The Department of Anthropology Presents

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Social Life with Limited Shared Language:
Exclusion and Inclusion in a Mainstream Classroom with Three Deaf Students in Iquitos, Peru

Language is a pervasive part of our everyday lives. Yet around the world, there are many deaf individuals who live without access to an established language. These individuals have not been exposed to an existing sign language, and their deafness and the unavailability of hearing assistive technology precludes access to spoken language. Research with this population has focused on the manual communication systems that these deaf individuals develop in an effort to identify the biological underpinnings of linguistic structure. However, little is published on the communicative competency of these deaf individuals (i.e. their ability to use their communication systems for social aims). In this presentation, I explore the constitution of social groups in a mainstream classroom with three deaf students. From 2013-2015, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the homes and schools of deaf youth without access to an established language in Iquitos, Peru. Despite the deaf students being generally excluded from the academic content taught in the classroom, I find that they are engaged in reinforcing bonds of solidarity with peers through explicit acts of classmate exclusion. These processes of exclusion and inclusion are carried out in moments of situated interaction through the deaf children laminating their utterances with a range of semiotic resources to express forms of stance towards the target assessable object or event. In examining the moment-by-moment achievement of the classroom social order, I illustrate how deaf youth without access to an established language are able to accomplish complex social work with limited shared language.

*Reception to follow immediately in SSB 269 Spiro Library