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**PLEASE WATCH I, CLAUDIA: IN
THE DEAF COMMUNITY OF
NICARAGUA** -- on
www.youtube.com (11 ½
minute film student production;
ends a bit abruptly, but I think
you will enjoy this)

Progress Report: March 14, 2013

To Our Donors,

We have been extraordinarily busy these past few months. The news is mixed.

On the plus side, we continue to maintain Deaf teachers in two schools – the government run special education primary school in Condega and the special education school operated by the St. Agnes convent in Bilwi. Our next teacher, Sayda Parrales, will be accompanying me in April to begin working at the private secondary school in Condega. Our outreach program for now is running smoothly. Unlike classes, where students attend Monday – Friday in a group, outreach targets individual children one at a time. This means a team has to devote much of the day in travel time to meet with a rural Deaf child for a couple of hours. This is not the most efficient way to spread sign language. But, the program also benefits the Deaf high school students who each week participate on our team. And for the children we are helping, the importance of this effort cannot be understated.

We have also been working everyday since December to produce our first edition of a Nicaraguan Sign Language Handbook. We expect to have a final product in three weeks! Our goal is to develop a resource that will benefit Deaf children not only in the select communities where we operate, but on a national scale. Some years ago, the Nicaraguan National Deaf Association, based in Managua, ANSNIC published two sign language dictionaries – one containing diagrams of about 1,200 signs, and a much smaller booklet with about 250 signs for children. These books, while useful are merely glossaries. They provide no information or guidance for any hearing person (parent, teacher, interpreter student or friend) who is interested in learning anything about the grammar and syntax of Nicaraguan Sign Language. We do not believe you can learn any language merely from a book. But, we think that a handbook that begins to explain the rules of Nicaraguan Sign Language is very much needed. Moreover, the very existence of such a book will engender more respect for Nicaraguan Sign Language as a rich and sophisticated human language.

Alas, we are much too small a nonprofit to publish this handbook in any reasonable quantity (my wish is for 3,000 copies – one for every family with Deaf members), but we plan to introduce the handbook at the April workshop in Condega and furnish copies to our partner schools and outreach families.

The handbook is divided into two sections: 1) an explanation (or more accurately, a partial explanation) of the more important features of the languages grammar and syntax; and 2) a glossary divided by topic. The first section is provided in both Spanish and English. Some of the material may be difficult for many people to follow, although we try to avoid too many technical terms. But, then, that is the point: Nicaraguan Sign Language is a complex rule governed human language. We illustrate sentences with video frames, but we also write the signs with SignWriting. Sign language literacy is not critical, but certainly helps if the reader is serious about learning the language. The glossary section is subdivided into topics for quick reference: animals, food, weather, medical situations, verbs, opposite adjectives, geography, religion, and so forth. All entries feature photos of signers, SignWriting, an illustration of the meaning of the sign, and glosses in both Spanish and English.

This handbook is nothing like the sign language dictionaries being used in Nicaragua today. Here are some excerpts:

EXCERPT ONE (From Spatial Verbs-Directional)(English version):

When you are signing a sentence with a spatial verb sign, follow the moving figure with your eyes. The moving figure is the actor, and the grounded object is located at the point where the particular action sequence ends. Eye gazing, often coupled with head tilting, is an integral component of the grammar of this sign language. Your Deaf friend needs to process communication input quickly and effectively. Eye gazing and head tilting furnish cues that enable fluent signers to accomplish this.



Read the facial features signs left to right. The blue eye gaze (with an appropriate head tilt) follows the moving figure classifier (also in blue). The signer's eye gaze (and head tilt) change to track the collision of the vehicle classifier with the stationary classifier clitic.



La mariposa vuela a la flor.

The butterfly flies to the flower.

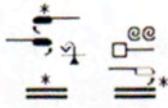
Use of three dimensional space is very important in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Here the signer physically signs the flower at a specific location – to her right. Further, she turns her head and gazes at her hands. Her eye gaze and head movement serve to cue us to focus and remember that location. In the second sign, she needs both hands to make the sign for butterfly. She places the butterfly slightly to her left. Her head turns slightly left and her gaze shifts to the new location because she wants us to see what she is seeing. Her butterfly literally moves across her chest toward the location of the flower. She tracks its flight with her eyes, helping us to see in our own minds the route the butterfly is taking. In the

final sign, the butterfly alights upon the flower. The signer's eyes direct us to follow the moving figure classifier through the remainder of the flight until the small insect reaches the location of the grounded object.

In the past three examples, we have considered sentences with the following verbs: climb-up, crash-into and fly-to/land-on. In all three cases, these spatial verbs showed direction and movement. In the case of the boy climbing the tree, the verb showed both the starting or *source* location (base of the tree) and the ending or *goal* location. With the car collision, we do not really know where the car came from; we are directed to focus on the impact. Likewise, we know our flying butterfly originated from somewhere else, but the signer wants us to focus on the flower.

Spatial verbs that show direction and movement are called *directional verbs*. These verbs show source location (example: “to leave”), goal location (example: “to touch”), or both.

EXCERPT TWO, Medical: (Actual page is slightly larger and, of course, the clarity is better.)

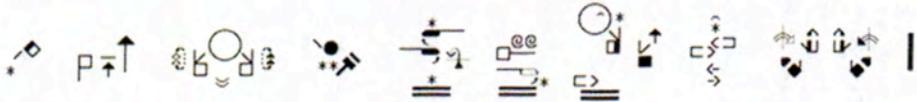


ultrasonido
ultrasound



Voy a ver al doctor y hacerse un ultrasonido que muestra que el bebé sea normal.

I go to see the doctor and have an ultrasound which shows the baby to be normal.



EXCERPT THREE, Geography (again, this is a reduced copy):



Suiza
Switzerland



Tailandia
Thailand



EXCERPT FOUR, Opposite Adjectives:



innocente
innocent



culpable
guilty



limpio
clean



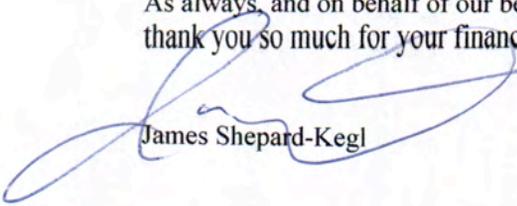
sucio
dirty



On the negative side, the 3 year grant from CBM turns out to be for one year only. The grantor is undergoing restructuring and our prospects for renewal are not encouraging.

So, when our grant funds run out – around October – we may find ourselves again on the financial brink - right back where we were a year ago. I should add that our CBM liaison is scrambling in an attempt to prevent such an outcome, but has duly warned us not to sit back and rely on continued funding from her organization.

As always, and on behalf of our beneficiaries,
thank you so much for your financial help,


James Shepard-Kegl