What Are You Suggesting?

Interpreting Innuendo Between ASL and English

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Interpretation of innuendo is a complicated undertaking. This is true for monolingual users of a language, but even more so for professionals who are interpreting live and interactive discourse. To gain a better understanding of effective strategies for interpreting innuendo, one must first understand innuendo and its form and function in both languages involved. To study innuendo, one must investigate numerous components of language that make up, or function as, innuendo. Chief among those are humor and indirectness. To understand a speaker's intent, an addressee must have reached a level of communicative competence to recognize the speaker's contextualization cues. Both the cues and the competence to recognize them are culturally bound. Therefore an interpreter working interlingually and cross-culturally must have the appropriate level of competence in each language. Even so, systemic problems related to the use of innuendo within interpreted encounters may affect the outcome. In order to gain a better understanding of the ways in which interpreters convey innuendo in American Sign Language (ASL)-English interpreted interaction, this study addresses both the conveyance of innuendo by native Deaf signers of ASL and the interpretation of innuendo from English into ASL. For this study, two Deaf actors performed an English script in ASL, and two interpreters interpreted an audio version of the script into ASL. The script is fraught with innuendo. The performances and interpretations were analyzed to determine the strategies used to convey the humor and insinuation by native signers of ASL and ASL-English interpreters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Innuendo

By its most pedestrian definition, *innuendo* is a hint or sly, usually derogatory, remark or an insinuation.[1] Conversationally, it may be represented by zingers, sarcasm, witticisms, double entendre, and similar wordplay like verbal parody, irony, and understatement. For this paper, *innuendo* is defined as utterances that carry an implicit derogatory meaning aimed at a particular target, often guised with humorous intent or faux naiveté. What most of the contemporary research calls *punning* would comply with this definition of innuendo. Punning, however, is an insufficient label because it fails to capture the same conversational impact created by ellipses, ambiguity, and allusions. For interpreters, this broad definition allows for a variety of communicative events that pose similar challenges to the task of conveying a message from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Foremost of those challenges is the issue of form versus meaning. It is a characteristic of languages that one form may express numerous meanings, and one meaning may be expressed through numerous forms (Larson, 1998). For interpreters, figurative use of language presents a potential difficulty because they must determine the speaker's intent for choosing the nonprimary meaning.

Just as many variations of wordplay humor have been gathered under the umbrella heading of innuendo, so too have variations in indirect communication. This runs contrary to other research on indirectness. In a study about indirectness in political discourse, for example, Obeng (1997) defines specific categories of verbal indirectness, such as evasion, innuendo, circumlocution, and metaphor. Each category explains a distinct kind of verbal misdirection or a particular discourse strategy. Innuendo in that study is narrowly defined as an insinuation about an interactant's character. Circumlocution is based on Goffman's work and is defined as "a variety of evasive tactics deployed by an interactant to protect himself or herself against face-fall" (Obeng, 1997, p. 55). Obeng specifically differentiates between circumlocution and innuendo, saying, "Unlike other verbal indirectness strategies such as metaphor, innuendo, proverbs, and aphorisms which exploit the polysemy of words, circumlocution pertains to the rhetorical structure of discourse" (ibid, p. 55).

For this paper, however, both the innuendo and circumlocution categories above will constitute innuendo. Certainly Obeng's definition of innuendo falls directly into the scope of the term's definition for this paper. Circumlocution will be included because humor and indirectness are two typical evasive tactics used by interactants to save face. Goffman's definition deftly describes one of the primary functions of innuendo in conversation. This will be discussed in greater depth later in this paper. Still, Obeng's distinction of circumlocution does underscore the breadth of innuendo, which is not only reflected in lexical or phrasal items, but may also be characteristic of a discourse-level strategy.

Linguistics, it seems, finds this umbrella category of innuendo too all-encompassing for sufficient analysis. To investigate the relevant aspects of innuendo, one must consider applicable research on puns, jokes/humor, indirectness, figurative language, irony, and parody. Information for this literature review was gathered from fields of linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, sociology, ethnography of communication, semantics, psychology, and anthropology. This paper cannot capture all the information available, but it will highlight particular findings from researchers that interpreters use to develop strategies to address innuendo.

