

Event: Online Book Launch (via Zoom) of *Simplified Signs: A Manual Sign-Communication System for Special Populations, Volumes 1 and 2*

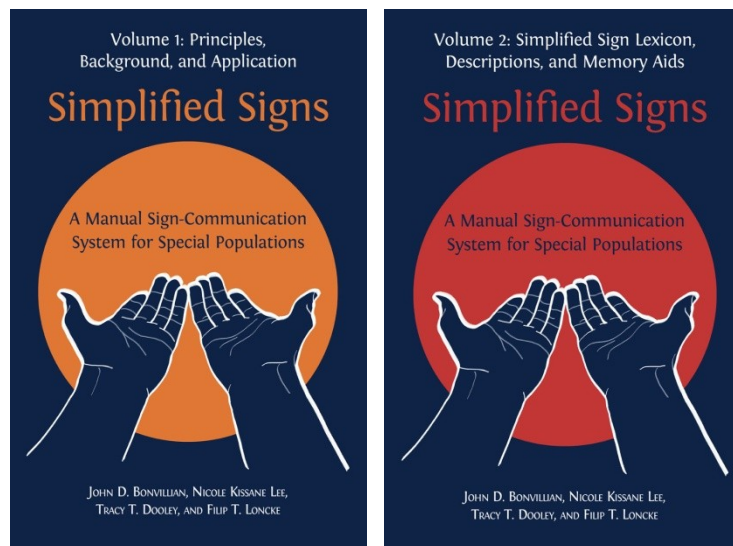


Figure 1 Simplified Signs, Volumes 1 and 2 Book Covers

Event Date: Thursday, September 3, 2020 at 11:00 am EST

Moderator: Laura Rodriguez, Open Book Publishers

Panelists: William B. Bonvillian, brother of primary author, John D. Bonvillian

Nicole Kissane Lee, co-author

Filip T. Loncke, co-author

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Transcript:

[00:01] Laura: So, welcome to our launch for our new Simplified Signs: A Manual Sign-Communication System for Special Populations book, which was written by the late John D. Bonvillian, by Nicole Kissane Lee, who is here with us today, Tracy T. Dooley, and Filip Loncke, who is also here with us today.

[00:16] Laura: So, we the book publishers are really fortunate to have with us today for this book launch these three panelists. First, we have Bill Bonvillian, who you will really soon meet and is here presenting in behalf of his brother, the late John D. Bonvillian. John D. Bonvillian was the principal author of this book. He was a faculty member of the Psychology department at the University of Virginia. He was working there for 37 years and he also chaired the University's interdepartmental program in Linguistics. Bonvillian was known for his contributions to the study of sign language, child development, psycholinguistics, and language acquisition. And for the last 17 years of his career, he worked on developing the Simplified Sign System that is the subject of our discussion today. He also received his Ph.D. in Psychology from Stanford University and his B.A. in Psychology from Johns Hopkins. He authored around a hundred journal articles, and he was an editor of the journal *Sign Language Studies*. He sadly passed away in 2018; that's the reason why we have Bill with us today.

[01:15] Laura: We also have in our panel Nicole Kissane Lee. So, she had the privilege of formally starting the Simplified Sign project with Dr. John Bonvillian in 1997. Back then, she was a first-year pre-medical student at the University of Virginia. She, after that, graduated in 2001 with high distinction in Psychology and under the mentorship of Dr. Bonvillian as well with her thesis focus on the Simplified Sign project. This project gained recognition for its unique innovation and was showcased in the *Today Show*, CNN, the *Washington Post*, and *Cosmo Girl* to name a few. Dr. Lee afterwards went on to obtain her medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia and her surgical residency training at the University of Florida. She also had a fellowship training in advanced laparoscopic surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital. After that, she had a fellowship training in Medical Simulation from Brigham and Women's Hospital and she obtained her Master of Education with a focus on Technology and Innovation from [Harvard University. She is] the bariatric surgeon at Indiana

University. She is now an Assistant Professor of Surgery and Director of the Indiana University Surgical Skills Center and also Co-Director of the Indiana University Surgical Education Research fellowship.

[02:32] Laura: Finally, we have Filip Loncke. So, he's a psycholinguist from Belgium who came to the United States in 1997 as a Professor of the Curry School of Education and Human Development at the University of Virginia. Before his arrival in the U.S., he worked for 20 years as an educational psychologist and as a school superintendent for services for children with disabilities. He obtained his B.A. and M.A. degrees in Special Education from the University of Ghent and his Master's degree and Ph.D. in Neurolinguistics from the University of Brussels. While he was in Belgium, he was a co-developer of a manual sign system that is actually currently in use in part of Europe and since his arrival in the U.S. in the late 90s. Until John Bonvillian's passing, he collaborated with him on several research projects related to the Simplified Sign System.

