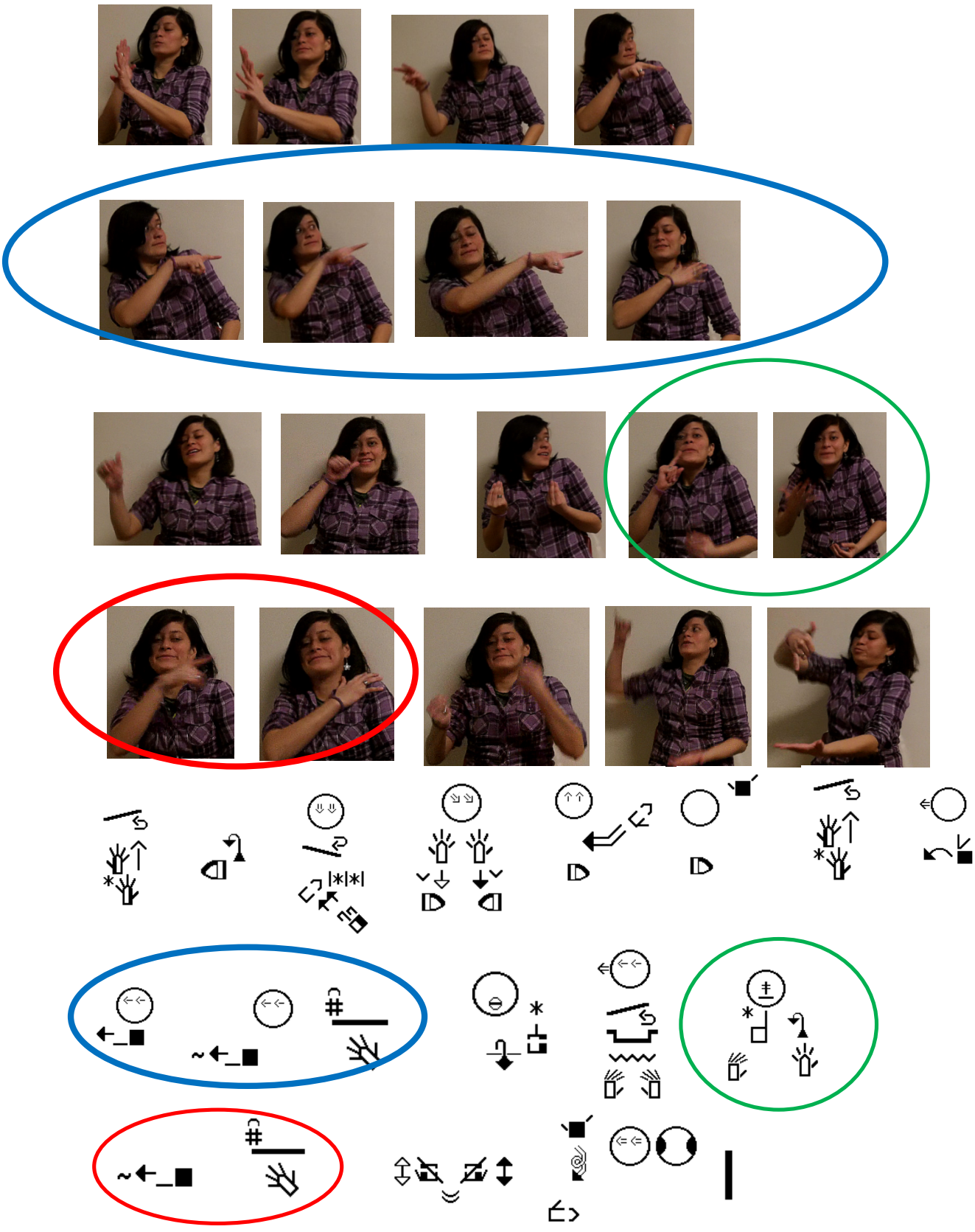
There are several signs that are made simply by pointing with the index finger (often accompanied by eye gazing and head tilting). Linguists refer to these pointing signs as *deictic gestures*, which means the sign cannot be fully understood without a point of reference. (The term itself is derived from the Ancient Greek word "deixis", meaning "reference".) For example, the sign "there" only has meaning when considered in reference to the signer's location, that is, "here – where I am". You might say that "there" conceptually means "not here by me". Similarly, "that table" may be understood as "not this table next to me". The pronoun "him" means "not me [the signer] and not you".

In English there are two indefinite articles ("a" and "an") and one definite article ("the"). Spanish has corresponding articles "un", "el", "los" along with their female gender forms. We have not observed the appearance of indefinite articles in Nicaraguan Sign Language, although we are not prepared to rule them out, either. By contrast, we have noted the use of a pointing sign that corresponds to the English definite article "the". However, unlike English and Spanish, where almost every noun is preceded by an article, the definite article in Nicaraguan Sign Language appears much less frequently.

More commonly, we have seen another deictic gesture that may be translated as the English demonstrative "that". This sign tends to partner with yet another deictic gesture: the adverbial concept "there". This construction resembles certain English dialects where the combination "that-there" is heard (but rarely written), i.e., "That-there man likes to fish."

Consider the following paragraph:

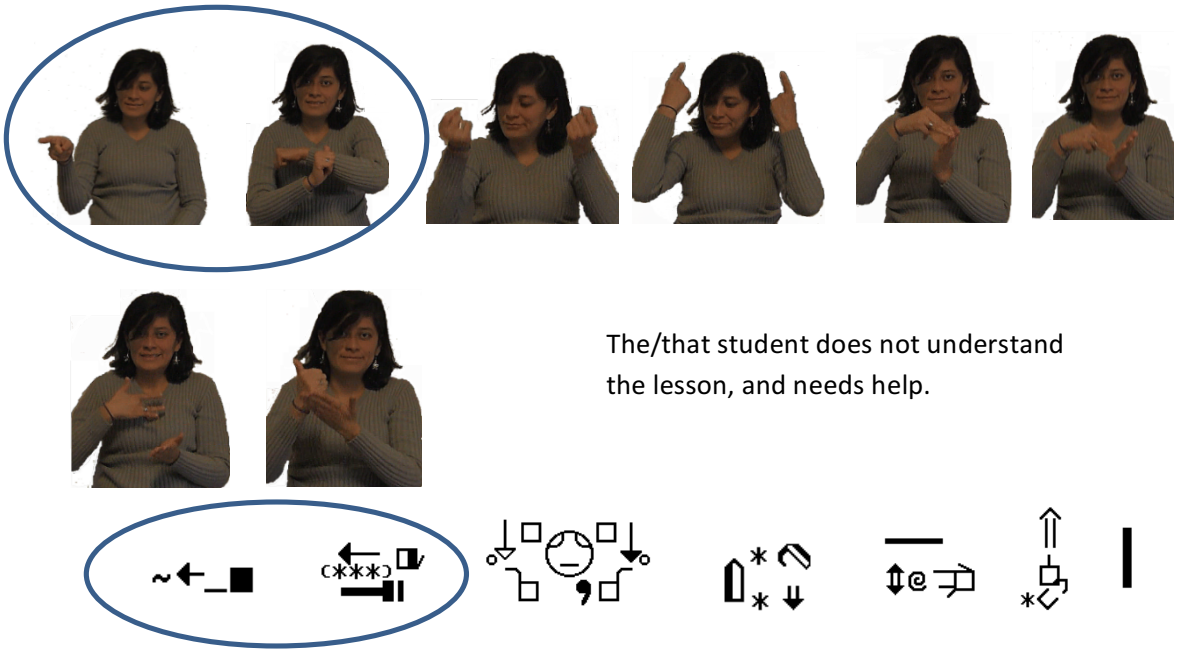
> The people line up and present tickets. (The agent) examines the tickets and invites them to enter the airplane. The line of people continues, look: **that-there** pilot is snockered; they are afraid because **the** pilot (might) fly the airplane into the ground.



