

# Cultural and Language Diversity and the Deaf Experience

Editor

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# From the Cultural to the Bicultural: The Modern Deaf Community

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Almost as stunning as the changes in the deaf community in the last thirty years have been changes in the last *five* years. Thirty years ago, Deaf people generically referred to their language as "the sign language"; it is now renamed "American Sign Language," standing in contrast to the also renamed British Sign Language, French Quebec Sign Language, Thai Sign Language, and the myriad national sign languages of the world. The activities of their everyday life were called "the deaf way," or "the deaf world"; they are now called "Deaf culture." The last five years have seen even newer vocabulary take hold, from calls for rights of Deaf people as a "linguistic minority" to schools that can educate the "bicultural" Deaf person.

Without doubt, the new vocabulary perplexes and distresses the larger public. Intense debates have erupted between the fields of medicine and education and the "cultural activists" of the deaf community. Two prominent national magazines, the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Los Angeles Times Weekly Magazine* have featured Deaf cultural activism as a major story (Dolnick, 1993; D'Antonio, 1993). Both chose the most extreme of

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clashes, a debate between Deaf people, doctors, and hearing parents over cochlear implants and whether the devices are being overprescribed to young deaf children. Deaf people are described as challenging the ulterior motives of doctors and hearing parents. Hearing parents of deaf children in response accuse Deaf people of unnatural and unnecessary claims to cultural rights.

My goal here is to review the newest rhetoric of the American deaf community, especially with respect to the terms "cultural" and "bicultural." When I refer to "the deaf community," I refer to an abstract collection of ideas and activities spread out over many smaller communities of deaf people stretched out over the physical and ethnic geography of the United States.<sup>1</sup> In an earlier paper of mine (Padden, 1980), I describe the deaf community as made up of not only Deaf people – those who commit to the use of American Sign Language – but also other active participants in the community, hearing relatives and spouses of Deaf people and their signing co-workers and friends. I retain this basic definition. Deaf communities in Washington, D.C.; New York; Chicago; and San Francisco each participate locally as well as nationally in a broader plan to assert cultural rights of Deaf people. I am interested in local plans as well as those addressing a national agenda. I am particularly interested in two institutions that have felt the impact of the new rhetoric most acutely: the school and the workplace.

### A History of "Deaf Culture"

In culture studies today, a great deal of interest has been directed to societies changing in the face of modern pressures. From Indonesia (Siegel, 1986) to Native Americans in Connecticut (Clifford, 1988), it is clear that the nature of the modern world is constantly shifting and changing. Immigration and efforts at integration have created new opportunities of coexistence; groups of people coexist in ways they never have before. Deaf people are no exception. Just as Indonesia is forced to face the modern world, Deaf people today coexist with hearing people in very different ways than they did thirty or even five years ago. Their language and

<sup>1</sup> Communities often disagree over the details of cultural representation – for example, the disagreement between white and black Deaf communities over whether performances of signing songs (a signed version of lip-synching) are legitimate. Black Deaf people have argued that signing songs is more acceptable in their communities.

rhetoric reflect the pressures of modern integration, brought about by profound changes in their schools and work lives.

### Living Among Others

The debate over whether Deaf people constitute a true "cultural" group still rages on several fronts, not only in the media for the larger public, but even within deaf communities. A large part of the debate concerns the peculiar facts of transmission within the group. Clearly there is not the conventional line of transmission, from parent to child, that is part of one of the more comfortable and popular definitions of a culture.

First, although Deaf people are far more likely to marry other Deaf people, only a small number of such unions will produce deaf children. In a classic survey of 4,471 Deaf couples conducted in the nineteenth century, only 8.6% of their offspring were deaf (Fay, 1896). Studies of inheritance in Deaf families since this time have shown little deviation from these figures (Schein & Delk, 1974; Arnos et al., 1992). The oft-reported figure that less than 10% of all deaf children have parents who are also deaf attests to the tenuous and imperfect transmission of Deaf culture from one generation to the next. Deaf people are far more likely, indeed ten times more likely, to produce hearing children than children like themselves. Furthermore, Deaf people are far more likely to have hearing parents and relatives than they are to have families who are Deaf. Indeed, Deaf people always have hearing relatives, often in their immediate families.