[03:15] Laura: So, this is a project that has been going on for a long time. And we also have some of the contributors that are not able to be here with us today. Tracy T. Dooley, the person I mentioned at the beginning, so she was an undergraduate honors student at the University of Virginia and a member of Dr. Bonvillian's research group in the early 90s. She there studied handedness in young sign-learning children of Deaf parents. Dooley later obtained her Master of Divinity [degree] from Emory University at the Candler School of Theology and pursued training in sign language interpretation at Dekalb College. In 2003, Dooley rejoined Dr. Bonvillian's research group where she focused on the expansion of the Simplified Sign System to include more concepts, the writing and editing of Volumes 1 and 2, and overseeing the development of sign illustrations. After Dr. Bonvillian passed away, Ms. Dooley

updated both volumes of this book, and she prepared the system under the different ideas to be ready for publication.

[04:13] Laura: And last, but not least, we have Val Nelson-Metlay who illustrated the Simplified Signs. Nelson-Metlay was born hard-of-hearing and is now Deaf and fluent in American Sign Language. She graduated from the University of Kansas, and then she went to work as a commercial artist. And she has kindly worked on all the signs that you can actually see on the new edited volumes that I think everyone had the chance to access. We sent the link and everything, so I hope you have familiarized yourself with these fantastic volumes.

[04:45] Laura: So, before we begin with the questions for your panelists, as I've said before, I want to explain a few logistics for this phone call. So, this event has been recorded, so to maintain your privacy and make sure that you are as comfortable as possible, I would recommend you to turn off your camera. The microphones are already turned off for everyone, so if you have any questions as I've said before please put it on the chat feature. And I would also like to let you know that if there is anything, any problem or you're experiencing some issues with perhaps any of the people who are being interviewed—you can't hear it well enough, as well, just put it on the chat feature and I will make sure I transmit the message to everyone. So, if everything—oh sorry, I just got a message—I'll slow down. [Laura laughs.] So if everything is okay I would just continue with the first question.

[05:35] Laura: So, this question is for panel member Nicole Kissane Lee, who I understand and as I've mentioned before was there at the inception of the Simplified Sign project. It was some 20 years, around some 20 years ago. So, would you like to tell us a bit about the Simplified Sign project and what it is and how did it come about?

[05:52] Nicole: Yes. Good morning and thank you. Can everyone hear me? So, I'm Nicole Kissane Lee, nice to see everybody this morning or this

afternoon depending on where you are. The Simplified Sign project was the brilliant brainchild of my mentor, Professor John Bonvillian. Bill Bonvillian, his brother, will speak more about John in a minute, so I'm not going to take all of his thunder and take all of the details about his wonderful brother. But Professor Bonvillian, John Bonvillian, was one of my first professors at the University of Virginia when I was an undergraduate in 1997. Professor John Bonvillian taught an undergraduate course called Child Psychology. It was extremely popular and was always packed; there was a waiting list every single time he taught it. Fortunately, I got in. One day after class, I approached Professor Bonvillian and asked if he had any potential research endeavors that I could participate in. As an enthusiastic, budding pre-medical student, I knew I wanted to and needed to participate in research as an undergraduate. And I was most interested in the research and opportunities that Professor Bonvillian discussed in his class. He was really captivating. Lo and behold, he had been contemplating a simplified sign system for hearing but non-speaking populations for many years, something that had just been rumbling around in his brain. It was a tremendous undertaking that he knew would take years to bring to fruition, but he seemed to think that with somebody—I was a freshman in college and had four years of work ahead of me—and it was perfect timing for him and I to work together to truly launch the Simplified Sign System. Over the next four years, we worked diligently to bring the project from just an idea in his head to a formal system available on the web. Our project was so popular on the web back in 2001 that we nearly crashed the University of Virginia's website. At the middle of 2001, and the end of this first chapter of the Simplified Sign project and all of this web excitement, we gained national and international recognition, with major news sources highlighting our research and catapulting this project to the next realm, which is where my partners on this call have taken it. The University of Virginia had put out a press release about our interesting and novel research and

they were very proud of Dr. Bonvillian and his graduating student. Before we knew it, CNN, the Today Show—the Today Show actually came to the University of Virginia and followed us around—the Washington Post and even a magazine called *Cosmo Girl* were calling us to get access to our work. It was an exciting time and I was so privileged to be a part of it; I’m still privileged to be part of it. It’s probably the single most important time in my life that launched my career in medicine, my career in research. I’m still an active researcher and I think that Dr. Bonvillian was the pivotal point that really launched me there. So, that’s the very beginning of this whole endeavor. Maybe not the beginning, the beginning began in his brain, but this was when the pen hit the paper and ultimately hit the web, and the rest is history.

[09:16] Laura: Well, thank you so much for that. So we’re going to the next question. So, the next question is for Bill Bonvillian. So, I understand that the Simplified Sign project was the capstone project for your brother John Bonvillian’s career. So would you like to tell us a bit about your brother, his career interests and research, how that culminated into the Simplified Sign project. [Silence as Laura waits for a reply.] Sorry, we can’t hear you, so if you could please, Bill...be careful with that. Thank you.