The deictic adjective construction “that-there pilot” (or, more literally, “there-that pilot”) is circled in blue. And, the deictic definite article “the” appears (circled in red) immediately before its referent noun (“pilot”). Other interesting grammatical features include role shifting (from passengers to ticket agent to pilot), a null subject (the agent), a default classifier for “person” in its quantified and variant form to express “people”, and a final clause “because the pilot (might) fly the airplane into the ground”. This last clause includes a plain verb and a spatial directional verb with moving figure (the default classifier “airplane”) and ground classifier.

Always bear in mind that a good interpretation process includes converting the sentence expressed in the grammar of the source language into a sentence that adheres to the grammar of the target language. In the above example, we have presented the final clause of the ISN sentence as an English *relative clause* beginning with the conjunction “because”. The sign “because” (circled in green) is actually a question marker, meaning “Why?” The question is rhetorical. The signer immediately provides the explanation.

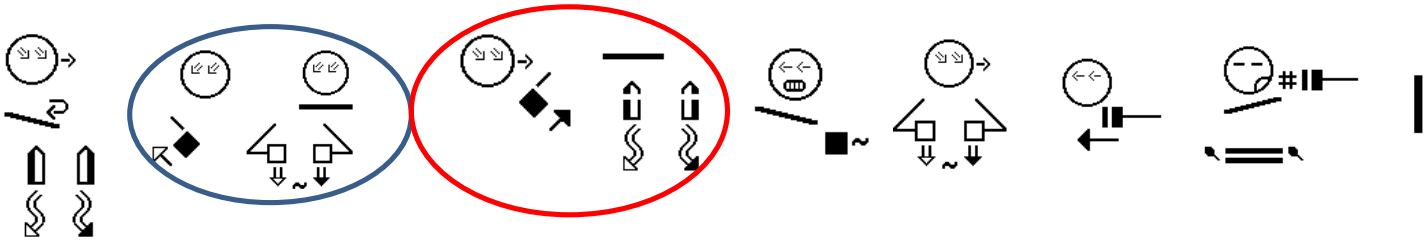
In the next example, the signer sets up the circled subject in an arbitrary location using a deictic gesture that you could translate as “the” or “that”:



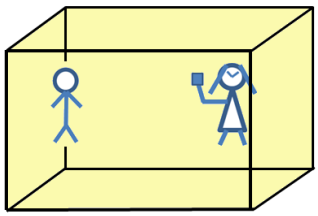
The/that student does not understand the lesson, and needs help.

Let’s examine again a sentence we presented in our earlier discussion of role shifting:

The woman hits the man in the face.



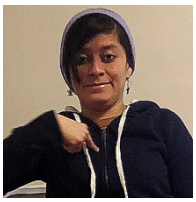
The signer needs to clearly identify the woman as the subject and the man as the object so that we will understand who does the hitting and who gets hit. As previously noted, body twisting, head tilting, eye gazing and choice of signing space are all critical techniques for achieving effective communication in this kind of sentence. This signer also uses deictic gesturing to establish distinct spatial coordinates for each person. The subject woman becomes "**the** woman" and the object man becomes "**the** man".



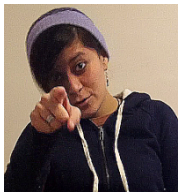
Signed languages use signing space to convey three dimensional concepts. You should become comfortable using *deictic gestures*, also called *indexical pointing*, as an additional method to establish the relationship of nouns to each other within a sentence.

Caution: Deaf signers in Nicaragua use both role shifting and indexical pointing to identify the subject-actor and object-actor in sentences. However, we have observed some signers who construct their sentences by assuming the identity of the subject-actor or the object-actor, or even by alternating between the two of them. Thus, when signing about someone else, the narrator might opt to first identify the actor and then refer to that actor using the first person pronoun "I/me".

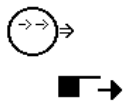
Pronouns are also signed by indexical pointing:



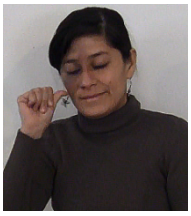
I, me

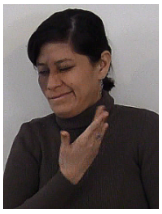


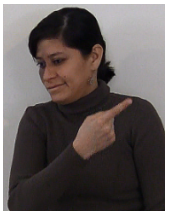
you



he/him
she/her/t
hey/them

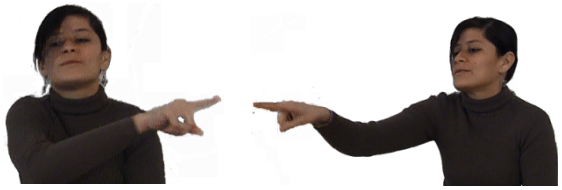


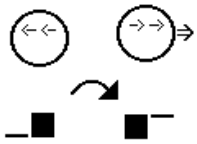




Anne does not like him.

The plural pronoun “you” is a deictic gesture with a sweeping arc:





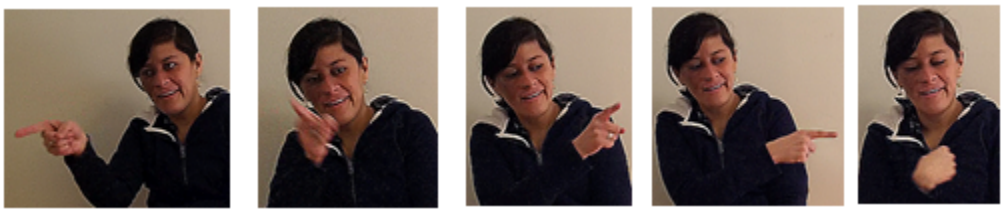
you (plurality): “all of you”

alternative: point at each individual: “you and you and you”

When only two people are involved, the dual pronoun “we” can be expressed by pointing back and forth between “you” and “me” with a “two” handshape.

we two (dual number)

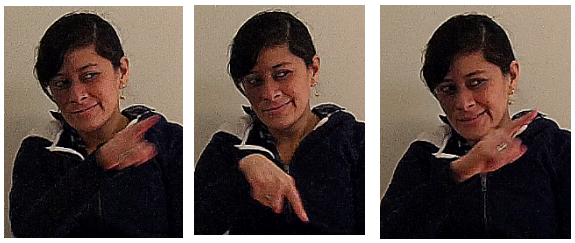
Another way to express “we” is to point to each person and then to yourself:



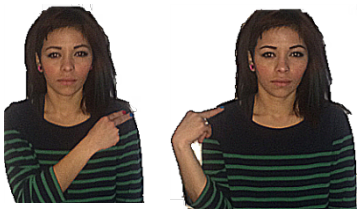
you and you and you and you and I

alternative translation: Each of us.