Humor and Innuendo

Humor research has approached the topic from two perspectives: appreciation and production. The emphasis in linguistics fields has been primarily on the former, leaving most of the latter to psychology. Production of linguistics humor has received almost no attention from researchers (Pepicello & Weisberg, 1983). Some reasons for this will be outlined in the Issues with Research to Date portion below. Research conducted on humor appreciation has historically focused on jokes and puns. These forms of humor lend themselves naturally to analysis because the rituals involved offset them from other parts of a conversation. Phrases like, "Did you hear the one about . . . ?" or "Two guys walk into a bar . . ." mark the utterance to follow as a joke. Similar kinds of phrases have been found for puns and riddles. Analysis, then, is bound by the introduction and the punch line. This allows researchers to follow tried-and-true methodologies used to study other clearly bounded communication like greetings and leave-taking. Puns are similarly offset from the rest of the sentence and easily studied as a comparison between the true word and the pun.

Sociolinguistics changed the complexion of how communication is studied by investigating conversation in context. Researchers recognized that people do not speak in complete sentences. Attention was turned from studying sentences to studying utterances—the less-bound fragments of sentences that people use to communicate. So too has the focus broadened in humor research as investigators seek to learn more about nonbounded humor used in conversational joking. Herein lies the opportunity to discover more about innuendo, which, as mentioned above, is intertwined with verbal irony, teasing, conversational punning, and the like. Moreover, observing in context how innuendo is used can provide some insight into the speaker's goal when he or she chooses that discourse strategy.

Innuendo is a deliberate speech act that capitalizes on the context of the moment. Rosen-Knill and Henry (1997) outline four essential acts for verbal parody that can be minimally adapted to provide an outline of innuendo (Table 1). Understanding the innuendo requires the addressee to recognize the speaker's intent, appreciate the performance of the utterance, understand the derogatory meaning, and appreciate the humorous tone. Without each step, the speech event falls short.

It is not the aim of this study to delve into Freudian explanations of humor motivation. Still, issues of conversational joking inherently address interactant behaviors as demonstrated by turn-taking, face-saving and face-threatening acts, and general conversational control issues. These harken back to theories of humor as a form of aggression. Given the derogatory aspect of innuendo reflected in the critical act above, one should particularly expect such connections. At the same time, humor is often credited for creating a bond between the interactants. The age-old advice to public speakers is open with a good joke. Saville-Troike (1998) points out, "Joking is also a common way of mitigating criticism that might not be acceptable if given directly" (p. 34). Throughout this paper, the paradox of humorous innuendo as simultaneously face-threatening and face-saving will be discussed, as will the similar contradiction that it is disruptive and cohesive in intent.

Indirectness and Innuendo

Every definition of innuendo includes a reference to its indirect nature. Questions immediately arise as to how the subsequent indirect meaning is recognized by the addressee and what purpose it serves for the speaker.

TABLE 1. *Outline of Innuendo*

Verbal Parody	Innuendo
1. The intentional representation of the object of parody toward a target	1. The deliberate insinuation
2. The flaunting of the verbal representation	2. The flaunting of the implication
3. The critical act	3. The critical act
4. The comic act	4. The comic act

First, how is indirectness understood by the addressee when the speaker uses a figurative meaning? According to Saville-Troike (1998), "situated meaning must be accounted for as an emergent and dynamic process" (p. 22). To describe this process, Gumperz (1977) uses the term *conversational inference*. Conversational inference is highly context-bound. Participants in a conversation use it to interpret one another's intentions, interpret meaning, and build the conversation. Using verbal and nonverbal responses, each participant acknowledges his or her understanding of what is being said. Both Saville-Troike and Gumperz discuss the importance of perceiving the salient features of the linguistic message and integrating that with extralinguistic cultural knowledge. In this way, the meaning is negotiated by the interactants.

Searle (1975) discusses the role of illocutionary force in indirect speech acts. Suffice it to say, a speaker can produce an utterance that has a meaning different from what he or she actually says. "There are also cases in which a speaker may utter a sentence and mean what he says and also mean another illocution with a different propositional content" (ibid, p. 59). As an example, he explains that *Can you reach the salt?* is not merely a question but a request to pass the salt. While under the right circumstances that may be an actual question of one's physical ability, most often it is a recognized idiomatic request. In a case of dialogue, Searle analyzes the following sentences:

Student X: Let's go to the movies tonight.
Student Y: I have to study for an exam.