[09:48] Bill: Sorry, thanks. Thanks Laura and it’s hard to beat what Nicole said, but let me just add a few points here and a few perspectives. You know, my brother got his B.A. in Psychology from Johns Hopkins and that’s probably the place where he first developed his interest in language and cognition. You know, really about how we learn, how we know things. He went on to get his Ph.D. in Psychology at Stanford and it’s there really that he became interested in sign language. He worked with Penny Patterson and the gorilla Koko, and the two of them worked on teaching this gorilla signs and Koko eventually got up to probably over 600 signs, which was a fascinating story. But he also, for example, he had an experience working with a young boy who had severe autism. And he had the

idea of teaching him some basic signs. And the child had never been able to communicate with his parents, and he was able to do that for the first time through a few signs. So, even early on in his career these ideas were floating around. After his first teaching job, he moved to the University of Virginia where he spent the rest of his career and he retired emeritus from UVA in 2015. He always taught the large, introductory first-year lecture course year after year as Nikki has just reminded us. But he used that, as Nikki experienced, as kind of a testing ground for his emerging sign system. Throughout his career, he took an interest in sign language, first developed at Stanford and applied it not to gorillas, but to the human species. His research focused on how people learned spoken [correction: sign] language. Are there cognitive advantages to signing? How did signing fit with other ideas about linguistics and cognitive development? One feature of John's work was his very early support of sign language to communicate with nonverbal populations as I mentioned, including some children with autism, and that led him eventually to a very prescient educator named Gail Mayfield who taught, helped lead the Grafton School in Virginia for people with disabilities. And Gail asked John to develop a simplified signing system for her students who had difficulty communicating effectively in the American Sign Language, which is the sign language for the Deaf here in the United States. John had been thinking about this, but that gave him a push. So, the project took the last 20 years of my brother's life and his career, and it was truly a labor of love. So, as you've heard, it involved finding, developing, testing hand signs that would be both easy to form and easy to remember. And that brings us to where we are today and the publication of these two volumes of *Simplified Signs*, which as you noted Laura, was certainly my brother's capstone project but also a great accomplishment for the other three authors.

[13:11] Laura: Well, thank you so much for that, Bill. So, we're going on to go the next question. So, the next question is for Filip Loncke. So, he

brings up the Simplified Sign project, both the theoretical focus on linguistics and a practical focus on teaching children with special needs. So, this question will be aimed at the theoretical side of things. So, can you explain to our audience a little bit about the development and now appreciation for sign language from a linguistics perspective?

[13:34] Filip:

Yes, thank you for the question, but first let me say, Laura and everybody. I see that there are a few people in the audience that I know so hello out to everybody. [Filip smiles and waves.] Good to see you Ludwina and Ingrid and Kristen and others and Nicola, good to see you. My connection, I met actually John in December of 1981, that will tell you a little bit about our age, in Bristol, England. So, it's yeah, December it was, 39 years ago, the same time, a week before the famous wedding of Princess Di and the rest of the story you probably know. Anyway, I was immediately interested in the work that he presented at the conference in Bristol, which was emerging about—it was a conference about sign language, sign language research which was or has been maybe for ten years about, an emerging field in linguistics and in psycholinguistics. And he presented his research and I was fortunately very interested in that because it merged a couple of things, for example, his interest in developmental psychology, Piaget, which I shared with him. I was very much interested in that. And we, I started—that was before we had emails—I started to have some old-fashioned letter writing exchange with him. I lived in Belgium, and that period, as you mentioned in the introduction I was involved in a project that is still existing in Belgium and in other parts of Europe where we have developed also a sign system. Not quite exactly the way that Simplified Signs work, but there are some similarities and that was also going on in other places. It's really based on, to go to your question, what that has to do with sign language research and sign language linguistics. Well, the big discovery of sign language linguistics was that sign language is all languages. I mean, it's very trivial today,

but back in 1981 and certainly before that, that was almost controversial. Many people believed that the basis of language is acoustic signal—the sound. So, by definition, if you take that narrow view—we now think as a narrow view—if you take that narrow view then by definition sign languages are not languages. But what sign language research showed was that has also been influenced by other developments in linguistics, it's really the symbol that got, the fact that there is a symbol, it is conventionalized and all that. So that has shown that not only sign languages or linguistic systems are languages, but also that the signs themselves are linguistic units. And so, this is of course something we accept now and nobody questions that anymore, but it really demonstrates that the linguistic potential is very flexible. You don't have to use it in an acoustic signal and that has been shown in Deaf communities around the world since the creation of the world, basically. As soon as there were Deaf communities, there were sign languages. Only people that know these were sign languages, and what people more and more realized is that Deaf communities had discovered that as an alternative for the acoustic signal for spoken languages. So, the next step in thinking was maybe not everybody will discover that on their own because people are not in communities and with individuals with autism or other developmental disabilities. Maybe we can actually extract some of these symbols that seem to work for, in a natural way, as an alternative in Deaf communities, we can extract that and somehow offer them to other populations. So, that's really how the discovery of sign languages, sign linguistics connects with the project that John started with the Simplified Signs.

[18:13] Laura: Well, thank you so much for that Filip. So, now, I want to prove this stuff, I want to like have some fun with the audience as well. So, I was wondering whether if someone on the panel would have to demonstrate a few of the signs for us? A volunteer?