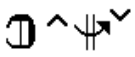
Or, you can sign “we” with a circular motion of your index finger.



Occasionally, we have observed an initialized “N” handshape, from the Spanish “nosotros”, made below the right and left shoulder. This sign for “we”, of course, is not a deictic gesture at all; rather, we regard this variant as an example of Signed Spanish. This sign is often used in Spanish verb conjugation classes for Deaf students – and arguably should be limited to that purpose, if used at all.



Finally, instead of using a deictic gesture, you could substitute the sign for “all” to convey the same idea.



Conversational Fluency and Metalinguistic Awareness[1]

In linguistics, the term *metalanguage* refers to the special vocabulary we use to talk about language. Children are usually taught this vocabulary in primary school grammar classes and again at the secondary school level when studying foreign languages. We say that a person who understands metalanguage has metalinguistic awareness.

The average seven year old hearing child has conversational fluency in his first language but lacks metalanguistic awareness. Consider this ungrammatical sentence in standard English: "The man *cook* the fish." The native standard English speaking child without metalinguistic skills will immediately recognize that the sentence is wrong and should be able to correct the error. However, only a student with specialized metalanguage vocabulary and understanding would be able to explain that the grammatical mistake involves issues of *verb conjugation* and *subject agreement*. This student would be able to point out that the subject ("the man") is *third person singular* and, accordingly, standard English requires the *present tense verb* to be inflected by the addition of an "s" ending.

In our introductory section, we suggested that gaining an understanding of the rules of grammar and syntax in Nicaraguan Sign Language would help you to improve your ability to express yourself and to understand fluent signers. In the following sections, we then defined for you many of the metalingusitic terms needed to discuss a signed language. As you have seen, the metalanguage for signed languages includes specialized concepts such as *classifiers*, *plain verbs*, *inflecting verbs*, *serial verbs*, *spatial verbs*, *classifier clitics*, *ground*, *moving figure*, *temporal aspect*, *distributed aspect*, *numeral incorporation*, *topicalization* and *deictic gestures*. The metalanguage for signed languages also shares many of the labels associated with spoken languages: *person, tense, plural, noun, adjective, adverb, subject, predicate* and so forth.

Hearing children generally have famliarity with at least some metalinguistic terms when they begin second language classes in school, whether they live in Nicaragua or elsewhere. By contrast, Deaf children, whether or not they have conversational fluency in a signed language, are expected to master a speech driven language even though they lack metalinguistic awareness of their first language.

In 2013, Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects produced a short video intended to introduce Deaf Nicaraguans to some of the metalinguistic terms associated with any discussion of sign langauge grammar. We enlisted the aid of a Deaf Nicaraguan as our narrator. Because Nicaraguan Sign Language is a highly productive language, this young man, who spent his childhood attending Deaf schools in Managua and Bluefields, quickly was able to generate signs to describe complex aspects of his native language's grammar. Consider the following sign sequence to express the term *classifier clitic:*

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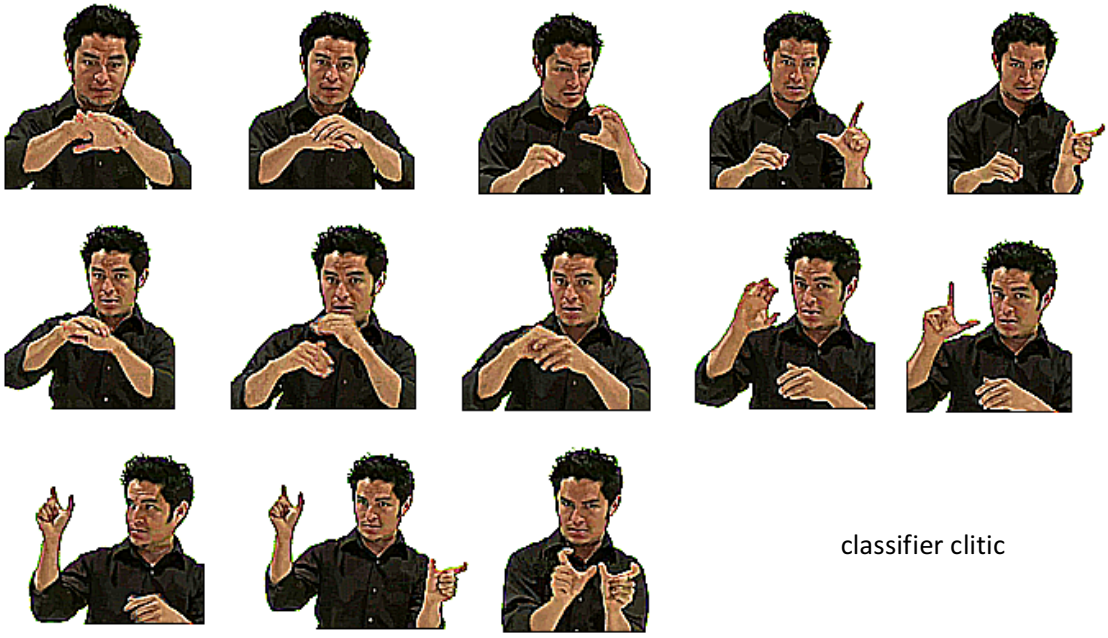
[1] For a detailed analysis of these terms, refer to Cummins, J. (1979). *Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters*. Working Papers on Bilingualism, No. 19, 121-129.



classifier clitic

We recommend that the Nicaraguan educational system include lessons not only in traditional metalinguistic terminology (i.e., *nouns*, *adjectives*, *verbs* and *adverbs*), but that educators also discuss with Deaf students the rules of grammar for Nicaraguan Sign Language. Students who are fluent in Nicaraguan Sign Language will readily understand these concepts.

This cannot happen overnight. We recognize that few educators or interpreters in Nicaragua have received extensive training in sign language metalanguage. Indeed, the problem is hardly confined to Nicaragua, but is typical in Deaf education in many countries. We hope this Nicaraguan Sign Language Manual will serve as a useful resource for readers seeking ISN metalinguistic awareness.