Most people would recognize Y's response as declining X's proposal, but the literal meaning is simply a statement of fact about Y—seemingly unrelated to the first utterance. To explain how X determines that Y is

rejecting the offer, Searle details a 10-step process that integrates facts from the conversation, principles of conversational cooperation, speech act theory, factual background information, and inferences that X would utilize. Of course interactants do not consciously go through these steps. They occur naturally during the dialogue as a part of Gumperz's conversational inference and Saville-Troike's dynamic process. Searle's steps do, however, reveal the opportunities for innuendo in indirect communication. One must simply suspend the principles of conversational cooperation at that point in the process. While this explanation of how the meaning of innuendo is understood by the addressee only scratches the surface, it does provide enough foundation to move forward.

The Role of Innuendo in Conversation

With an understanding of what elements of communication constitute innuendo and how they are recognized, the appropriate next step is to discover what purpose innuendo serves in a conversation. Within any given situation, under what circumstances will a speaker choose innuendo as a discourse strategy—and to achieve what end? Obviously, the generalized functions of humor and indirect communication mentioned above can be applied to innuendo. A more thorough insight can be gained, however, from research conducted on four of those functions: inclusion, exclusion, subversion, and circumlocution. In each case, innuendo serves as a strategic tool for communication.

Inclusion

The inclusive function of innuendo as humor is demonstrated in two circumstances: (1) between strangers and (2) within a community. When people meet for the first time, often they feel a need to "break the ice" (i.e., move past the initial uncomfortable feeling to build rapport). In a review of the sociology literature on the study of humor, Fine (1983) discusses research on how men use sexual humor in bars to gauge a woman's reaction for additional contact. If the woman rejects the joke, the man can save face by asserting that his true invitation was not rejected, only the joke. If the woman laughs, the man assumes she is open to more intimate contact. The humor, then, is not merely a vehicle to initiate conversation, but a device to insinuate the speaker's true intention. Separate from questions about the methodology of humor research,

it is easy to recognize that innuendo can be used early in relationships to imply expectations.

Humor is also used to build a community. Fine highlights research about the Chippewa Indians that found "one of their categories of humor is humor that promotes group solidarity. . . . This humor is directed internally through testing, mutual ribbing, good fellowship, and even humorous self-deprecation" (173). The result is a trusting, communal relationship. This philosophy often motivates the rituals of initiations in a variety of social organizations. Community-building can also be demonstrated by gallows humor. Fine explains this phenomenon as humor that grows out of situations wherein an oppressed group pokes fun at its oppressors. The humor is often bitter and is used to galvanize the oppressed by transforming their plight into a source for unity. This gallows humor can function as subversion.

Exclusion

It seems logical that if humor can function as a device for inclusion that it can serve similarly as a device for exclusion. They differ, of course, only in one's perspective of the situation. For example, a Deaf joke may unify the community with a punch line that emphasizes the us-against-them mentality of gallows humor, in which members of the Deaf community triumph over the majority non-Deaf society. It is inclusive for Deaf people and exclusive from the non-Deaf perspective. Similarly a Deaf joke may target a Deaf individual who has, in the opinion of the group, strayed from accepted group norms. The humor again reinforces the communal identity and implicitly threatens the target with exclusion from the group for the violation. In this way, it controls the target's behavior. Sociologists label inclusion and exclusion as social conflict function and social control function, respectively (Fine 1983).

Subversion

Carried to an extreme, both social conflict and social control humor begin to function as subversion. The speaker can "foster demoralization and social disintegration of the group [control], or induce a hostile attitude toward an out-group [conflict]" (ibid, p. 174). At this level of aggression, the feigned guise of humor serves as an attempt to deflect retaliation from the target. Fine mentions numerous studies into black/white

humor, Czech/Nazi humor, and Arab/Israeli humor as examples. Left unchecked, the attitudes that the humor inspires can proliferate. The former Soviet Union recognized the power of subversive humor and often jailed those who challenged the authority of the state with jokes. The defense for the accused, then, was essentially, "What? You can't take a joke?!"

Circumlocution

Whereas the first three roles of innuendo relate to its humorous aspects, the final role, circumlocution, relates to the indirect nature of innuendo. Obeng (1997) analyzed how politicians speak and determined that indirectness is essential for communicating difficult messages—those that threaten face. For those in a political arena, saving face is tantamount to saving one's career. Given the heterogeneity of addressees in an audience for any given utterance, politicians often use innuendo to avoid potentially damaging communication.