[18:30] Nicole: I'm happy to volunteer. My personal favorite sign is PEEK [Nicole demonstrates an okay-hand placed in front of one eye], mostly because that's the sign that was on the front page of the Washington Post back in 2001. But I also like my medical signs, and John Bonvillian put in a specific effort to put a lot of medical signs into this project because of the target population of people that have medical needs. So, I like DOCTOR, let me get it on my screen [Nicole demonstrates the fingers of a flat-hand resting on the opposite wrist]. HEART ATTACK [Nicole demonstrates a two-handed version of the sign with 5-hands closing into fists near the chest]. My husband's a heart surgeon so I know "heart attack" quite well. OXYGEN TUBES [Nicole demonstrates the tips of the fingers of a V-hand held near the nostrils]. My three-year-old might think that's more than "oxygen tubes," but I don't know. PAIN [Nicole demonstrates the tips of the index fingers of pointing-hands repeatedly coming close together in short, sharp movements]. And then the one that everyone is scared of, SHOT [Nicole demonstrates the tip of the index finger of an L-hand touching the top of the opposite arm as the thumb arcs down]. So, I like the medical ones and I like to share those, and I've taught those actually to my kids.

[19:25] Laura: Well, that's fantastic. Thank you so much.

[19:29] Bill: I've got a few, Laura, if you let me...

[19:31] Laura: Of course, please, go ahead.

[19:33] Bill: One of my favorites is TURTLE [Bill demonstrates a wiggling thumb held underneath a curved-hand]. My brother used to entertain us sometimes at dinners with his favorite emerging signs; one of my all-time favorites is SQUID [Bill demonstrates a 5-hand closing into an O-hand a few times as it moves to the side]. And this is SQUIRREL [Bill demonstrates the tips of the fingers of spread curved-hands resting on the cheeks next to the mouth]. And BIRD obviously [Bill demonstrates flat-hands flapping up and

down as they are held out to the sides of the body]. And CATERPILLAR I've always liked as well [Bill demonstrates with the index and middle fingers moving up and down as the hand moves to the side]. So, those are a few of some of my favorite signs, and again, they're designed to be easy to use, but also very easy to remember so that it truly is a simplified signing system.

[20:13] Laura: Well thank you so much for that. So, as much as I would like to continue with the sign demonstrations, I do have more questions for the panel, so I will go to the next one with one for Filip Loncke. So, Filip, it goes about the practical application of the Simplified Signs. So, would you like to tell us about your experience with the special populations and their use of signing in general, and the Simplified Signs in particular?

[20:38] Filip: So, thank you for the question. My personal experience is and let's say, and this goes back really even before I had met John, maybe the beginning of the time that I met John when several places in the world, including where I lived at that time, people started to try out manual signs with special populations. Individuals with whom, let's say the traditional forms of speech therapy or speech intervention did not work. Anecdotally, it started really with this case anecdotal evidence that it often worked, that these kids, or these—usually, people started with teenagers—after a while people had tried to teach them to speak and it didn't work and so and then after when these kids were twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old, people threw up their arms and said “well, this is not working after all; let's do something different.” And so, signing was started and little by little, people published reports—I did, I was one of those and several others published reports about the case studies—about one case, two cases, little groups—people started to organize it. And to put it, to summarize the research or the reports, it seemed to work. And it is not with a discussion about why actually does it work, but the reason why it works—I believe for a very simple reason it works—is that you offer something that has a number of

let's say "entry points" where that makes it learnable to which communication works. So, it's a visual thing, it's a gestural thing, and all that, and it's often embedded in interaction. And before I, let me explain that in a minute, so I didn't give you my favorite signs yet. Okay, the reason is that I think the most—my favorite signs or the best signs I think are the ones that actually are interactive. Things like THANK YOU [Filip demonstrates a flat-hand moving away from the mouth] or I GIVE TO YOU [Filip uses a flat-hand moving away from the body toward the viewer] or BYE [Filip waves a 5-hand back and forth next to his head]. Things that are really based in normal interactions, and so because these normal interactions that you reinforce with signs—with something that people can understand, can actually internalize [Filip points to the sides of his forehead], build a symbol in their head, this is a basis for many other things. A basis really for socialization, for cognitive development, and for learning in general. So what happens is and has been reported again and again is that you create by opening something, you create a dynamic that learning can expand. One more thing about experiences, in most cases—in educational situations or in other situations, not just educational in schools or something—the practice that is in some form or other generally promoted and used is what is called "key word signing." So, it's not that you're just signing because that's a complicated thing—it's [key word signing] not sign language—but you're going to use it in a multimodal way. You're going to still have eye contact, talk to the person. In other words, you present your communication partner a number of information, a number of channels, in which probably, for many of them, the sign is the most prevalent one, the strongest one. So that is called "key word signing." So, you see, to educators or parents to communicate with a person who would benefit from the signs in talking to the person in a specific way and really highlight the core words, the key words, with manual signs. And that's a practice that is now used in some flexible form in many places now.

[25:07] Laura: Well thank you so much, Filip. So my last question will be for Bill Bonvillian. So, Bill, will you describe to us the structure of the two volumes that comprise the Simplified Signs project and how the public can obtain access to the signs and how they can learn it? [Silence for a few seconds.] Sorry, we can't hear you, Bill.

