

The Right Man in the Right Place at the Right Time

Armstrong, D. F., Karchmer, M. A., & Van Cleve, J. V. (Eds.). (2002).

The Study of Signed Languages: Essays in Honor of William C. Stokoe. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press. 277 pages. Hardcover. \$59.95.

This imposing set of papers is derived from presentations at a conference held at Gallaudet University to celebrate William C. Stokoe's eightieth birthday. Sadly, the conference occurred only shortly before his death. The array of papers here remind us of the depth and breadth of Stokoe's scholarship and the truly innovative nature of his thinking. In his Introduction to the volume, I. King Jordan alludes to Stokoe as "the right man in the right place at the right time." Those of us working in education of the deaf are familiar with the huge impact he and his colleagues and the generations of sign linguists who have followed them (many of whom are gathered together in this volume) have had on our understanding of the "linguistic nature" of natural sign languages and hence their suitability for all purposes of life—especially pronounced in the acceptance of natural sign languages into education and a broader acceptance in Deaf and hearing communities after a hiatus of over 100 years. The sections of the volume remind us that Stokoe's influence, although central for Deaf people and for those of us working in deafness-related areas, was much wider and influenced several areas of linguistic theory and practice.

Douglas Baynton, Adam Kendon, and Scott Liddell put Stokoe's work in a historical perspective and outline its influence on linguistic origins theory and "conflicting agendas" in sign and spoken language linguistics. Especially interesting is Baynton's overview of changes in general intellectual explanations of the world (such as evolutionary theory) and their impact on attitudes toward signed and spoken languages in the nineteenth century—attitudes that may well (inter alia) have influenced the dominance of oral approaches stemming from the

time of the Milan Congress. Frank Wilson, Roger Fouts, Gabriel Waters, and Sherman Wilcox contribute chapters on Stokoe's influence on "language origins" theory. Lucas, Bayley, Rose, and Wulf examine the influence of his work on Deaf communities, and Glenn Anderson addresses its influence on Black Deaf communities in particular. Britta Hansen reviews the impact of his work on Deaf education from a European perspective. John Bonvillian reminds us that communities other than the Deaf have benefited from the recognition of sign language in his examination of its use with people with autism and other disorders; from Italy, Capirci and her colleagues describe the role of gesture in children's transition to two-word speech.

Of particular interest and possible controversy is the concluding chapter by Carol Padden and Jennifer Rayman, who speculate on what the future might hold for ASL survival in the context of decreasing numbers of Deaf people because of technology, genetic research, and other influences, such as the decline of the residential schools and the loss of "Deaf Space" in clubs and other aspects of Deaf social culture and community. Although placed in the American scene, there is much to speculate here for Deaf people and their hearing colleagues and friends in most nations of the world.

In sum, this book is a most interesting collection and one that is important reading for all people interested in linguistics generally, for Deaf people, for their friends and colleagues, and for anyone interested in a unique aspect of the human condition.

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