Finally, the last motivation for using innuendo to be addressed here is that often times innuendo is the most accurate expression. "The indirectness itself will contribute to the contents of the concept and make it altogether different from a directly expressed concept" (Geukens, 1978, p. 266). For a detailed account comparing addressees' reaction to indirectness, see Colston and O'Brien (2000) and Leggitt and Gibbs (2000) for their work on verbal irony.

Linguistics of Humor

As mentioned above, appreciation of linguistic humor has been researched for many years. This section will feature those aspects of the research applicable to interaction. After an overview of the mechanics of humor, this section will address how the use of conversational joking impacts communication from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Notice in Table 2 how different fields describe humor in their research. This list is by no means meant to suggest homogeneity within the fields; instead it is a reference tool, a summary of general information. Reading down the center column, it becomes clear that each of the fields attributes a kind of duplicity (frame shifting and script overlap) or disingenuousness (incongruity and discontinuity) to humor. Goffman (1974, p. 11) defines frames as "definitions of a situation [that] are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least

TABLE 2. *Descriptions of Humor by Discipline*

Discipline	Description	Author
Sociology	Frame shifting	Goffman
	Discontinuity or bisociation	Fine
Contextual Semantics	Script overlap & Incongruity	Raskin
Semantics	Incongruity-Resolution	Pepicello & Weisberg
Cognitive Psychology	Incongruity Resolution	Suls

social ones—and our subjective involvement in them." An activity like a business meeting may be framed as a professional event, but a humorous remark from a participant reframes the activity to one of play. Other participants must recognize the change in frames to understand the humor.

This reframing is what other researchers call incongruity or discontinuity. Essentially, play is not compatible with a professional business meeting. Another example, a comment to a coworker that he is looking couth, kempt, and sheveled is humorous only after the addressee realizes that the speaker has exploited bound morphemes, that is, the compliments are not actually English words (Pepicello & Weisberg, 1983). That is an incongruity. Suls (1983) even compares humor appreciation to problem-solving skills. He posits that humor requires (1) a "play" cue, (2) extreme divergence, and (3) an appropriate time scale to comprehend the humor. Suls' Incongruity Resolution Model (Figure 1) outlines the steps to appreciate humor.

The logical next question is how does the addressee recognize a "play" cue? According to Gumperz (1977, p. 199), "It is the process by which we evaluate message meaning and sequencing patterns in relation to aspects of the surface structure of the message, called 'contextualization cues.'" The addressee uses the cues to determine the signaling of interpretative frames. These may include paralinguistic and intonation contours, but Gumperz emphasizes that contexualization cues are highly culturally specific. This concurs with other research that interpreting the meaning of an utterance requires communicative competence (Hymes, 1974) and the ability to understand the speaker's meaning (Grice, 1975). Communicative competence is "a system of its [language] use, regarding persons, places, purposes, and other modes of communication, etc.—all
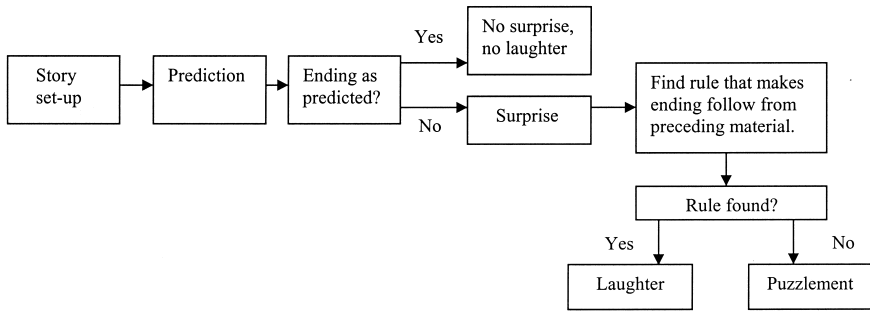
FIGURE 1. *Suls' Incongruity Resolution Model*

the components of a communicative event, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them" (ibid, p. 75). Communicative competence is acquired in tandem with other aspects of language acquisition. Table 3 summarizes this information. Taken in total, one can see that "meaning in conversations is usually jointly produced" (Gumperz, 1977, p. 195). No participant wholly controls the meaning of an utterance himself.

