ORDERING BURGERS, REORDERING RELATIONS: GESTURAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN HEARING AND d/DEAF NEPALIS

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Abstract

This article analyzes gestural interactions between hearing and d/Deaf Nepalis to argue that local understandings of the consequences of these engagements make visible ways of ideologizing gesture that may be obscured by the gestural typologies widely used by scholars. In Nepal, d/Deafness is associated with ritual pollution that can be shared across persons. Consequently, the use of gesture in a communicative interaction can both presuppose the presence of a polluted d/Deaf body and creatively index the transmission of that pollution to a hearing interlocutor. By the same token, gesturally engaging with Deaf persons can index "modern" rejection of belief in ritual pollution on the part of the hearing participant. While many scholarly typologies of gesture focus on form and decontextualized reference, the pragmatic effects of gesture derived from and contributing to differently positioned personhoods are more significant in local ideologies in Nepal.

Keywords: d/Deaf; Gesture; Personhood; Nepal.

1. Introduction

Several years ago Nanglo's Bakery Café, a popular and relatively expensive restaurant chain in Nepal, aired a television advertisement promoting its venues. The commercial featured a d/Deaf[1] waiter instructing viewers in a series of gestures, bivalent with Nepali Sign Language (NSL), that can be used to order burgers, *momos* (dumplings), pizza, and coffee. The piece concluded with the written words (in English), "Action Speaks" followed by the Bakery Café logo. This commercial advertised not only menu items, but also the fact that several of the Bakery Café outlets feature an all-Deaf wait-staff. Further, the commercial indicated that, rather than expect the Deaf wait-staff to speak or read lips, patrons should consider using a gestural modality in placing their orders. In this article I examine gesturally mediated interactions between hearing and d/Deaf Nepalis, both within and outside of Bakery Cafés, and argue that they make visible ways of ideologizing gesture that may be obscured by the typologies widely used by

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[1] In this article I follow the common Deaf Studies convention of writing the English word "deaf" in lowercase to indicate the inability to hear, "Deaf", written with a capital D, to indicate identification as a member of a signing community, and using the mixed case, d/Deaf, to refer to groups or situations in which both medical and cultural framings of d/Deafness are relevant. As I have discussed in other work (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2011a), my use of this convention should not be taken to imply that I view this distinction as universally relevant, or relevant in the same ways across social contexts.

scholars.

d/Deafness can be greatly stigmatized in Nepal, as the condition is frequently viewed an indication of bad karma (the results of misdeeds in this or a previous life) (Joshi 1991; Taylor 1997; Acharya 1997; Prasad 2003; Hoffmann 2008). The condition is therefore seen as carrying ritual pollution that can be transmitted to others. The kinds of interactions that can transmit ritual pollution are most frequently represented in the literature as concerning rules about commensality, because water and cooked food are important media for the transmission of ritual pollution. However, the pollution associated with d/Deafness can also be shared through other kinds of physical, spiritual, and social intercourse; the use of gesture as the primary modality in a communicative interaction can both presuppose the presence of a polluted d/Deaf body and creatively index the transmission of that pollution to the person of the hearing interlocutor.

This being the case, hiring Deaf waiters to serve food in a restaurant chain and airing a commercial advertising their presence would seem inadvisable. However, while karma and the attendant belief in ritual pollution described above are significant idioms for structuring social relations, during the last 60 years *bikash* (development), class, and modernity have come to coexist and/or compete with karma as important social frameworks. Nevertheless, the notion of transmissible substance can underlie the significance of d/Deaf-hearing gestural interactions even in contexts in which a belief in d/Deaf pollution is framed as "traditional and backwards"; when hearing patrons engage gesturally with Deaf servers in the Bakery Café this act, in addition to denoting a request for a menu item, points to and helps constitute the hearing participant as modern and *bikashi* (developed). This meaning refutes but relies on the semiotic associations with Deafness and gesturing described above.

Both of these ways of framing the affordances of gesture highlight potential limitations of widely used gestural typologies. A typological project requires that sets of gestures be recognizable as tokens of a type. However, the axis of this iconicity can vary widely; scholars have proposed a range of criteria for organizing gestures into types, including degree of conventionality, formal isomorphism, integration with or independence from spoken language, and means of conveying reference or organizing discourse. As Kendon has noted, multiple typologies are not problematic if they are framed as "provisional working instruments" rather than as "universal or general schemes" (2004: 107). In fact, the presence of multiple frameworks may help scholars attend to the multidimensionality of gesture (Kendon 2004:84; see also Ekman and Friesen 1969:93).

However, the theoretical perspectives underlying these typologies reflect and perpetuate particular sets of ideological beliefs about the nature of language and semiosis more broadly, often including a focus on context-independent referential meaning over the pragmatic effects of gesture in interaction. In this article I draw on long-term participant observation in Nepali d/Deaf social networks during a series of six visits between 1997 and 2006 to argue that the categories outlined in scholarly gestural typologies do not capture the most significant factors in seeing a given gesture as "the same as" another in this ethnographic context. Rather, the pragmatic effects of gesture derived from and contributing to differently positioned personhoods are more significant in local ideologies in Nepal. This perspective reflects and perpetuates an alternative ideology about the nature of semiosis; that signs and persons are mutually constitutive.