When we teach the metalanguage of Nicaraguan Sign Language to Deaf students, we are showing our respect for Nicaragua's indigenous signed language, and, thereby, our respect for these native signers themselves. That is reason enough to teach this subject. Moreover, as an added benefit, Deaf students who can explain the grammar of their signed language are in a much better position to successfully learn the grammar of a speech driven language like Spanish. Indeed, we argue that it is unrealistic, and therefore unproductive, to expect Deaf students in Nicaragua to master the grammar of Spanish unless those students first have metalinguistic awareness of Nicaraguan Sign Language.

INDEX OF METALINGUISTIC TERMINOLOGY IN NICARAGUAN SIGN LANGUAGE (indicating page where the concept is introduced)

adjective: *Topicalization, Adjectives, Quantifying Classifiers, and Numeral Incorporation* p. 97 An *adjective* is a sign (or group of signs) that describes a noun by answering the question: What kind is it?

adverb of location: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 70 The pointing adverb that sets up a goal location in space is a deictic adverb, but may also be called an *adverb of location*.

antecedent noun (referent): *Classifiers* p. 52 A classifier relates back to an already specified noun or noun phrase. This referent may occur earlier in the sentence or in the narration. In some contexts, the referent may be implied (example: a null subject). An antecedent noun is not needed in the case of a default classifier.

applicative verb: *Spatial Verbs (directional , Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* pp. 70 An *applicative verb* is a spatial verb that incorporates a locative relationship.

applied object: *Spatial Verbs (directional , Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 70 In a sentence with an applicative verb, the object is called an *applied object* and appears twice: as an antecedent noun and again as a classifier clitic within the spatial (applicative) verb.

auxiliaries: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 68 *Auxiliaries verb* are pointing signs that enable a sign that otherwise would not show movement or direction to become a spatial verb. The auxiliaries (meaning: "source-there," "goal-there") may also be used to supplement a directional verb even when not needed.

body incorporation: *Spatial Verbs (locative)* p. 76 Body incorporation is a feature of a set of locative verbs that are signed at or near different body locations to specify the relevant body parts.

classifier: *Classifiers* p. 51 Classifier hand shapes, incorporated into verbs, are used to show appearance, location and/or movement. After a signer indicates some particular thing, a classifier can be used to show where the thing is located, what it looks like and where and how it moves. Classifiers represent living things, too, especially people. In the case of a physical object, the classifier may resemble its surface feature, depth or general shape.

classifier clitic: *Classifiers* pp. 58 When constructing a spatial verb, moving figure and ground classifiers are separated by very weak boundaries. The ground classifier is called a *classifier clitic*: it carries its own meaning but cannot function as a separate sign. Instead, the ground classifier must be linked with the verb.

default classifier: *Classifiers* p. 53 In a few instances, the original sign also serves as its own classifier. In such cases, the rule requiring the classifier to be preceded by its antecedent noun does not apply.

deictic adverb: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 70 An adverb that establishes a spatial or temporal aspect of an utterance is called a *deictic adverb*.

deictic gesture: *Deictic Gestures* p. 102 There are several signs that are made simply by pointing with the index finger (often accompanied by eye gazing and head tilting). Linguists refer to these pointing signs as *deictic gestures*, which means the sign cannot be fully understood without a point of reference.

demonstratives: *Topicalization, Adjectives, Quantifying Classifiers and Numeral Incorporation* p. 97 *Demonstratives* (this," "that," "these") describe a noun by answering the question: Which one?

directional verb: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 66 Spatial verbs that show direction and movement are called *directional verbs*. These verbs show source location and/or goal location.

distributive aspect: *Inflecting Verbs, Serial Verbs and Role Shifting* p. 80 *Distributive aspect* is the feature of a verb action that shows the distribution of the recipients. Plurality is expressed by three verb motions.

encumbered signing: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 64 A sign normally requiring two hands may be made with one hand only if the other hand is occupied, or *encumbered,* by its need to serve another grammatical function.

figure: *Classifiers* p. 54 In the context of figure and ground, we define *figure* as either the thing that moves in a verb of motion or the thing that is located in a verb of location.

goal: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* pp. 65-66 The *goal* location is the ending point of the direction and movement of a moving figure in a directional spatial verb.

ground: *Classifiers* p. 54 In the context of figure and ground, we define *ground* as that thing or person located in space that serves as the anchor point for the movement or location of the figure.

inflecting verb: *Inflecting Verbs, Serial Verbs and Role Shifting* p. 78 To inflect a verb simply means to change the verb in some manner. *Inflecting verbs* agree with "person" in the grammatical sense, that is, first, second, or third person. ISN verbs may also be inflected to indicate number: singular action, dual action and plural action.

locative object: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 68 In ISN, action and spatial relationships are merged within the spatial verb. Consequently, the grammatical terms "preposition" and "object of the preposition" do not apply. A *locative object* specifies a location.

locative verb: *Spatial Verbs (locative) & Body Incorporation* p. 73 A *locative verb* is a spatial verb without direction and movement.

manner: *Classifiers* p. 53 *Manner* refers to the movement of the hand shape of the figure classifier, i.e., movement of fingers.

metalanguage: *Conversational Fluency and Metalinguistic Awareness* p. 109 In linguistics, the term *metalanguage* refers to the special vocabulary we use to discuss a language.

moving figure: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 61 Within a directional spatial verb, the *moving figure* (usually made with the dominant hand) shows the direction and movement of the classifier that corresponds to the subject of the sentence.

null subject: *Classifiers* p. 59 A *null subject* is not signed, but instead is an implied subject (and may be the antecedent noun for a classifier).

noun: *Topicalization, Adjectives, Quantifying Classifiers and Numeral Incorporation* p. 97 A *noun* is a sign that denotes a person, animal, place, thing or idea.

number: singular, dual and plural actions: *Inflecting Verbs, Serial Verbs and Role Shifting* p. 78 *Number* can be an important feature of inflected verbs in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Certain verbs are altered to show *singular action* (one action), *dual action* (two actions) and *plural action* (more than two repetitions).

numeral incorporation: *Topicalization, Adjectives, Quantifying Classifiers and Numeral Incorporation* p. 100 Numeral incorporation means a numeral classifier is occupying a figure or theme position.

orientational verb: *Spatial Verbs (orientational)* p. 89 A verb in which the orientation of the hand shape changes depending upon the actual position of the associated goal location is called an *orientational verb*.