Grice (1975) developed the Cooperative Principle for conversations and its four maxims:

- **Quantity.** Give exactly as much informative as required.
- **Quality.** Say only what you believe to be true.
- **Relation.** Be relevant.
- **Manner.** Be succinct. (ibid, p. 45)

These outline the goals for the speaker and conversely the expectations for the addressee. The addressee will follow these maxims to determine the speaker's meaning. This becomes critical for understanding humor, and particularly innuendo, in that the incongruity, discontinuity, etc., seemingly violates Gricean maxims. Raskin (1985), however, found a way to reconcile the Gricean maxims with humor by adapting them as non-bona fide communication: Raskin's application of maxims for non-bona fide communication (joking):

- **Quantity.** Give exactly as much informative as is necessary for the joke.
- **Quality.** Say only what is compatible with the world of the joke.
- **Relation.** Say only what is relevant to the joke.
- **Manner.** Tell the joke efficiently. (ibid, p. 103)

TABLE 3. *Focus for Understanding Innuendo*

Discipline	Focus	Author
Anthropology	Contextualization Cues	Gumperz
Ethnography of Communication	Communicative Competence	Hymes
Pragmatics	Speaker's Meaning	Grice

Grice asserts that in the spirit of conversational cooperation, the addressee will make every effort to treat sentences that violate the maxims as nondeviant to the greatest extent possible. Once the utterance can no longer be considered bona fide communication, however, he will look for humorous context (Raskin, 1985). This sequenced search for meaning complements the frame shifting theories discussed above. The sequence triggers the innuendo as the addressee recognizes the incongruity of the utterance, cannot reconcile it within Gricean maxims, discovers a match in Raskin's adapted maxims, and finally comprehends how the speaker shifted frames.

An example of this process is the remark, "at band camp," uttered as an aside by a student in a graduate-level interpreting class. The remark is succinct, but violates each of the other three Gricean maxims: In a feedback discussion of ASL to English interpreting, it is certainly not relevant, and it does not provide enough information for an addressee to determine the veracity of the statement. Yet, because the utterance satisfied the maxims for non-bona fide communication, the addressee immediately recognized it as an allusion. The utterance completed a catchphrase from the movie *American Pie*. In context of the class, the speaker noticed a mannerism in the target, as he frequently used the phrase, "This one time . . .," in his interpretation. By simply completing the catchphrase, the speaker used the real-life classroom context to create and resolve an incongruity and carried with it the impact of the movie character who originally spoke the line. Out of context, most people would not recognize, much less appreciate the humor, but the speaker and addressee managed to negotiate meaning from the utterance.

With an overview of how humor and innuendo are recognized, it is important to investigate the impact they have on a conversation. Norrick (1994) points out the contradictions mentioned above, that conversational joking is associated with both aggression and rapport. It is disruptive and yet can intensify cohesion. "If the attempt at humor is understood

and accepted, participants in the conversation may enjoy enhanced rapport; but if hearers do not get the joke or feel joking is inappropriate in the current context, the result can be misunderstanding, disruption of involvement, and loss of rapport" (ibid, p. 411). Norrick explains that conversational joking is disruptive because it forces hearers to "disregard contextually obvious meanings and look for obscure interpretations outside the current topic and activity" (p. 411). He also points out that humor is volatile in that certain kinds of humor will be accepted in one setting but not another.

Fine (1983) made the same assessment regarding the participants involved. "Joking is a strategic activity. By that I mean that not everyone can joke about all topics in all situations" (p. 165). A contemporary example comes from an episode of *Seinfeld*. Jerry complains about another comedian who starts using Jewish material in his routine just after converting to Judaism. "I think he just converted for the jokes!" Seinfeld cries. The implication relates to the discussion above about inclusion and exclusion. Seinfeld contends that the comic has not been Jewish long enough to be considered a part of the community. He is still an outsider; therefore, the humor is offensive. Fine cites sociological studies that revealed humor is judged funnier when it disparages groups other than that of the addressee or holds the addressee's group in esteem. Therefore, a Jewish joke told at a Jewish event will in all likelihood be regarded as a disruption if told by a non-Jew, but as an opportunity to increase rapport if told by a member of the community.