2. Linguistic, semiotic, and media ideologies in the study of gesture

Linguistic anthropologists have gained much analytical purchase from focusing on language ideologies, the "ubiquitous set of diverse beliefs" whether implicit or explicit, that are "used by speakers of all types as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in communicative activity" (Kroskrity 2004: 497). In recent years scholars have built on this work to argue for the value of a broader focus on semiotic ideologies, beliefs about "what signs are and how they function in the world" (Keane 2003:419), or a more narrow focus on media ideologies: "how people understand both the communicative possibilities and the material limitations of a specific channel, and how they conceive of channels in general" (Gershon 2010: 283). Expanding and contracting the focus on ideologies in this way can, as Gershon points out, "raise productive questions about how (these different but related sets of) ideologies intertwine" (Gershon 2010: 284).

The relationship between these nested sets of ideologies is well illustrated by their effects on gesture studies. Media ideologies framing some modalities and channels as inherently superior to others informed many earlier linguistic and anthropological perspectives concerning gesture. Particularly influential was the Cartesian-influenced assumption that more obviously embodied modalities of a communicative ecology were necessarily primitive, vulgar, or non-arbitrary. This perspective informed a broader semiotic ideology about the boundary between linguistic and non-linguistic semiosis, in which gesture, while semiotic, could be excluded from serious linguistic inquiry.[2]

Linguistic and psychological work in the late twentieth century that reappraised the relationship between gesture and language was, of course, influenced by scholars' ideologies about the nature of language. Many influential typologies of gesture, as part of their interest in classifying gestures according to their similarity to or difference from spoken language, define the latter in large part by its conventionality and compositionality, attend more to abstract linguistic structure than language use in context, and display an ideological focus on the semantico-referential function of language (Silverstein 1976). For example, many studies focus on "quotable" emblems, a category that appears in most typologies of gesture (e.g., Ekman and Friesen 1969; Kendon 1983; McNeill 1985). Emblems are gestures said to language-like in that they have stable, conventionalized referential meaning that is widely shared and can signify in the absence of accompanying spoken language.[3] Much work on this type of gesture

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[2] Though sign languages were often likewise framed as non-linguistic due to their modality, Stokoe's seminal work (1960) demonstrated that sign languages are in fact linguistic systems. However, his work, and much that followed (e.g., Emmorey 1999), takes pains to argue that, despite sharing a modality, sign languages are structurally distinct from "non- or para-linguistic" gesture. More recently, some scholars have begun to question this distinction while others continue to uphold it (e.g. McNeill 2000). For example, looking at sign language performance in context has called into question the degree to which it is appropriate to posit a strict distinction between the linguistic qualities of sign languages (often framed as those that are digital and discretely contrastive) and the paralinguistic (because gradient) gesture that signers may also employ (Okrent 2002; Liddell 2003). Liddel (2003) argues that American Sign Language structures such as agreeing verbs, fundamental to the language's grammar, are formally gradient. As Kendon notes, if such gradient or gestural forms are "necessary for the working of sign languages as a language, then this challenges the opposition between a gesture and a sign" (2008: 351). I explore these issues further in another article (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2011b).

[3] However, McNeill (1985) excludes emblems from those gestures he frames as linguistic, precisely because he sees them as less dependent on and less intertwined with spoken language.

has focused on creating dictionaries linking emblems to their referential meanings without attention to the pragmatics of the interactional, situated use of these forms (e.g., Barakat 1973; Wylie 1977; Morris et al 1979).

Those studies which do focus on the deployment of emblems in context reveal problems with the assumption that they can be effectively described through attention to context-independent referential meaning or that they primarily function independently of other modalities, including speech (Driessen 1991; Sherzer 1972, 1991; Kendon 1995; Brookes 2004). Such studies illustrate Haviland's (2004: 201) claim that many gestural typologies "overlook important complications in the semiotic modalities, cultural variability, and interactive significance of gesture." For example, Sherzer, by studying a range of interactions in which the thumbs-up gesture is deployed in Brazil, found that the emblem had a much wider range of functions and meanings than could be predicted by its paradigmatic definition of "good" (1992: 192). He also notes that far from being context-independent or taking on meaning independent of accompanying speech, in many cases the thumbs-up "derives meaning from the slot (in discourse) in which it occurs" (1991: 193).

Attending to the contexts in which gestures are used also creates space for scholars to attend in more detail to the non-referential social indexicality through which gestures can create and reflect social relations. For example, Driessen (1992) studied the ways in which the deployment of emblems in Andalusia could, in addition to functioning referentially, also reflect and produce notions of male superiority. Similarly, Brookes's work on the use of emblems in South African townships illustrates how the use of emblems can "symbolize sub-cultural affiliation, articulate notions of township masculinity, and express an affiliation with the modern urban township identity," even as observers outside this subgroup see the use of such gestures as indexical icons of delinquency (2004: 216).