[25:27] Bill: Laura, as you know, there are two volumes here and you know, as we've discussed from earlier descriptions of my brother John, he was an academic. And he was interested in kind of all aspects of signing. So, the first volume of Simplified Signs really is an academic summary of the research and the history of signing. And while this volume is academically very rigorous, and I can say fairly exhaustive at points, it's also remarkably accessible to those of us who don't have a background in psychology or linguistics. So volume one is both a compendium of the research about sign language, usage in its various contexts, and it's a platform for understanding the Simplified Sign project. So, I think most readers are going to find it fascinating. It covers issues like, you know, did humans sign before they had a spoken language? Why did Native Americans make such widespread use of a common sign language that the tribes had in common? Did early European explorers use sign language? Could signing help and how in language acquisition? That's volume one, which is just a very rich history and analysis that's quite accessible. Volume two—volume two is designed to stand alone—it is the lexicon, and in it, with Val Nelson-Metlay's one thousand drawings are 1000 of the 1800 signs that the project developed. The lexicon includes illustrations of each sign and verbal descriptions of the sign, and memory aids, and synonyms for each sign. The volume includes, importantly, a dynamic index of the signs, which is a tremendous tool for finding just the right sign to fit your needs. Simplified Signs was published by Open Book Publishers, which is sponsoring, of course, this book launch. Open Book makes all of its books available online free—it is open access. So hardback, paperback, eBook copies are also available for a fee, but the system is there for you to use. And it

was important to John and the other authors that this be available to everyone. And publishing through Open Book really makes that possible, so please spread the word about it. I think one more thing deserves mention: the signs are easy to learn. They're fun, and you know, I hope that others—I know some in my family are already considering this—are going to be preparing tutorials to help teach the signs to people who want to learn them. So, watch for tutorials upcoming on YouTube and particularly on this Open Book website.

[28:31] Laura: Thank you so much for that, Bill. So, we do have a few questions already, so I will go through them and, in the meantime, please feel free to send the questions—you can send them either to me directly or to the general channel for everyone to see. So, I want to start with the first. So, we do have from Nicola [Grove], we have questions/observation. So, she talks about how key word signs work in practice, so clearly learning from the individuals who are using signs creatively and spontaneously in ways that we don't really predict. So, that was a bit of her statement, do you have anything that you would like to add or you would like to comment upon? [Silence for several seconds, then visual of Bill talking with no audio.] Hello? [Silence for a couple more seconds.]

[29:22] Nicole: It looks like someone's talking but not unmuted. Ms. Grove?

[29:30] Bill: Go ahead, Nikki.

[29:31] Nicole: It looks like Nicola Grove is talking, but not unmuted. I don't know, she's trying to...Laura, if you want to activate her account.

[29:40] Laura: Oh yes, so just... [Visual of Laura working on her computer, followed by a visual of Nikki, then a visual of Nicola Grove.]

[29:47] Nicola Grove (attendee): Thank you so much. I just wanted to say it's such a privilege to be here because I'm an old colleague of Filip's and of John's himself and one of the last things John did was to contribute a chapter to the book I published last year which is an account of sign acquisition in children with developmental disabilities, both

Deaf and hearing, and it was really wonderful to have that communication with him. So to see Simplified Signs taking off in the States where I think, I know as a speech therapist, there hasn't been quite enough in pedagogy and quite enough acceptance of signing and signing children is really wonderful, and I'm so hoping that this project is going to really persuade speech therapists, speech pathologists, and teachers to take off with signing. So, my observation is really, it's a kind of plea, for saying that it's not just about teaching these children and adults to sign; it's us learning from them, because what my Ph.D. showed is that although we may be using key word signing to children, they often surprise us by the way that they communicate back. And often these kids will do things like use signing in a different word order and they will modify signs to create spontaneous meanings. So, for example, the sign GIVE, GIVE TO YOU [Nicola demonstrates a flat-hand moving forward] even if they're not taught, they will change the handshape to show if they're giving a cup [Nicola demonstrates a C-hand], or they're giving a sweet [Nicola demonstrates an O-hand]. And this is something very surprising and means that what we really need to do is make sure that whatever form of sign we're teaching, we're very alert to the linguistic innovations that these young people are making, and I'd love some comments from the panel on that.

[31:51] Laura: [Starts to talk and then we hear Filip's voice.]

[31:53] Filip: I think that's for me. Nicola, it's great to see you. Yes, I agree with you. So, just a few minutes ago, Bill mentioned that we will put up tutorials and so, I can imagine that some of the tutorials will exactly be about that, okay? To raise awareness about people who want to adopt it and use it, raise awareness that's it's not a one-way street like we are the teachers and we give that to you and do what we tell you. The signs that are suggested that are in the system are ones that were found to be probably very accessible, but that doesn't mean there is some divine law that every person will have

to use it. In fact, as it always happens as you enter an interactive learning process, and I say the teacher, or the adult, or the caregiver, or whoever the person is, the communication partner with the person who can benefit from the signs, and the magic will happen, I mean we think will happen. It's like a negotiation process, some signs will be adopted, some signs may not be adopted, some signs will be modified, and at the same time, yes it's a great suggestion to in our tutorial to explain, to make people who want to introduce it and use it, to make them aware of the fact that they need to be observers and they are not just teachers, they are also students from the person that they are teaching. So, thank you, thank you for your comment. That's a great addition.