Norrick (1994) uncovers another paradox of conversational joking. Using punning as an example, he explains that humor is aggressive not only to the subject (target), but to the addressee as well. Because puns are usually not prefaced the way other jokes are, the humor is a pop quiz of sorts. By putting the addressee on the spot, the pun is aggressive. At the same time, punning "provides a way of talking off record, so that we can manipulate the flow of topics, test for shared background knowledge and attitudes, and realign participants in non-confrontational ways" (p. 415).

Much of the research and many of the examples in the paper deal generically with humor. The issues presented all apply to innuendo, but there are risks unique to this genre as well. The most obvious is the ability to disclaim a joke. A traditional joke is marked, and if the addressee rejects it, the speaker can shrug it off to some degree, saying, "It's not my joke. It's not like I wrote it or anything." Innuendo is contextual and

self-generated. In an article on conversational joking and identity display, Boxer and Cortes-Conde (1997) discuss the high risk involved in such an encounter. Their study on teasing showed that the encounters occurred between intimates and were meant to enhance the existing bond. Given the delicate nature of the speech act, however, the speaker could go too far.

Remember that meaning is negotiated between speaker and addressee. That allows for misinterpretations or faux misinterpretations that will affect the result. Zajdman (1995) listed possible outcomes of face-threatening acts (Table 4). It clearly shows that despite the speaker's intent, the possibility exists that the utterance will not be received accordingly. Leggitt and Gibbs (2000) recognized the negotiation involved in their study of verbal irony. "Verbal irony critically depends on the desire to communicate intentions that do not directly match the words, and the correct interpretation of ironic language depends on recognizing that disparate intention" (p. 5). Tannen (1986) uses a baseball analogy to capture the spirit of exchanges like innuendo. "The speaker feels clever for having pitched a curve ball, the hearer for having caught it. But if the curve is not caught—if it hits someone in the head or flies out of the ball park—no one is happy" (p. 62).

One way for the speaker to avoid these pitfalls is to mark the innuendo, but that has consequences of its own. Some studies have investigated how the speaker might set off the utterance. Boxer and Cortes-Conde (1997) refer to studies wherein the speakers use disclaimers or exaggerated intonation, laughs, or winks to mark the utterance. Barbe (1993) analyzed explicit irony in written English. She selected Letters to the Editor that contained phrases like "it is ironic that . . . ," "ironically . . . ," and "in a rather ironic twist of fate . . ." from two newspapers. What is striking is Barbe's observation in the footnote about the selection of these sources: "It is interesting, and perhaps worth investigating, that professional writers of satires seem to avoid the explicit use of irony" (p. 582). Of course they do. Irony, innuendo, etc., are indirect by nature. Explicating irony by calling it such or following innuendo with the tag "if you know what I mean," undermines the intent of the form. It is a linguistic rim shot. The speaker avoids being taken literally, but as a conversation style, the technique leaves him looking like the stereotype of a bad stand-up act, "Hey, these are the jokes, folks." One need only look to the Monty Python sketch in which the character follows up each utterance with a

TABLE 4. *Possible Outcomes of Face-Threatening Acts*

Speaker's Intention	Hearer's Interpretation	Speaker's Expectation	Hearer's Expectation
Meaning offense	Taking offense	Insult	Insult
Meaning offense	Not taking offense	Insult	Amusement
Not meaning offense	Taking offense	Amusement	Insult
Not meaning offense	Not taking offense	Amusement	Amusement

vocalized stream of markers—"wink, wink, nudge, nudge, say no more, very good then"—to see the backlash of revealing the implication.

Issues with Research to Date

As mentioned earlier, linguistic research into humor has focused on appreciation rather than production. One of the great barriers, especially for the study of conversational joking, is naturalness. Experimenters in all fields try to strike the perfect balance between naturalness and control. Spontaneity is a key feature of conversational joking. The example above, "at band camp," was hysterical in context and not the least bit amusing outside of it. One might appreciate the depth of wit required to create the humor, but it does not have the impact without the spontaneity. Some studies have focused on control by using written English (Barbe, 1993; Leggitt & Gibbs, 2000); others chose to record actual interactions to analyze (Boxer & Cortes-Conde, 1997; Hay, 2000). Logistics must be considered either way. For example, would the subjects in the Leggitt and Gibbs study react differently to the verbal irony if they saw it in context and heard the intonation rather than reading it from a page. Hay mentioned in her own background material that men and women use humor differently. Men tend to perform while women tend to use it cohesively. The subjects did not know Hay was analyzing humor, but they did know they were being recorded. Does that make the speech event a performance and potentially inhibit the speakers? Hay, like all researchers of natural human interaction, is constrained by Labov's Observer's Paradox (1972). By simply being involved, personally or via electronics, the researcher changes the dynamic.