Gestures not only give meaning to the persons performing them but also take on particular meanings and pragmatic force *because of* the persons performing them. As Noland has noted (2008: xvi), "every instantiated gesture…(is released) into potentially new networks of expressiveness based not (only) on the differences among (gestural) signs but on the differences among the bodies executing them." For example, in her discussion of the co-optation of the gang-related Crip Walk dance and related gestures of gang membership, Philips (2008) talks about the different meanings and effects that arise when these movements are performed by a non-Crip, who may have learned the moves from the YouTube videos through which the movements have begun to circulate out of their original context.

Other scholars have noted the importance of attending not only to the ways in which gestures can generate meaning outwardly but also to the inward phenomenological experience of performing (or viewing) gestures (e.g., Csordas 1994). Some phenomenologically oriented discussions have framed bodily experience and semiotic meaning as separate or even opposed processes, a stance reflecting an ideology that frames the semiotic as symbolic (in the sense of arbitrary) social "text" and sees bodily experience as inherently motivated (and therefore not arbitrary). However, approaches to semiotics that do not see the symbolic as mutually exclusive of indexical and/or iconic motivation (such as that outlined by C.S. Peirce (1931)), allow for a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between symbolic and motivated meaning involved in the experience of producing and/or interpreting a given sign.

For example, Ness writes about the ways in which danced movements can create inscriptions within the body as well as through the body. She gives the example of dancers trained within Martha Graham's tradition, who repeatedly engage in a contracting movement, a "hollowing out of the abdominal cavity and curving of the spine in the thoracic, lumbar, and sacral areas" (Ness 2008: 11). The repetition of this movement over years leads to changes in the dancers' skeletal-musculature, which Ness sees as a set of interior signs. Ness claims that this is "far more than the natural consequences of a certain kind of physical training process. The rounding of the bones, the stretching of the ligaments, all of the structural changes that will last a lifetime, preserve a way of defining a certain part of the body as (the cultural practice of the dance) would have it defined and of using that bodily term as a thoughtful agent of methodological exploration and informed cultural conduct" (Ness 2009: 18-19).

Ness argues that these marks can be framed as inscriptions not only because of their semiotic content but because they are permanent or, at least, durable. Likewise, in the interactions between d/Deaf and hearing Nepalis I discuss below, the contingencies of situated interaction, often ideologized as mercurial and fleeting in Western scholarship, are in Nepal viewed as having significant and sometimes lasting effects on persons. However, unlike the cases Ness describes, in the Nepali context these effects can occur not only in the person of the gesturer but also in the person of those to whom the gesture is directed, as interlocutors share substance through interaction.

3. Gesture, personhood, and pollution

In many South Asian contexts, persons are conceived of as porous and "dividual" rather than as bounded individuals (Marriott 1968; Marriott 1976; Marriott & Inden 1977). As Marriott explains, persons consequently "absorb heterogeneous material influences. They must also give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances - essences, residues, or other active influences - that may then reproduce in others something of the nature of the persons in whom they have originated" (Marriot 1976: 111). Much of "the energy of personal action" is therefore "devoted to maintaining one's own 'nature' in part by not mixing with things, places, or persons that might alter you in a disagreeable manner and, conversely, by seeking out transactions – such as with pure and beneficent gods – that might at least temporarily enhance your qualities, or 'polish' them" (Mines and Lamb 2002: 169). As this suggests, concerns about ritual pollution are relational; a social actor's own degree of purity or pollution is relevant in considering the impact of engagements with other relatively pure or polluted persons.

In some cases a person might be temporarily polluted. As Mandlebaum explains, "every person must go through a cycle of impairment and restoration" as a result of daily activities such as defecation, periodic events such as menstruation, and less frequent events such as childbirth or a death in the family (Mandlebaum 1970, I: 186 f). A range of media, including food, water, and physical touch, facilitate transmission of pollution from such persons to their interlocutors. For example, if an unpolluted person were to touch a woman who had recently given birth, the former would have to seek purification from ritually pure items, such as the "five products of the cow" (Hofer 1979: 62). Spiritual and social interactions are not necessarily seen as different phenomena than these more obviously physical engagements, and are likewise able to facilitate the mixing of substance (Marriott 1959, 1976). For example, a woman who

gives birth is ritually polluted, but so are the "new-born child's father, the father's brother, classificatory brothers together with their wives, sons and unmarried daughters" (Hofer 1979: 62).

