

# SignWriting Symposium 2014

## Presentation 28

### ABSTRACT

#### **“Writing Bodies, Blurring Boundaries: SignWriting practices reflecting and producing new analyses of language”**

by

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The creation and use of any writing system is always an ideological process, by which some aspects of a communicative ecology are deemed vital for representation and some are not. In turn, the beliefs and assumptions that affect the creation of a writing system are often perpetuated by its use (Duranti 1997); writing systems can reinforce users' awareness of some aspects of language and, particularly when a writing system is thought of as the best or ideal representation of that language, make it harder to be aware of other aspects (Silverstein 1981).

Modern linguistics emerged from the ability to objectify language through writing, in a context in which alphabetic writing was seen as the best and most developed form of writing. Consequently, scholarly and popular beliefs about the nature of language broadly are influenced by writing practices in complex and pervasive ways. In this paper, I explore how the use of SignWriting, which diverges in several radical ways from alphabetic scripts that map onto sound contrasts, presents an opportunity to notice and analyze aspects of language use that may be obscured by language ideologies that influenced and are reinforced by dominant writing systems. In particular, I argue that SW practices provide a chance to think in new ways about three kinds of boundaries: those between linguistic and paralinguistic phenomena; between communicative modalities; and between different social groups.