Still, these studies are a great deal more sensitive to factors that contribute to humor than some prior research. For example, Hay points out that much of the research to date has been conducted by men, naturally

from a male-centric perspective. That has led to misconceptions that women do not have a sense of humor or can't tell jokes, and even speculation that women are not aggressive enough to tell jokes. In one example mentioned in Fine (1983), a study was conducted on men in bars to see how they use and respond to humor. It revealed that men tend to laugh more at risqué jokes when they are told by beautiful women than when they are told by unattractive women. The obvious problems with this study are: 1) Who decided the jokes were funny to begin with? and 2) Who decided how attractive the women were? Beyond the mental image of a formal Request for Participants advertising for ugly women to tell dirty jokes, readers of these investigations must be particularly attentive to the researchers' methodologies.

Indirectness in American Sign Language (ASL)

While the breadth and depth of ASL research is ever increasing, the fact remains that the field itself is not yet even four decades old. Innuendo, as defined for this paper, is only now beginning to be investigated in English discourse after centuries of linguistic research; it should not come as a surprise then that research into even the broadest related issues of ASL is sparse. Since the earliest work of Stokoe (1960), which inspired decades of linguistic research into ASL as a natural human language, only one published study has analyzed the structural and grammatical possibilities of wit and punning (Klima & Bellugi, 1979). Considering that humor has only been a viable topic for investigation in linguistics roughly as long as ASL has been recognized, limited research demonstrating that witticisms and "plays on signs" do indeed exist in the language may not be surprising.

Unfortunately, the minority status of ASL users coupled with the nonaural and unwritten modalities of the language has allowed many assumptions about ASL and the American Deaf community to fill the void of research yet to be conducted. Consider the long-held notion that Deaf people are blunt (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996, p. 73). Such an assumption would lead one to believe that it is impossible to use innuendo when indirect communication is not commonplace. Roush (1999) challenged the stereotype of the blunt Deaf person when he brought indirectness strategies in ASL to light. Although indirectness in general goes beyond the scope of this paper, several of Roush's points are key to an understanding of the possibility of innuendo in ASL.

Roush acknowledges the stereotype of directness in Deaf people and emphasizes that it is as strong inside the Deaf community as it is with those outside the community who interact with its members. Typically, issues related to changes in the addressee's physical appearance, speaker disclosures, and advice are cited as examples of that directness. The rationale is that directness facilitates communication and promotes solidarity through sincerity. Roush posits, however, that these goals are tempered by strategies for independence and saving face.

While he notes that more research must be done on indirectness in ASL, Roush does mention several examples that are commonplace. Criticism may be offered in an indirect manner with phrases that translate roughly to "this is not the Deaf way" to emphasize a sense of community; bilingual Deaf people may also appropriate more English-like politeness strategies to convey indirectness; and ASL also makes use of euphemisms such as:

> GONE for deceased
> BROTHER/SISTER for gay or lesbian, respectively
> MONTHLY for menstrual period
> (Roush, 1999, p. 36)

In addition to lexical substitution for taboo topics, signs may be altered to reduce their visibility for the sake of subtlety. For example, *menstrual period* may be conveyed with a particular nonhanded sign made at the location where the standard ASL sign is produced.

Roush's research is the foundation for analysis of the role of innuendo in ASL. First, he has demonstrated that ASL has strategies and use for indirect communication. Second, the examples of euphemisms for taboo topics parallels topics that are often discussed figuratively in English as well. This bodes well for the probability of innuendo, which also tends to capitalize on taboo topics. Moreover, the shared background of taboo topics (death, sexuality, sexual orientation, bodily functions) may also bode well for interpreting innuendo on those topics cross-culturally. Future research should investigate the ethnographic role of innuendo in ASL and Deaf culture. If ASL does indeed have innuendo, what function does it serve? Does innuendo in ASL parallel innuendo in English as euphemisms seemingly do? Answers to these questions lead in turn to development of strategies for interpreting innuendo between the two languages.