In addition to these temporary types of pollution, certain groups or people are seen to inherently "possess impurity in various degrees" (Cameron 1998: 7).[4] These include a range of *jat*s (kinds), including women and members of lower castes. As Parrish explains, such groups are "viewed as realizing the fruits of the sins of previous lifetimes - their fate is justified by karma (one's destiny based on one's actions in this or previous lifetimes) and ordained by the dharma (moral and religious law) which caste society embodies" (Parrish 2002: 179). Unlike temporary and correctable pollution, that which inheres in such groups is typically permanent (Cameron 1998: 7; Glucklich 1984). Therefore while everyone, high caste or low, must continually manage and mitigate the polluting effects of the temporary pollution described above, permanent pollution must also be managed in ways that create and reinforce hierarchies.[5]

The d/Deaf, whose bodily difference is taken as a mark of bad karma, are often viewed as constituting such an inherently polluted category. This view is supported by the fact that d/Deaf persons born into higher castes may be ejected from their birth caste networks and made to engage in polluting tasks, like plowing, that are associated with the impurity usually transmitted along lower caste lines. For this reason, many Nepalis interpret d/Deafness as a low or out-caste phenomenon, which further reinforces its association with pollution and punishment, though this state of affairs does not manifest itself via birth patterns but must be actively produced (Taylor 1997).

As a result, some Nepalis will avoid physical and social engagements with d/Deaf persons, as a means of protecting their personhoods. For example, when I interviewed the hearing principal of Kathmandu's Naxal School for the Deaf she recalled that when she first began to oversee the d/Deaf school, she was chastised and even shunned by some friends and family members who were concerned that the d/Deaf students' pollution might affect her (and, in turn, them). Likewise, throughout my fieldwork I participated in NSL classes, held at the Deaf associations. Among my classmates were hearing Nepalis who had chosen to study NSL either to improve communication with a particular Deaf person or because they were interested in working as an interpreter. These classmates often commented on the social pressure against learning NSL they experienced from, often, older relatives citing concerns about ritual pollution.

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[4] In addition, as Sarah Lamb notes in her study of gender and aging in Bengal, some persons are seen as more permeable than others: women are "clay vessels" to men's "brass pots" (2000: 182ff).

[5] Nepal's Muluki Ain, or Chief Law, of 1854, was a socially powerful legal document enumerating and ranking Nepal's jats in terms of their relative purity or pollution by Hindu standards. This legislation was an attempt by then Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana to codify rules concerning cross-category physical and social contact. In part due to this consequential legislation, a set of largely Hindu idioms became important in shaping relationships between and within groups considered non-Hindu as well (Furer-Haimendorf 1957; Fisher 2001), though to varying degrees. (Consequently, d/Deaf Nepalis born into non-Hindu families can be less stigmatized by the notion of ritual pollution, but this is not always the case. I have explored this issue in past work (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2010)). While the Nepali government revised the Muluki Ain in 1963 to remove the use of caste as an officially sanctioned method of structuring social relations, the concept of ritual pollution continues to significantly affect the ways in which many Nepalis engage with one another.

3.1. *Gesture as an emblem of personhood*

Within this ideological framework, while both hearing and d/Deaf Nepalis employ gestures, the person doing the gesturing affects the social meanings and pragmatic effects of gestural interactions. That is, it is not gesture as a modality in and of itself that can reveal or transmit substance. Rather, it's the fact that use of a gesture can be an "indexical icon" of Deafness (Pierce 1931). (Peirce refers to indexical icons as "emblems". To avoid confusion with the gestural category emblem, I will use the lengthier "indexical icon" in this text.) But, as Agha (2007: 235) notes, in looking at the relation between signs and personae, it is necessary to attend to "acts of performance and construal through which the two are linked, and the conditions under which these links become determinate for actors." Thus, the use of gesture or sign is only read as an indexical icon of d/Deafness when it is distinguished from use of gesture motivated by other factors. This can only be determined by looking at what Agha (2007: 236-237) calls the "text-level" indexical relations of a situation. Having made this determination, a given person can decide whether engaging with a gesturer might subject them to ritual pollution.

For example, a shaking hand is a widely circulated emblematic gesture that, in a paradigmatic sense, means, "is not". This form is illustrated in figure 1, an image from the NSL dictionary.[6] As this illustration would suggest, this gesture is bivalent with hearing persons' gestural repertoires and NSL, though in the latter code it is formally grammaticalized in ways not found in hearing persons' usage.

Figure 1.

छैन
Is not

Sherzer's (1991) observation that a given emblematic gesture can have a wide range of meanings and effects that hinge on the context of use certainly applies here and, in the Nepali ideological framework I have been describing, the person doing the gesturing is a very salient part of that context. For example, one afternoon in 2005, during a period when the Maoist rebels had cordoned off Kathmandu, Nepal's capitol

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[6] Since the late 1980s, Nepal's Deaf led National Federation of Dead and Hard of Hearing has worked to standardize NSL through the production of sign language dictionaries, in cooperation with The Danish National Association of the Hearing Impaired (LBH) and, later, Britain's Deaf Way. The dictionary was released as three volumes in 1996-1997, and was updated in 2003.