person and agreement: *Inflecting Verbs, Serial Verbs and Role Shifting* p. 78 *Person* in the grammatical sense is divided into first, second, third and singular, dual, plural. ISN does not change verb endings to indicate subject agreement. However, the signer does alter verb forms to show *agreement* of the verb not only with the subject person (the actor), but also with the object person (the recipient). This is accomplished by inflecting or changing the direction of movement of the sign. *Also: Spatial Verbs (locative) & Body Incorporation* p. 75

plain verb: *Plain and Copulative Verbs* p. 91 When you are not dealing with spatial or inflecting verbs, when you need not concern yourself with spatial agreement, and when you are not dividing your attention between ground and moving figures, then you are left with *plain verbs*. With plain verbs, you do not make your signs in different three dimensional locations to show agreement with the subject and object. As a result, SVO word order becomes the primary means for distinguishing subject nouns (or subject noun phrases) from object nouns (or object noun phrases.)

privileged classifier: *Classifiers* p. 55 A *privileged classifier* is a classifier that has only one item in its set.

productive sign: *Classifiers* p. 57 A signer may combine handling and shape classifiers to produce signs as needed for the particular situation. With *productive signing*, the number of potential signs is enormous.

quantifier: *Topicalization, Adjectives, Quantifying Classifiers and Numeral Incorporation* p. 97 A *quantifier* is a sign (or group of signs) that describes a noun by answering the question: How many are there?

role shifting: *Inflecting Verbs, Serial Verbs and Role Shifting* p. 79 Stepping into the shoes of the participants is called *role shifting* and may be accomplished by head tilting, torso twisting, eye gazing and/or inflecting the verb.

sentential verb: *Classifiers* p. 57 *Sentential verbs* are complex verbs that, like sentences, convey a great deal of information. Figures, grounds, locations and actions all come into *sentential verbs.*

serial verb: *Inflecting Verbs, Serial Verbs and Role Shifting* p. 79 A *serial verb* is a verb that is paired with another verb. "To give", for example, optionally can be followed within the same sentence by the verb "to receive". Serial verb combinations ("give-receive", "buy-exchange") occur frequently in Nicaraguan Sign Language.

signing space: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location)* p. 62 *Signing space* is the physical space used by the signer to convey direction and movement as a three dimensional concept.

sign simplification: *Spatial Verbs (orientational)* p. 90 This term applies when a signer substitutes a traditional sign phrase with a shortened version.

smooth pursuit: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 65 When signing a spatial verb with a source location or a goal location or both, your eyes must follow the moving figure. This eye gazing is called *smooth pursuit*.

source: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* pp. 65-66 The *source* location is the beginning point of the direction and movement of a moving figure in a directional spatial verb.

spatial verbs: *Spatial Verbs (directional*), *Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 60 *Spatial verbs* describe movement in three dimensional space. Within a spatial verb, ground must precede moving figure.

topicalization: *Topicalization, Adjectives, Quantifying Classifiers and Numeral Incorporation* p. 99 *Topicalization* moves an object noun or noun phrase to the front of the sentence and marks that sign or signs with a special facial expression – a raising of the eyebrows.

temporal aspect: *Inflecting Verbs, Serial Verbs and Role Shifting* p. 80 *Temporal aspect* is the feature of a verb action that shows that the action occurs repeatedly.

theme: *Classifiers* p. 54 In generative grammar, the *theme* refers to the entity that is moved or located in space.

time adverbial: *Tenses: past, present and future* p. 94 A *time adverbial* is a sign that expresses tense (past, present, future), indicates that an event is impending or shows the sequence of events.

topic perseveration: *Spatial Verbs (directional), Auxiliaries and Adverbs of Location* p. 64 One hand stands by stationary in a set location in preparation to become the ground component of the spatial verb.

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

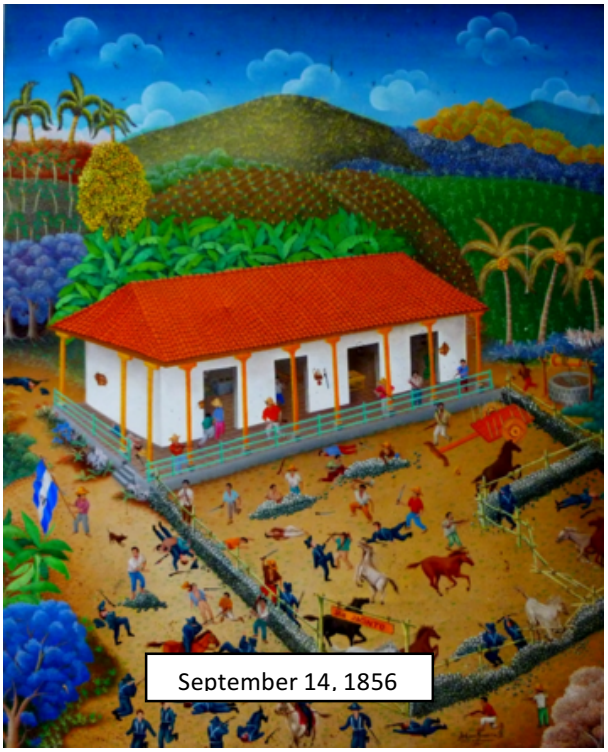
NATIONAL ANTHEM of NICARAGUA, by Salomón Ibarra Mayorga (1918) --
adapted in Nicaraguan Sign Langauge by Daphny Rodriguez Chang and James Shepard-Kegl (2018). Rodriguez is a teacher at the Maureen Courtney Special Education School in Bilwi. Shepard-Kegl is a director of Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects. Our illustrator is Marcia Allen of Bluefields [two men over outline of country, blood-stained flag, waving flag.]

Over the years, the Nicaraguan Deaf Association (ANSNIC) in Managua has produced several translations of the Himno Nacional. In all these translations, ANSNIC tried to substitute a sign gloss for each Spanish word and to maintain the Spanish word order. We understand the desire to respect the original lyrics to the extent possible. Unfortunately, Deaf Nicaraguans cannot understand the sentiments expressed by the National Anthem when the signs are presented in accordance with Spanish grammar and in violation of the rules of grammar of Nicaraguan Sign Language. In our interpretation, we use most, but not all, the signs from the ANSNIC versions. However, we also present an interpretation that is both faithful to the rules of grammar of Nicaraguan Sign Language and, we hope, to the meaning of the original lyrics. Where appropriate, we have paraphrased the Spanish words. We believe that Deaf Nicaraguans deserve to be able to share the National Anthem with their fellow Nicaraguans.

Context: The melody of the Himno Nacional dates back centuries, but the lyrics were written by Salomón Ibarra Mayorga in 1918, and adopted as Nicaragua's national anthem in 1939. Nicaraguans had seen a succession of civil wars between political factions, most notably the Conservatives of Granada and the Liberals of León, along with a national war to oust Walker's invasion. In 1912, the Conservatives (with the intervention of the United States Marines) regained political domination. In 1918 the Conservative government of President Emiliano Chamorro Vargas held a competition to compose the lyrics of a national anthem for Nicaragua. Under the rules of this contest, the new anthem would be a tribute not to the valor of soldiers on the battlefield, but rather to peacemakers and common workers. Mayorga's beautiful and patriotic lyrics won the competition.

