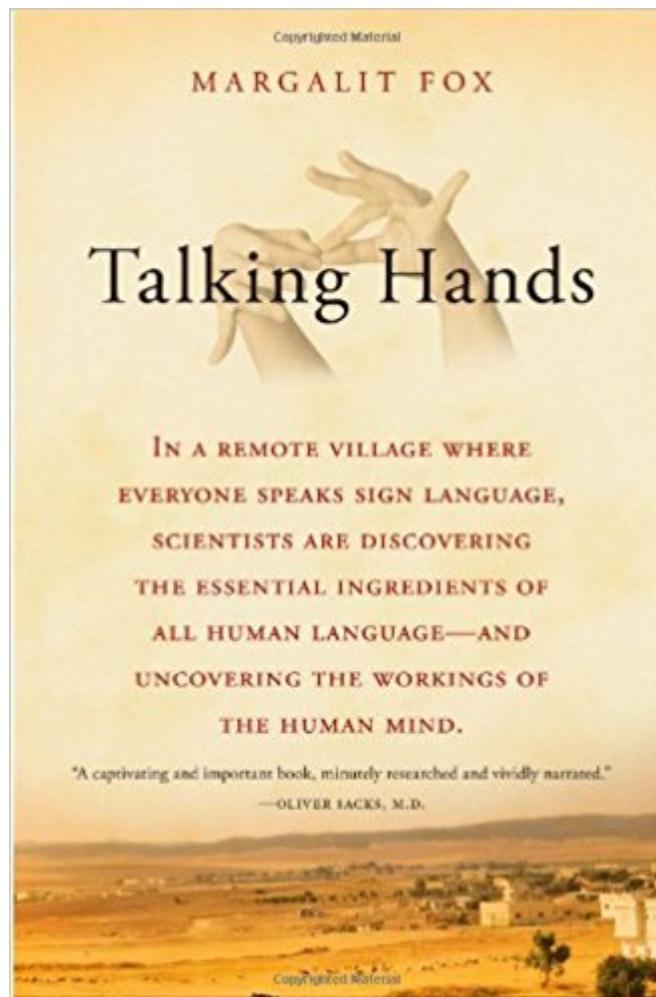


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# Talking Hands: What Sign Language Reveals About The Mind



## **Synopsis**

Imagine a village where everyone "speaks" sign language. Just such a village -- an isolated Bedouin community in Israel with an unusually high rate of deafness -- is at the heart of Talking Hands: What Sign Language Reveals About the Mind. There, an indigenous sign language has sprung up, used by deaf and hearing villagers alike. It is a language no outsider has been able to decode, until now. A New York Times reporter trained as a linguist, Margalit Fox is the only Western journalist to have set foot in this remarkable village. In Talking Hands, she follows an international team of scientists that is unraveling this mysterious language. Because the sign language of the village has arisen completely on its own, outside the influence of any other language, it is a living demonstration of the "language instinct," man's inborn capacity to create language. If the researchers can decode this language, they will have helped isolate ingredients essential to all human language, signed and spoken. But as Talking Hands grippingly shows, their work in the village is also a race against time, because the unique language of the village may already be endangered. Talking Hands offers a fascinating introduction to the signed languages of the world -- languages as beautiful, vital and emphatically human as any other -- explaining why they are now furnishing cognitive scientists with long-sought keys to understanding how language works in the mind. Written in lyrical, accessible prose, Talking Hands will captivate anyone interested in language, the human mind and journeys to exotic places.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The world of sign languages and cognitive research comes to life in this story of a remote Israeli village that's become a test bed for understanding how the human brain processes language. New York Times reporter Fox follows researchers, led by University of Haifa professor Wendy Sandler, to the Bedouin village of Al-Sayyid, where isolation, genetics and inbreeding have led to a higher than usual percentage of deafness in the population. In response, the villagers have created a home-brew sign language used by both the hearing and deaf. By studying this unique language, Sandler and her cohort hope to gain deeper insight into how the brain acquires and uses language. Chapters alternate between the painstaking work in Al-Sayyid and a history of sign language itself. Both are gracefully reinforced with vivid examples, from the early insistence of experts that proper sign language must produce words in one-to-one correspondence with spoken language to a lively gathering in Al-Sayyid where conversation flows freely in six languages: English, Hebrew, Arabic, American Sign Language, Israeli Sign Language and the local sign language. Fox takes readers on a fascinating tour of deaf communication, clearly explaining difficult concepts, and effortlessly introducing readers to a silent world where communication is anything but slow and awkward. (Aug. 21) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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New York Times reporter and linguist Fox joined a team of researchers as they traveled to a remote Bedouin village in Israel to record a unique sign language developed over generations. The language, used by deaf and hearing alike, afforded the researchers the ideal conditions for studying a "virgin sign" language, one developed through isolation and heredity, passed down through three generations. Fox recounts the experience of learning and adapting to a new culture; the Bedouin and the signing; as the researchers share meals, lodging, and common experiences with the families they encounter. Fox interweaves the research expedition with the long history of the politics and science behind the study of sign language and human language in general. Drawing on research by linguists, psychologists, and neurologists, Fox reveals the complexity of sign language and the efforts by the deaf to communicate with each other and the hearing. She recalls the contributions of pioneers, including Gallaudet College, Noam Chomsky, and Ursula Bellugi, as well as the Bedouins in their remote village, preserving a beautiful and expressive language. Bush, Vanessa --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Margalit Fox wrote a moving narrative detailing the stepwise evolution of an indigenous sign language in sited in a remote Bedouin village in the Middle East relatively uninfluenced by other

established sign language systems. Joining the other three linguists investigating the unique grammatical structures of that means of communication, Fox engagingly takes the readers into the lives of both Deaf and hearing native signers as well as that of the investigators during the course of the field research. The chapters alternate between examining the linguistic underpinnings of sign language in general and the cinematic snapshots of a unique culture unlike any other previously encountered. It's full of wry humor and trenchant observations. Highly enjoyable read and thoroughly recommended.

A linguistics book that is deeply tied with anthropology and even some neurology. Best understood by those with some interest in sign language or in anthropological research into isolated language cultures. How would you research a culture that has kept their language completely uninflected from other language influences? You can't use your own language to interview them, because then you are introducing your language as a new linguistic influence. The researchers used pictures, and asked the natives to use their own language to explain what they were seeing. I personally found many things totally fascinating, and marked half a dozen pages for reference. But when I tried to share my excitement with others who had no interest in linguistics, I couldn't interest them. Sign language interpreters love it!

I think I've purchased about 10 copies of this book over time. This is as close to perfect as any work in the general area of linguistics or sign language I've seen. Fascinating and inspiring. Stop reading this review and just order yourself a copy. You'll be glad you did. If you can put it down, you have more willpower than me. Great job.

Excellent! Should be required reading for ASL-1.

Bery well written...good for those who appreciate the nuances of sign language.

A truly wonderful book that blends an adventure, linguistics, and American Sign Language in a delightful and informative way. It is a must-read for anyone involved with deaf children and adults. You will come away from the book with a unique understanding of language development and signed languages.

Mrs. Fox makes some exciting inquiries into the development of human language by studying an

isolated bedouin community, who happens to have developed it's own visual language or signed language. While interesting for those who seek to understand the Deaf community it is invariably a book on linguistics. American Sign Language and Israeli Sign Language are used in contrast to this unique bedouin sign language. On a personal level it amazes me to see how versatile humans are. Even without sound we can create language.

This is a Deaf dream! To live somewhere everyone knows your language. I loved the story and the history of Deaf culture sprinkled in this book. It is a very interesting look into signed languages and the Deaf world.

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