city, I joined a long and noisy line of motorcycles and scooters cueing up at a filling station in hopes of getting a share of the rapidly diminishing store of petrol. A soldier who was guarding the pumps repeatedly used the emblematic gesture "IS-NOT" to let customers know, over the sound of the motors, that there was no petrol at the station. As it was clear from the context that the soldier was not using the gesture because he was likely d/Deaf, but because the area was noisy, use of the form was not likely taken to reveal anything particular about the personhood of the soldier. However, when the same gestural form is used in the absence of speech and in conjunction with other manual signs, suggesting that one or more participants are d/Deaf, this form can reveal, and potentially transmit, stigmatizing pollution. Therefore, as illustrated in figure 2 by Deaf Nepali artist Pratigya Shakya, parents often discourage d/Deaf children from displaying their condition through engaging in more than minimal gesturing or signing in public.[7] This practice can compound the effects of d/Deaf children's linguistic and social isolation, with lasting social, linguistic and cognitive effects (Taylor 1997; Hoffmann 2008; Hoffmann-Dilloway 2011a).

Figure 2.

        Within many typologies of gesture, the soldier and a d/Deaf child who used a shaking hand to indicate "NO" would be taken as performing two instances of the same widely socially circulated and conventionalized emblem. However, what kinds of samenesses and differences matter vary across social contexts. Although the form and reference of the gesture remain constant whether used by a hearing soldier or a d/Deaf

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[7] This drawing is an excerpt from a collection of illustrations Mr. Shakya produced for distribution to hearing parents of d/Deaf children. The collection features drawings of what are deemed typical ways in which hearing parents treat d/Deaf children (such as, in the provided illustration, suppressing their use of manual communication in public settings), followed by a drawing of the Kathmandu Association of the Deaf's recommended approach to rearing a d/Deaf child. The companion drawing to this piece shows the same hearing parents not only allowing their d/Deaf child to employ gesture (or NSL, the drawing doesn't make this clear) in public, but also responding in the same modality. Mr. Shakya does not erase the fact that this could be a controversial practice – passersby in the second drawing are shown staring at the central figures with expressions of surprise or shock.

person, it can't be assumed that all social actors will treat these aspects of the signs as more primary or fundamental than their disparate connotations and functions; indeed, for many Nepalis, the sameness of shared form and referent are less significant than the different potential forces of the gesture to reveal and transform the qualities of persons by circulating substance across interlocutors.[8] By the same token, however, the act of engagement with Deaf persons can function as an indexical icon of modern and developed personhood on the part of the hearing interlocutor. The next section explores the contexts in which this can occur.

4. Gesture, personhood, and modernity

While karma, and the attendant belief in ritual pollution described above are important idioms for structuring Nepali social relations, Nepal has been a state with "massive ideological and financial stakes in an international economy of development" since the 1950s (Leichty 2003: 7). Subsequently, *bikash* (or development), modernity, and class have come to coexist and compete with karma as important social frameworks. One illustration of the significance of these concepts is the fact that Bikash has become an increasingly common given name for children (Leichty 2003). The NSL sign BIKASH is also used as a group internal "sign name" for some Deaf Nepalis.

A range of governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Peace Corps, the Britain Nepal Otology Service, the Swedish Organization of Persons with Disabilities International Development Cooperation Association (SHIA), and Nepal's Welfare Society for the Hearing Impaired (WSHI), have worked in Nepal to promote the belief that deafness has a bio-medical basis *not implicated* in the workings of karma and hence not resulting in ritual pollution.[6] Such groups have established programs devoted to the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of deafness in Nepal, and to the education of d/Deaf Nepalis. Though the d/Deaf schools established through such efforts originally promoted lip reading and speech therapy while strictly discouraging the use of manual communication, NSL emerged from the intensive communicative interactions of the first several cohorts of students (Acharya 1997; Sharma 2003). Other groups, including the National Association of the Hearing Impaired in Denmark (LBH), the Swedish Association of the Deaf, the Norwegian Association of the Deaf, and Britain's Deaf Way, have worked with Nepali Deaf Associations to promote both NSL and an ethno-linguistic model of Deafness, which rejects a bio-medical framing of d/Deafness as an inherent disability.

Both types of group frame Deaf Nepalis' low social position, health problems, and lack of educational and economic opportunities as caused, not by an inherent quality of the d/Deaf (as a karma framework would suggest), but by Nepal's general "lack of development and modernity" which leads to their stigmatization. Indeed, as Leichty as noted, "an ideologically weighted global politics of development and progress places Nepal…in the structural position of modernity's opposite" (Liechty 2003: xi). Consequently, even as development and modernity become highly valued social qualities, "Nepalis experience modernity through a development ideology that

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[8] Though this notion can contribute to the stigma surrounding d/Deafness, within Deaf social networks in Nepal the idea of sharing substance through communicative engagements can work to create a notion of Deaf relatedness and community (see Hoffmann-Dilloway 2011a).

insists that they are *not* modern, indeed that they have a very long way to go to get there" (Pigg 1996: 163; Escobar 1995).[9] An important social project for many Nepalis is thus the transformation of Nepali modernity from "its condition as an oxymoron to a reality in local cultural life" (Leichty 2003: 7). Kathmandu's Bakery Café restaurants are one context in which this project is enacted.