Civil wars: Leon and Granada,
liberals and conservatives

1821: independence
1824-1825: civil war
1827-1836: civil war
1838: end of the Central American confederation
1854-55: civil war
1856-1857: national war against Walker
1893: coup d'etat by Zelaya
1912: civil war (with intervention of the United States
1918: National Anthem: a tribute to peace
1926-1927: civil war
1926-1933: Sandino's struggle against the Yankees
1978-1979: popular insurrection against Somoza
1981-1988: Contra War



NATIONAL ANTHEM

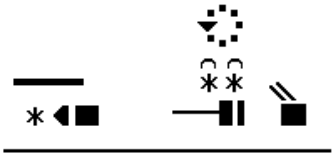
¡Salve a ti, Nicaragua! En tu suelo,
Ya no ruge la voz del cañón
Ni se tiñe con sangre de hermanos
Tu glorioso pendón bicolor,
Ni se tiñe con sangre de hermanos
Tu glorioso pendón bicolor.

Brille hermosa la paz en tu cielo,
Nada empañe tu gloria inmortal
Que el trabajo es tu digno laurel
Y el honor es tu enseña triunfal,
es tu enseña triunfal.

Hail to you, Nicaragua. On you land,
The cannon's voice no longer roars,
Nor does the blood of our brothers
Stain your glorious bicolored flag.
Nor does the blood of our brothers
Stain your glorious bicolored flag.

Peace shines in beauty in your skies,
Nothing dims your immortal glory,
For work is what earns your laurels
And honor is your triumphal ensign,
It is your triumphant ensign.

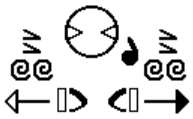
National Anthem



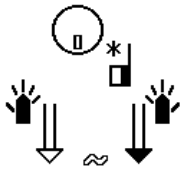
hail to you

Nicaragua

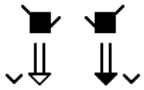
soil
sign by ANSNIC



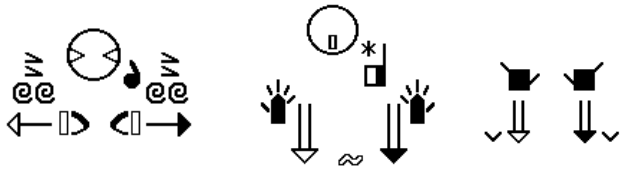
tranquil



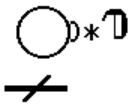
now
made with two hands
for poetic effect



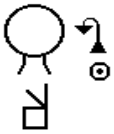
The land is tranquil now



hear



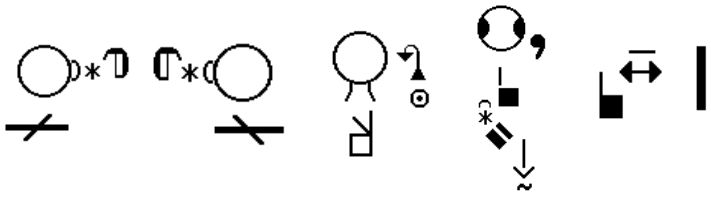
voice
(roar)



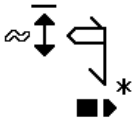
cannon

no

I do not hear the voice of the cannon anywhere.



flag



glorious

This is an ASL sign that is used in a religious context. We suspect that the sign has entered the lexicon of Nicaraguan Sign Language as a consequence of contact with North American evangelists.

two color or **bicolor**

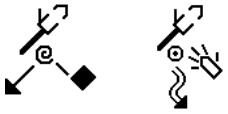
glorious bicolored flag

"Flag" is the grammatical object and, accordingly, appears at the beginning of the sentence. The adjectives "glorious" and "bicolored" properly follow the noun.

brother

blood

blood of brothers

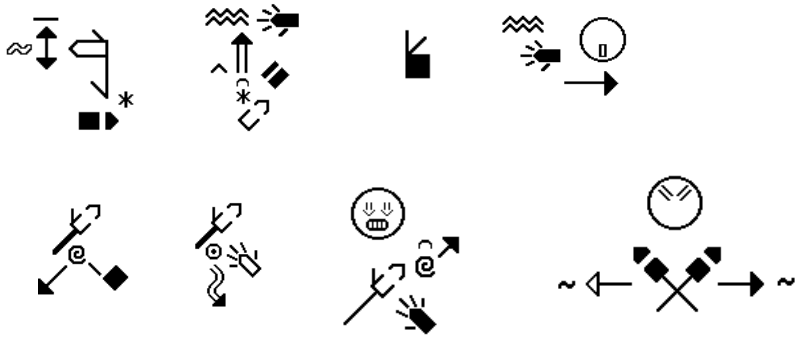


This is the subject. Note that the left hand shape is a classifier for the antecedent noun "flag" in preparation for the classifier clitic of the impending verb.

stain the flag
This is a spatial verb. The ground (red) is the classifier for the flag and the moving figure (blue) is the classifier for the blood.

no more
negation

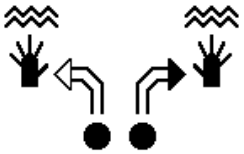
Nor does the blood of our brothers stain our glorious bi-colored flag.



sky
"Sky" is the ground and appears at the beginning of the sentence.

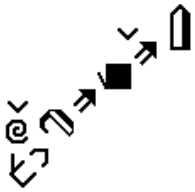
peace
the subject of the sentence

shines
the verb



in beauty
an adverb

soul

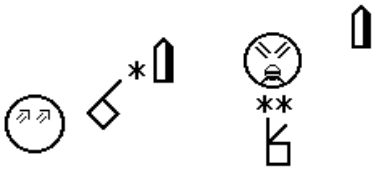


Mayorga expressed his patriotic sentiment
that nothing can ever diminish the immortal
glory of the nation. The translations by
ANSNIC substituted "soul" to convey
the concept of "inmortal glory". We use this
analogy, as well. "Soul" is an initialized sign
that ends in an "A" hand shape. However,
in preparationn for the classifier clític of the verb,
Rodríguez transforms the "A" into un flat or palm hand
that evokes an image of a wall or shield.

Nothing dims your immortal glory.

Rodríguez paraphrases Mayorga's concept:
"An object strikes the soul (wall/shield) and is shattered.
The soul is not affected at all."
Note the grammar: a spatial verb (directional)
constructed with a classifier clitic (red)
and two moving figure classifiers (blue).

nothing

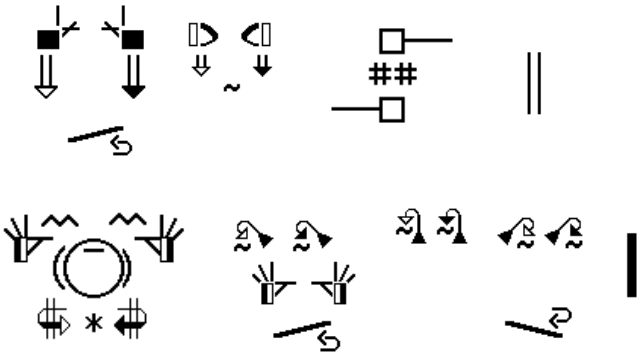


In Mayorga's lyrics, the pronoun "nothing) is the
subject, but in our translation "nothing" is an adverb
of negation, and, therefore, belongs at the
end of the sentence.