[33:40] Laura: Well, thank you so much. As I was saying, please do feel free to send me all your questions either privately through the [unintelligible] general channel. If someone wants to intervene as well and is okay with it being recorded and them talking, I can also activate your mike, and so please let me know. We do have some more questions. There's one from Ralph, a user, I just want to—so, there is two of them, so we'll go with the first one. So, can you give us some examples of a sign that is too complex to understand and the replacement that Simplified Sign project has presented for it? [Silence for several seconds.] Hello? [Silence for a few more seconds.]

[34:26] Nicole: Filip, do you know of a sign that was very complex in American Sign Language or in another sign language system that we simplified quite radically? [Silence for several seconds.]

[34:40] Filip: Instead of turning on my microphone, I turned it off. So, but no, I don't know from the top of my head. I remember we had many discussions about when would we decide that it is too hard. We didn't say anything about that. The methodology that John used for all the signs, I believe is that he kind of tested them, the learnability. Some signs were clearly too complicated and were replaced by another one. But I don't have an example from the top

of my head, which it's really a number of things. So, a number of criteria are used in general. Is it something that is easy to recognize? Sometimes it's called iconicity or transparency. Another thing is it easy to produce, okay? Or is it simple? By simple I mean that some signs seem to be combinations of other signs, what they call a compound sign. So, those are and were also shown in the research, that most of them were tested on quote naïve learners, people who didn't know anything and those were rejected. So, sorry I didn't really answer the question because I didn't have the answer but I've given...as a politician I give a different answer.

[36:04] Nicole: I actually got a tip from an old friend from UVA. I LOVE YOU is in ASL [Nicole demonstrates the American Sign Language sign: the 5-hand is held up with the middle finger and ring finger bent down while the other fingers remain pointing up]. That's extremely hard, so thank you Jess Davis for telling me that one. And we've actually, we've transformed that to I LOVE YOU as kind of crossing your arms across your chest [Nicole demonstrates this formation]. So this [Nicole again demonstrates the ASL sign for I LOVE YOU] would be way too hard to do for some populations. That's a transition that we made. I can't take credit for it; I'm getting help from the audience. [Nicole smiles and laughs.]

[36:34] Laura: Thank you so much for that, to both of you. So the second question that Ralph has posed is can you show us what the book looks like, covering inside pages? I think we actually have the person in charge of production of the book in here. So...Nikki, I think you've had a copy of it, or someone has it, in your office? Yep!

[36:52] Nicole: So here is Volume 1 [Nicole holds up the book in front of the camera] with my UVA colors, I'm very happy about that. It's just a traditional book, [Nicole flips through a few pages], well-written of course, and John spent decades making it perfect. Here is the lexicon [Nicole holds up Volume 2] and our illustrations are marvelous with a nice description next to every one. [Nicole opens

the book and shows the page with the sign for BUTTON(S) (CLOTHING).] Very easy to read; a ton of work by my partners on this call. [Nicole opens the book to the page with the sign for FIRE, then turns to the page with the sign for FRIDAY, then turns to the page with the sign for HICCUPS.] Heavy, could do some damage. [Nicole laughs.]

[37:30] Bill:

You know, I can add something here at this point, Laura, about how to use this, right? How do you make use of these books whether online or hardback? You know, I would start by reminding everyone that in this Simplified Sign System—it's not a full language, like the American Sign Language—it's a simplified system. One sign can cover many related concepts or words. For example, the sign for MUSIC is this. [Bill demonstrates the sign with pointing-hands arcing toward and away from each other in the neutral space.] But that also can cover song, instrument, orchestra, singing. So, when you use this material, don't just look up a specific word, use the sign index that's in volume two. So, if you look up the word "symphony," for example, the index is going to tell you to look up MUSIC, right? And MUSIC is what we call a gloss word and it will be bolded in the index. And when you find and check on MUSIC in the online version of the index, it will take you directly to the sign for MUSIC in the lexicon itself, right? So, my first answer really on how to use this is use the index tool to find what you want. As I think you'll find that the index and the sign system really are remarkably comprehensive. And there is also kind of a second answer, which there really is, if there is no sign that fully covers the concept that you want, create one. And if it works for you, share it, because my brother wanted, and I know the other authors do too, they wanted the Simplified Sign System to be very useful and to grow and to develop. So, you know, just as an example, my wife has already created a sign to name herself, and she'll use it I think on this signing tutorial that she's working on. The sign for herself consists of the sign for CELEBRATE, right? [Bill demonstrates the sign with pointing-hands, fingers pointing

up, making circles at head level.] And it's CELEBRATE and then she brings it down to herself, right? [Bill then moves both hands down so that the index fingers touch the upper chest.] You know, that's one she particularly likes, and it's fun to use and you can be creative in combining these different ideas and concepts.

[39:52] Laura: Well, thank you so much for that, Bill. So now that we've talked about like how the physical book is, we do have a question from the person in charge of production who is also here today with us. It would be interesting to know more about the genesis of the signs, like how do you come up with the sign; does the sign go through a process of reiteration or redefinition?