4.1. *The Bakery Cafe*

A locally owned chain, Nanglo's Bakery Café credits itself on its website as having "introduced fast food culture to the Kathmandu valley…the chain has been a key factor in cultivating a culture of eating out with friends, family and colleagues." It further positions itself as "today's favorite haunt for youngsters, families and executives…eating at (the Bakery Café restaurants) is a noteworthy experience." The atmosphere is designed to be read as modern and Western: Waitresses wear short skirts, while in the warm months the male servers wear shorts. Though fashion and standards for appropriate dress in Kathmandu are not static, such attire was appropriate within the context of the restaurant but would have been seen as immodest and inappropriate in many other contexts - during my years of fieldwork but none of the servers I knew would have worn such clothing outside of the Bakery Café. The menus feature relatively high priced fast food: Burgers (buffalo rather than beef, in deference to the dominant Hindu population in Nepal), fried chicken, and french fries, along with *thukpa* and *momos* (popular Tibetan noodle soup and dumplings) and other Nepali dishes.

The chain also advertises itself as follows: "the Bakery Cafe is known not only for its quality food, accessibility and efficient service but also for accepting and employing deaf staff" (website). The Bakery Cafés began to feature Deaf wait-staff with the grand opening of the New Baneshwor location in 1997, an event I was able to attend with several members of Nepal's Deaf Associations and representatives from a Norwegian Deaf association. While initially twelve Deaf waiters were employed at this single outlet, between 1997 and 2010 that number grew to around 50 Deaf wait-staff across several outlets.

The choice to hire Deaf waiters was risky, due to concerns about ritual pollution. As mentioned above, food is a highly salient means of transmitting substance in Nepal. Food exchanges are carefully managed, and Nepalis are often closely "attuned to questions of who prepared the foods (they) ate, how they were prepared and the ritual status implications of food transactions" (Leichty 2001: 87). Consequently, restaurants can be seen as dangerous sites, as customers can rarely know the ritual status of all persons involved in preparing and serving the food. In fact, few restaurants existed in Nepal until after the country's borders were opened to foreigners. After Nepal became one of the first sites for American Peace Corps volunteers in 1962, foreigners living in

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[9] This positioning functions, in part, to attract aid: Nepal received an estimated 3.7 billion USD between 1951 and 1997 (Joshi 1997). Though this money is routed through Kathmandu (and most of it stays there, having been filtered through many bureaucratic bodies and NGOs) the money is typically intended for rural areas – it is their "undeveloped" nature that attracts the funds. Other major elements of Nepal's economy include tourism and remittances. All of these industries are deeply invested in the tension between a poor, needy, traditional Nepal and a future image of Nepal as prosperous and "modern" (Pigg 1996; Liechty 2003). However, both the flow of aid and the ideological goals of the state have been affected by the Maoist war, which ended in 2006 and led to an ongoing reconfiguration of the government.

the country for extended periods created a demand for food service establishments. As these early restaurants were typically run by members of untouchable castes (a well known example being the pie shops run out an untouchable settlement that became known as Pie Alley), they were ritually out of bounds for most Kathmandu residents, especially the upper caste people who were more likely to have been able to afford to eat out of the home (Leichty 2001).

However, as Leichty (2001, 2003) argues, since the 1960s a caste-based logic of social relations has, at least in the public sphere in Kathmandu, gradually come to be replaced by one based on class.[10] Within this frame, eating in restaurants, a demonstration that diners have the cash to spend, has become way to perform class identity. Though some venues pointedly advertise their employment of high caste cooks, as many persons of higher caste would still be unlikely to knowingly accept food from a low caste person, eating in restaurants in which the ritual status of the employees is unknown is also a means of displaying "modern" distance from "undeveloped" belief in ritual pollution (Leichty 2001). The act of eating in the Bakery Café is an even more explicit way of publicly displaying disregard for these concerns due to the well-known presence of d/Deaf waiters.

The Bakery Café owner who conceived of the idea of training Deaf wait-staff, Shyam Kakshapati,[11] was very conscious of the fact that doing so would make the venue less attractive to some potential clientele, but potentially more attractive to others. When I interviewed him in 2005 he explained his choice as follows. He wanted to provide employment opportunities to d/Deaf Nepalis (as these are often very limited). But he realized that if, in doing so, he attempted to hide or even downplay the presence of the Deaf employees (by, for example, placing them in back of the house positions) his target upper middle class clientele might interpret the choice as a sign that the ownership was "slumming it" by hiring inexpensive labor. Therefore, he decided that the best option was to be as explicit and open as possible about the choice to hire Deaf wait-staff, so that it would be seen as akin to a development project. Indeed, the Deaf staff only work positions in the front of the house, and are not given "backstage" positions such as dishwasher or chef; their function in the restaurant is to be on display, as well as to take orders and deliver food. This gamble has been successful. The Bakery Café restaurants are flourishing and both customers and the media frequently praise the "good work" being done by the Bakery Café to combat the notion that d/Deaf Nepalis are ritually polluted.