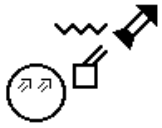
"**For**" and "**earned**" ("**digno**")
The spanish word "que" in this context has no grammatical
equivalent in ISN. We have not encountered an accepted gloss
for "earned."

laurel

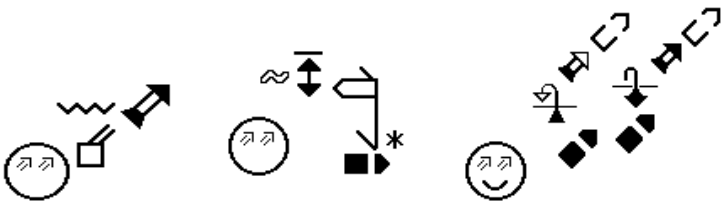
For work is what earns your laurels
In order to convey Mayorga's meaning while conforming to the grammar of ISN, Rodriguez translates these lyrics by signing, literally, "People work: they are given laurels." Notice that she has inflected the verb" give" to indicate distributive aspect.

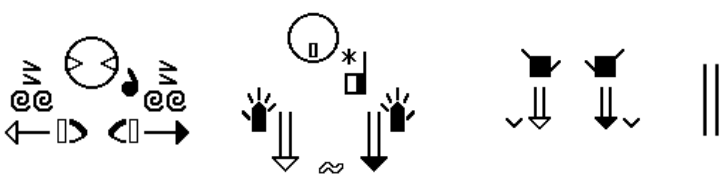


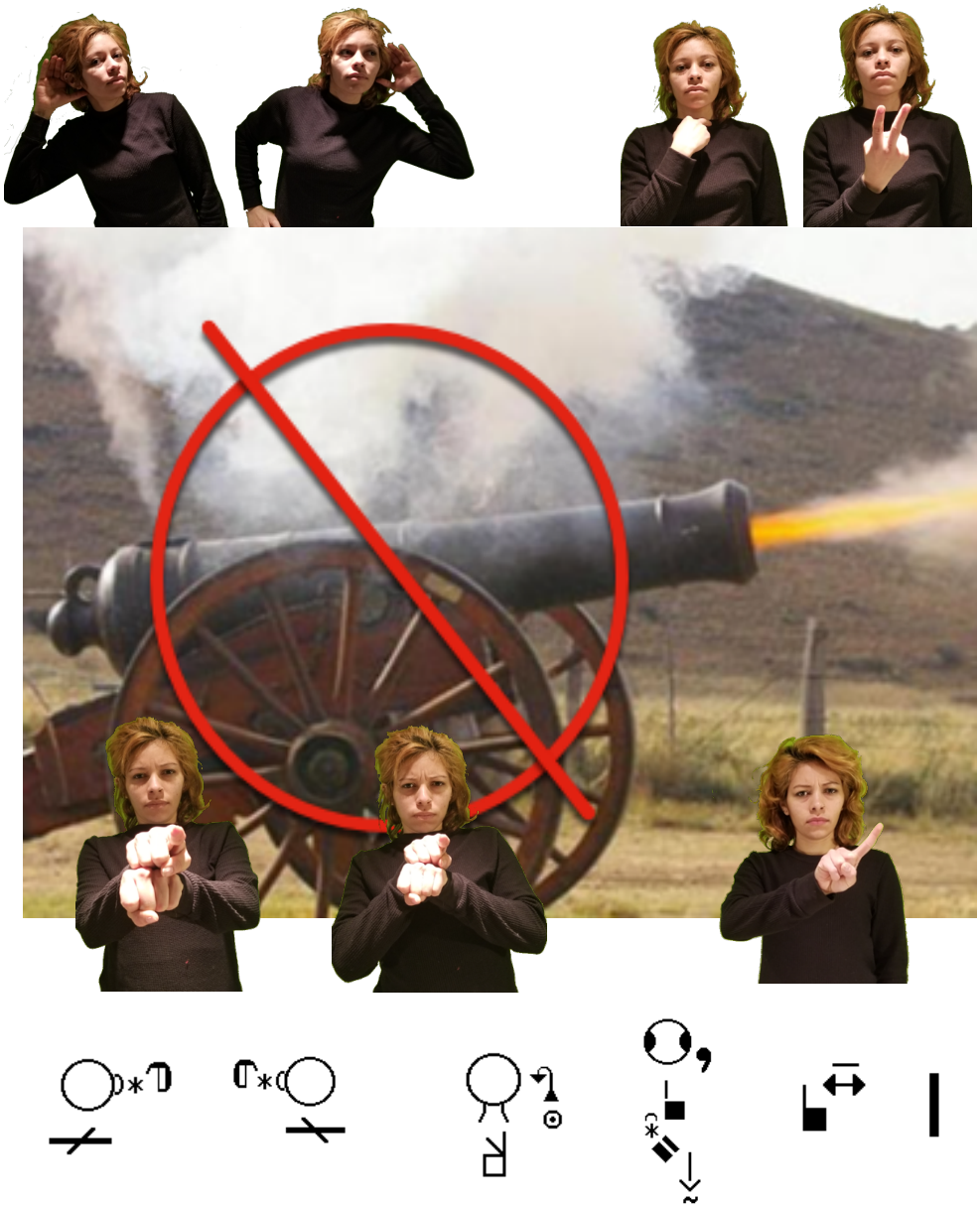
honor

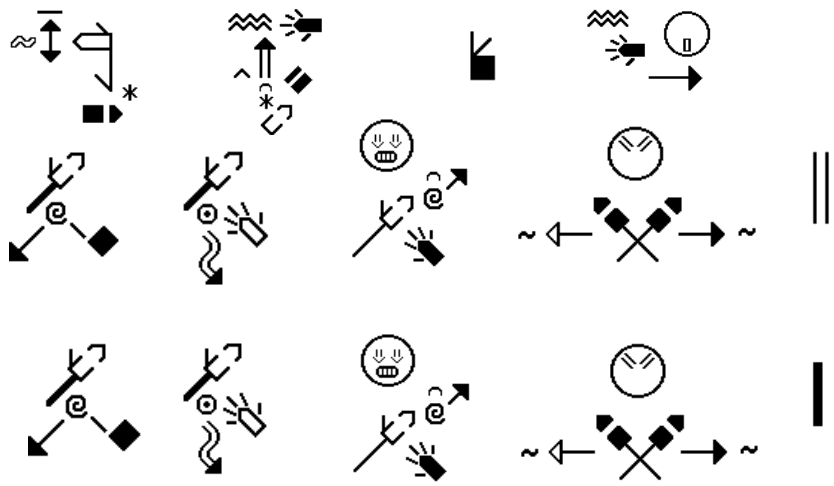


And honor is your triumphal ensign
The conjunctionn "and" is omitted. Rodríguez changes the movement of the sign "honor" to the position of the waving flag. She finishes the anthem with a gesture that says: "We proudly present our banner (flag)."