[40:12] Nicole: I can comment on that a little bit. John Bonvillian had tremendous experience with, I mean—we must have had forty books of different sign languages from across the world. And he would peruse these and find ones that he thought were pantomimic and easy to learn and that they just conceptually made a lot of sense and we tested them on undergraduate students for memory and recall of these signs. So, that was back in the early days of it, how we kind of would just went through dictionary after dictionary after dictionary and picked ones that we thought were helpful and that launched the first, probably, 500 signs? They got revised over the years, they got added on to, and I think there were some creative additions, like Bill says, where ones that just kind of made sense or were appropriate. So it all, everything was rooted originally in multiple dictionaries and literature-based and they were just adapted. But they were all tested, and we had a pretty extensive memory and recall of signs as kind of the platform research.

[41:16] Laura: Well, thank you so much. So, I've got another question from Michael Orlansky. So, what percentage, roughly, of the Simplified Signs are derived from the signs of American Sign Language? And what were the criteria for modifying American Sign Language or devising new ones for the Simplified Sign program?

[41:35] Filip: Yeah, so, John had really a very, let's say, practical approach to that. So, because American Sign Language is here in America, the most available and most accessible sign language, that's really where we looked first, well he looked first. But then, that's not a priority, it's just a fact that it's there. Now, ASL—American Sign Language—as any other sign language is a language that is used by individuals who all have normal skills, normal linguistic skills, cognitive skills, so some of them may not be acceptable. And then actually, he moved to other things. So sometimes, one thing that was done was actually to modify the ASL sign instead of going somewhere else, really modify the ASL sign. For example, and Ingrid Verbanck who is in the audience just texted me a suggestion, some of the ASL signs contain a form of fingerspelling, really the initial letter of the word. Now, that requires, okay, to make it easier to learn requires some knowledge and understanding of spelling, some level of literacy that is helpful for many learners, but sometimes not for the typical learner that we think of in our population. So, if modifying ASL signs is not an option, then as Nikki just said, we went or John went to other sources. So, we have, but I don't know the answer to the question, maybe that should be an independent distinguished research project, how many of the signs are still intact, untouched ASL signs and how many are not?

[43:44] Laura: Well, thank you so much.

[43:46] Bill: Well, if I could add something to that, which is another source that fascinated my brother was the Native American sign languages in North America. It was a single language, so there were a thousand spoken languages for Native American tribes across North America, but there was a single, common sign language, which is fascinating. And the signs in this Native American signing were very iconic; they looked like what they meant and that was a key as Filip has pointed out and Nikki has pointed out in adopting the signs for the simplified signing system. So, I think something

resembling 20% or so of the signs that they adopted were from Native American Sign Language.

[44:43] Laura: Thank you so much for that Bill. So we have a few questions; if you remember in my first e-mail and text to you when you sign up for the event, we did do a Google doc form so that you can send us your questions before the launch, so I have a few of those, we'll go through them if that's okay? So, one of them was do you believe that Simplified Signs will replace the sign languages used by Deaf people nowadays or at the moment?

[45:12] Nicole: Yeah, I can comment on that. Simplified Signs is meant to be an aid or an adjunct to populations trying to communicate. It's not supposed to replace a language. You know, we want this to be easy to learn, easy to remember, and if it was trying to replace a language, everybody knows how long it takes to learn a language. So, it's an adjunct, it's an aid, it's a tool, but it's not meant to replace a language.

[45:38] Bill: And I can add to that too, Nikki. You know, my brother John had the highest regard for the Deaf community and their sign language, and he studied and he used ASL, you know, pretty extensively. He spent a wonderful sabbatical learning year at Gallaudet University, which is the U.S. university for the Deaf. And he had many, many, many contacts, both social and professional, in the Deaf community. So, the furthest thing from his mind and I know of the other authors too, was in any way attempting to replace ASL. ASL is a full, rich, deep, complex language. This is a simplified system, right? It's a much more basic communication system for those who can't access ASL, right? So, this is not replacing ASL, this is an adjunct as Nikki just pointed out, this is a supplemental piece in a way to help people in special populations that really need help in communication. But, you know, it can be used for other purposes too, potentially. Again, in this simple kind of way. You know, "baby speak," right? There's been a lot of literature on "baby speak" and a lot of these simple signs are available to really little

children to learn pretty quickly. Nikki just mentioned that she's taught a number to her kids. Learning a foreign language; it may be, and this was one of the things my brother was exploring later in his life, it may be that learning a sign along with a foreign language word is a way of enhancing and helping recall for the new foreign language word that you're trying to acquire. So, there's all kinds of potential uses out here that this might actually fit.

[47:29] Nicole: One of the other things that John and I had a goal on and I think that's continued throughout the entire project is that if there was some person learning this in somewhat of a crisis situation and knew a new physical ailment, and they needed to be able to learn this rapidly, that a person could focus and learn a lot of signs and be able to present a lot of signs to another person within a short amount of time. They could learn a lot on a weekend. They could learn a lot in a week. You know, you can't do that with a language, but you can do that with a system.

[48:05] Laura: Thank you so much. And we have another one which is kind of related to others submitted to us. So what should people do if they can't find a sign that they need, and also, related to this question, are there going to be any tutorials or tools that can help someone learn the language or learn to use Simplified Signs?