4.2. *Reflecting and producing personhood through ordering interactions*

My descriptions of engagements between Deaf waiters and hearing clientele in the Bakery Cafes draw on my observations in the Jawalakhel and Thamel branches I frequented in 2001, 2004, and 2005. The Jawalakhel branch is located in a neighborhood known for housing many foreign aid workers and NGO headquarters. Its

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[10] This shift in framework does not necessarily result in a shift in the social actors advantaged: while caste and class do not map onto one another perfectly, generally speaking higher caste persons are more likely to have more financial resources than lower caste persons.

[11] Mr. Kakshapati is a member of the Rana family. The Ranas were hereditary Prime Ministers who ruled Nepal from 1846-1953. During this time, though they kept Nepal isolated from outside influences, the Rana family members traveled extensively in Europe and were avid consumers of Western goods and ideas. This background may have influenced Mr. Kakshapati's project, as he had both financial resources and came from a family with long-standing engagement with Western institutions. Mr. Kakshapati himself, for example, was at one time well known for his Western "hippy" fashion sense.

Bakery Café was a popular meeting spot for employees and volunteers to congregate after work. Other well-represented groups of customers included local teenagers. This group of clientele gathered in large raucous groups around the computers on the upper level of the restaurant: The Cyber Kitchen. Local businessmen, upper middle class families, and foreign tourists also frequent the venue.

Thamel, the location of the second branch, is Kathmandu's main tourist area. The neighborhood is composed primarily of both low and high-budget hotels, bars, restaurants, and shops selling souvenirs, books, and trekking supplies. This area is seen as seedy and dangerous by many Nepalis, in large part because it is a center for trade in illegal drugs. However, this image as made it a popular area for some younger, disaffected Nepali youth. As Leichty (2002: 35) notes, "for many Kathmandu young people, to frequent Thamel is to claim a vaguely sinister tough-guy reputation associated with drug use and/or violence." While in European and American contexts this kind of affiliation is often associated with youth from lower-class backgrounds, in Nepal "the 'tough-guy'… persona is the privilege of a kind of leisure class". The "punks", as they are locally referred to, come from "a middle class that, while not wealthy by first-world standards, would rather have its educated young men unemployed than engaged in anything but white-collar labor" (Leichty 2002: 41). Though "punks" were the Nepali youth initially most likely to spend time in Thamel, in recent years sites like the Thamel Bakery Café and nearby coffee shops have become popular with middle-class youths who have not adopted the "punk" persona, but who affiliate with modern consumer practices. Both groups of youth orient to what they perceive as Western culture, but often view it wistfully as something that exists in distant centers while they themselves remain "out here" in Kathmandu (Liechty 2002). I did not video-record events in these venues (as doing so would have been seen as disruptive by the management) but observed and participated in roughly 15 hours of Bakery Café interactions.

When Bakery Café owners first began employing Deaf wait-staff, the management took pains to provide at each branch explicit meta-pragmatic instructions for understanding the significance of their presence. This was necessary because, even if it could be taken for granted that patrons would read the text-level features of the situation in such a way as to see the waiters' communicative behaviors as indexical icons of d/Deafness, whether that d/Deafness would itself be perceived of as an indexical icon of ritual pollution or not also had to be established. As a result, each table was outfitted with a notice explaining the "special" nature of the wait-staff, and informing clients that this venue was participating in the social betterment of the d/Deaf. The notices worked to mediate the ways in which clients would read the pragmatic effects of engaging with d/Deaf waiters, pointing to the fact that a "modernity and development" frame should here supersede a "ritual pollution" frame. This was achieved by providing an "explicit metapragmatic discourse physically contiguous to the semiotic display" it sought to regulate (Agha 2007: 254). This notice thus became a part of the text-level indexical relations that allowed signs in context to be read as an indexical-icon of a particular understanding of the d/Deaf persona.

Though these notices were decorated with *mudras* (hand positions carrying complex meanings found in Hindu and Buddhist iconographic sculpture and painting) to frame hand gestures in a positive rather than negative religious light, in the early years the text made it clear that customers were not expected to engage in signing or gesturing with the waiters. Rather, it was suggested that ordering be accomplished by pointing to

the desired food items on the menu. The menu text was in English, which is itself often read as an indexical icon of modernity and therefore allowed a modern language (English) and modality (writing) to mediate between the interlocutors. By making these choices in creating the menu the management projected the assumption that all patrons would be literate in English. Likewise, it was a requirement that Deaf waiters hired to serve in these restaurants be able to read English with enough skill to decode the menu. This meant that the Deaf persons selected to be wait-staff themselves generally came from upper class backgrounds, as not all families could afford to provide schooling for Deaf children.