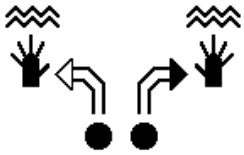


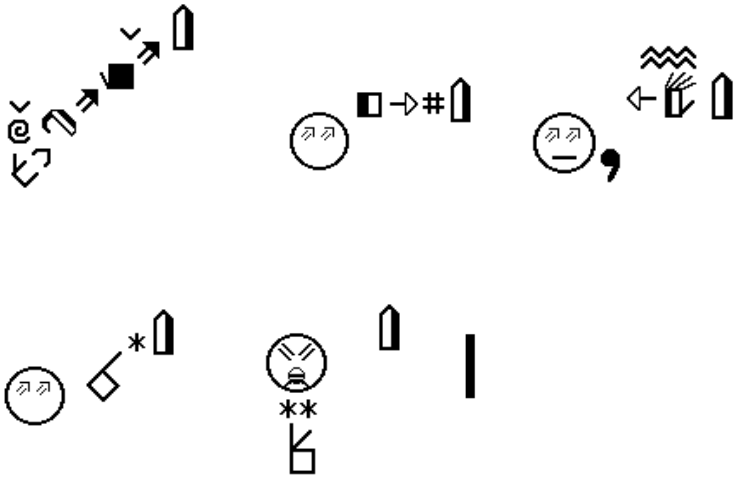


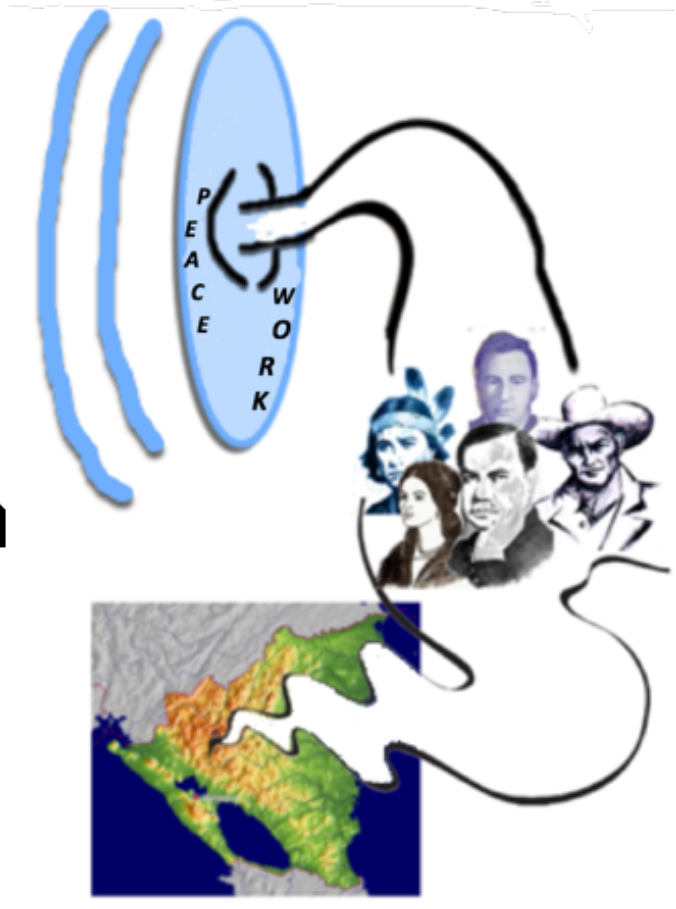

REPUBLICA DE NICARAGUA
AMERICA CENTRAL

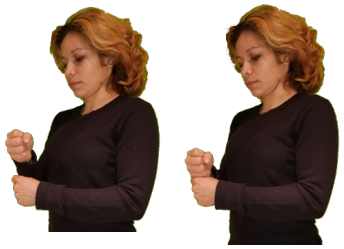


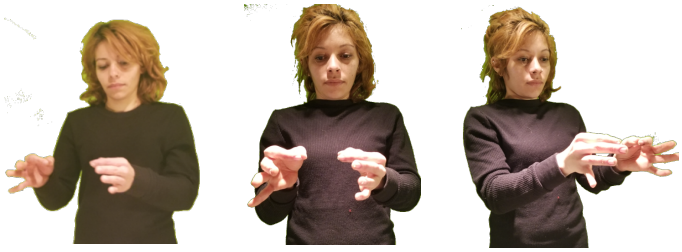


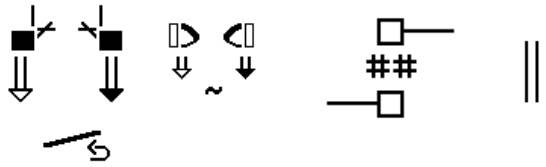


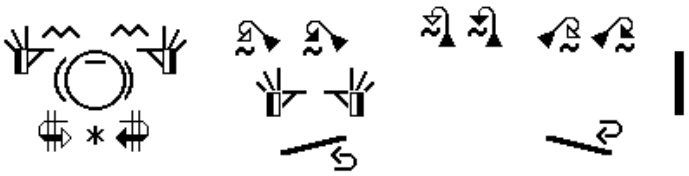



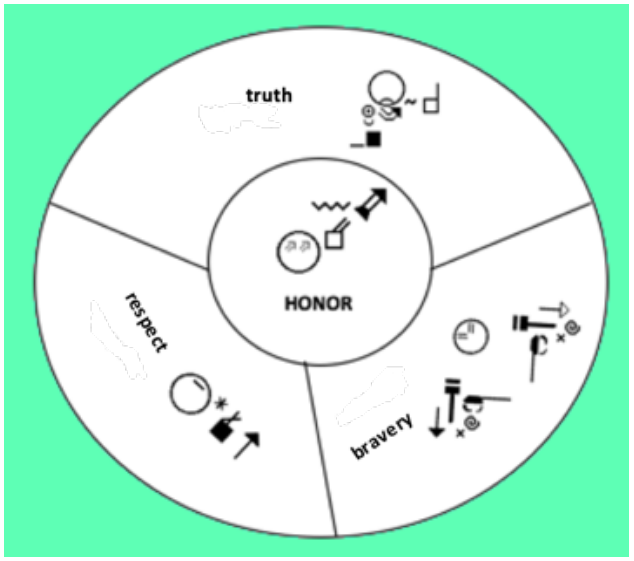

PEACE
WORK










truth
HONOR
respect
bravery