[48:24] Bill: Well, you know, I can build, Laura on my prior answer which was really use the index, right? Because, again, the signing system will have these gloss words, when we think about the word glossary, right? It'll have these basic words that can cover lots of different meanings and the meaning will be derived from the context in which you're speaking. So, use the index a lot, and in the online version, that in turn links you immediately, right? You just highlight it, right to the actual signing and to the gloss word, so, as I said, "symphony, singing" is also MUSIC, right? [Bill demonstrates the sign for MUSIC again with the index fingers swinging toward and away from each other.] And that will take you right to MUSIC. So that will help you kind of flesh out what

you need to get. But there's also room for creativity, right? So you could combine, for example, the word "music" with "group" and that seems to suggest "symphony," for example. So, there are a lot of ways to kind of tackle this; again, it's a simple system but there are ways to use it creatively, I think it can work to fill in gaps.

[49:36] Filip: Yeah, if I can add something to that, so creativity, is I think really is the key. What you have is a lexicon, but you also have people who are communicating with each other. And as I said before, it's a lot of things happen, the magic happens in the actual interaction and doing interaction between people. Sometimes, you want to say something and you may not know, okay, what is the sign? Well, there's no law against creating one on the spot. And the creativity is not just limited to the person, to the communication partner; the creativity can be in the person that we think will benefit from the signs. Once individuals discover or start playing with the gestural modality, sometimes they have, what is sometimes called in sign linguistics, "home signs." They create their own individual sign, but there's no law against using that if it's just created in a natural situation.

[50:52] Laura: Thank you so much for that to both of you. Uh, so this one actually answers one of the ones that was posted on the general channel before. So, we have a new one that is: Was John a great charades player and any signs from that game? Do we know anything about [that]? [Laura smiles.]

[51:12] Filip: The only one who would know that would be William, I think, Bill. Do you know?

[51:18] Bill: I couldn't quite follow your question. Would you just say that one more time?

[51:19] Laura: So, someone has asked if John was a great Charades player, and if that game, influenced at all some of the signs that have been included?

- [51:28] Bill: So, what kind of game? I'm sorry...
- [51:31] Nicole: Charades...charades.
- [51:32] Bill: Oh, charades, forgive me! [Laughter from Laura.] Yes, he was a great charades player and loved it! Um, and was quite good at it, and that was a big family entertainment opportunity when our extended family would gather, particularly around Thanksgiving and there would always be a charades game with the whole extended family. And sometimes he would use the opportunity to use the signs in the course of that.
- [51:54] Nicole: Evidently, there are a ton of charades-type games in his office when we finally, you know, the team worked cleaning out his office. I'm being told also privately on chat, so he had a stockpile of it. One of the other things that I wanted to mention is Tracy Dooley, one of the major contributors for this work, has also let me know that there are over 5000 synonyms in Volume 2 that can help you, kind of, if one sign doesn't work, another sign might be better, so over 5000 different synonyms are linked in there. Thank you, Tracy.
- [52:33] Laura: Well, thank you so much to both of you as well. So, if anyone wants to share any other questions, I'm just going to give the group like a five-minute short break and see whether the three presenters would like to show us their favorite signs, some signs that you were really attached to or would like to show the public? I know that we showed some animals and medicine-related ones before, but if you have any others? And, in the meantime, please do send your questions if you have more.
- [53:03] Bill: Well, one of my other favorite animal signs, Laura, is CROCODILE [Bill demonstrates claw-hands moving toward and away from each other like a big mouth full of teeth opening and closing], right? And CAT [Bill demonstrates with 5-hands by the sides of the mouth to represent the cat's whiskers]. And CAMEL [Bill demonstrates the sign by tracing two vertical humps in the air]. And, you know, CHICKEN [Bill holds his hands near his armpits

as he flaps his arms up and down], right? Those are—the animal signs—are very rich and fun and especially enjoyable for kids.

[53:28] Laura: Well, thank you so much. Nicole, do you want to...?

[53:32] Nicole: Yeah, so I have some signs. You guys can't see me in my entirety, but I have a big, pregnant belly. So, BABY [Nicole demonstrates with one forearm resting on top of the other forearm as the arms swing from side-to-side], and then PREGNANT [Nicole uses her flat-hand to make a large downward arc near her body] are totally appropriate for me right now. I'm not going to show you my big pregnant belly, because ooh—it's too big, but the PREGNANT sign [Nicole demonstrates that sign again] and the BABY [Nicole demonstrates that sign again] are very appropriate.

[53:55] Laura: Thank you so much. So, I don't think we have any more questions from the audience. Well, thank you so much first to the panelists to being able to join us today and to the attendees, thank you so much for making time to be with us today. As Bill said before, this book is available to read for free on our website in PDF format, and we have them in other formats if you want to purchase them as well, but the main text is available. You can access it, you can access the index, which is key and we should all have taken that home today. And also, this will be posted; the main panel will be posted on YouTube next Monday, so if you want to see it again, or share it with someone or you want to go over some questions that we've gone through and you want to try to find some answers, you can have a look at it. And also, contact me if you have any further questions. So, thank you so much to everyone and hope you had fun! Thank you to Bill, Filip, and Nicole for being with us today.

[54:55] Bill: Thank you!