In the early years of Deaf employment at the Bakery Cafés I sometimes observed hearing couples at both branches, once seated at their table, discuss the notice indicating that they could expect a Deaf server. These discussions often involved joking about the possible mishaps that could occur, centering on the fact that not all employees in a given branch were d/Deaf. How, couples frequently speculated, would one know in instigating an interaction whether an interlocutor was Deaf or hearing? What humorous consequences could arise from making the wrong assessment? However, I never observed such a scenario actually unfold. When a Deaf waitperson first approached a table he or she would signal this status by greeting the patrons with a *namaste*. This gesture of greeting, illustrated in figure 3 by a screen shot from the Bakery Café television ad, involves pressing the palms of the hands together. Hearing Nepalis routinely perform this gesture, but in this context the gesture would typically be accompanied by a spoken greeting; the silent, and often slightly exaggerated, performance of a namaste indexed the waitperson's Deaf status. Once realizing that a given waitperson was Deaf, many customers would restrict their interactions with the server to pointing at the menu text, and not use gesture as a resource to expand the interactions. If some elaboration were required (for example, if a special adjustment to an order was necessary) customers frequently sought a hearing host or manager, who would be identified by the fact that they were speaking, with whom to discuss the matter.

Over the years, however, customers have begun to draw on their gestural repertoires in both placing orders and expanding their interactions with the waiters. These exchanges were sometimes treated as amusing by hearing clients, who dissected the interaction laughingly after an order had been placed. However, for regular customers the act of using gesture in placing an order often became more naturalized. In response to this shift, the Bakery café has, through commercials such as that described at the beginning of this article, attempted to cull from the NSL signs the waiters use among themselves signs that that can be popularized as emblematic gestures for hearing people to use in ordering particular menu items. Subsequently, the emblematic gesture paradigmatically meaning *bhaat* (rice, or food in general), which is often used by hearing Nepalis, is sometimes replaced in ordering interactions with gestures, such as BURGER, that refer to particular menu items. A screen shot from this commercial appears in figure 4.

Figure 3.

welcome

Figure 4.

burger

This shift achieves more than just greater formal or referential specificity in the gestural modality. The more significant difference is that moving out of a more common hearing person's gestural repertoire indexes a greater social engagement with the Deaf waiters, with the potential effect on personhood this, in turn, indexes; eating in a Bakery Café and gesturing with a Deaf wait person can, in addition to denoting a request for a burger, both reflect and produce modern and *bikashi* qualities in the hearing person. At

the same time, via the act of ordering food in an expensive restaurant, customers can see themselves as actively participating in the development of the d/Deaf. This involves a fractal recursivity with Nepal's structural position globally, allowing patrons to occupy the position of modern and developed frequently denied them (while the Deaf waiters occupy the position of "undeveloped" aid recipients). Consequently, though the Bakery Café's efforts to support d/Deaf persons are significant and have contributed to reducing the stigma surrounding d/Deafness in Nepal, d/Deaf Nepalis are not the only beneficiaries of this project.

However, these social meanings can only emerge relative to the notion that d/Deaf bodies will transmit pollution. Thus the Deaf participants are directly indexed as non-polluting in a way that indirectly indexes the idea that they are polluted. As when parents sometimes eat food polluted by their children's prior tastings as a way to express intimacy, the pragmatic effects of this act are "made possible by the norms that prohibit it" (Parrish 1994: 154). Should belief in ritual pollution cease to be as socially significant in Nepal or should, as is happening in some contexts, d/Deafness cease to be associated with ritual pollution, gestural engagements with d/Deaf waiters may no longer have this particular semiotic meaning or pragmatic effect.

5. Conclusion

Linguistic anthropology and related disciplines have amply demonstrated the value of attending to the multi-functional character of contextually situated language (e.g, Silverstein 1976; Jakobson 1990; Duranti and Goodwin 1992) and adopting a semiotic orientation in analyzing the manner in which language ideologies link the formal and the social (e.g, Irvine and Gal 2000). This perspective has less frequently influenced studies of gesture, however, where models of language as primarily concerning decontextalized reference have often held sway. This is well illustrated by the ways in which the construction and application of many influential gestural typologies reflect and perpetuate a particular set of linguistic and semiotic ideologies derived from a formal linguistic approach.

However, gesture is as multifunctional, context-dependent, and linked to the social via language ideologies as is language (if, indeed, it is appropriate to separate the two analytically). As the examples in this article illustrate, the multiple functions of signs can be transformed independently of one another when circulating through different communicative events; though the form and reference of a given gesture may remain constant across interactions, its broader semiotic significance and pragmatic effects may vary widely, depending on, among other things, the set of ideological construals of the relationship between gesture and persona operating for a given participant. Consequently, the organization of gestures into types depends on the kinds of semiotic functions, and the levels of similarity and difference across instances of use, that are most ideologically salient within a given social context. Attending to the ways in which such ideological frameworks and their social consequences vary within and across contexts helps articulate the study of gesture with the rich social action from which it is constituted and which it helps constitute.

Acknowledgements

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