At the same time, Deaf people are different from other disabled groups in terms of transmission. Inherited deafness is more frequent than inherited blindness. Unlike deafness, blindness tends more to be an acquired condition, often taking place late in life. Total or near-total deafness is more likely to occur early in life than blindness (Gearheart, Mullen, & Gearheart, 1993).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, it has been estimated that of all children born deaf today, 62% of them are deaf from genetic causes (Marazita, Ploughman, Rawlings, Remington, Arnos, & Nance, 1993).

The relative frequency of deafness over generations has resulted in a fairly stable history organized in large part around institutions such as the school, the club, and the church. Deaf people themselves have founded schools (for example, the Indiana School for the Deaf, founded in 1843,

<sup>2</sup> The exact incidence of genetic blindness is difficult to determine. It has been reported that the prevalence (or number of cases) of blindness in school age children is 0.04% as against deafness in 0.5% of school age children. Gearheart et al., 1993.

and the Arizona School for the Deaf, in 1911), local clubs, national organizations, and religious groups. But these entities almost always exist within the control of the state. Schools for the deaf may be enclaves at the center of their community, but the schools are under the control of the state government. Deaf organizations may have their own building or even operate a small business, but their licenses and regulations belong to the larger society. There are no towns or even blocks or areas of a city entirely occupied by Deaf residents anywhere in North America. Unusual island communities of Deaf people such as on Martha's Vineyard may have had larger than usual numbers of Deaf people, but hearing relatives and fellow islanders have coexisted with them (Groce, 1985). Deaf people cannot avoid working with others and living in buildings and using objects designed by others. Their lives are undeniably infiltrated, in large part, by others.

Deaf people have always had to coexist with hearing people, but what is remarkable about the last thirty years, and especially the last five, has been how the terms of that coexistence have changed. The ways that Deaf people coexist with hearing people in their schools and workplaces have changed dramatically in this period of time. The new vocabulary of "cultural" and "bicultural," I would argue, consists of modern ways to recognize the boundaries between Deaf and hearing people, and to imagine what these boundaries should be.

### The School

Given the patterns of transmission across generations, the school, and not the family, becomes a major socializing agent for deaf children. The traditional means of schooling deaf children in the first part of this century was the residential school where deaf children not only were introduced to classrooms with other deaf children, but also in many instances lived in a boarding arrangement for long periods of time. A single residential school was expected to serve an entire state or a large region of a state, and was often located in the middle of the state, as in Frederick, Maryland, or Colorado Springs, Colorado. The long-term separation of deaf children from their families and neighborhoods created the basis of the many deaf school communities of the United States. Today, Deaf adults identify each other by the city and the state in which they attended school more often than by the city in which they were born. ("Where are you from?" "Frederick.")

In this sense, then, the school and its grounds have served as "island

communities." The typical residential schools, founded since the 1800's - indeed, the ones judged to be among the most beautiful - were those that fulfilled the "asylum" prototype of large buildings situated on pastoral grounds, often within walls. Travel outside the walls of the school was carefully controlled, in the interests of protecting the children. A graduate once described his years at a residential school as not dissimilar to living in a minimum security prison. There were no high barbed-wire fences, but the boundaries could not be breached, either by the deaf children or by outsiders. The result was the creation of a bounded community headed by teachers and school administrators. The school reflected the community boundaries, the careful separation of deaf children from the public, and protection from outside hearing people.

Beginning in 1970, spurred in part by a social trend toward deinstitutionalization and subsequent disenchantment with expensive asylums, deaf children began attending different kinds of schools. Instead of choosing residential schools, many parents responded to the opening of public schools to disabled students, prompted by the enactment of Public Law 94142, and placed their deaf children in local public schools (Moore, 1987). Between 1970 and 1978, enrollment in public residential schools dropped by 9.8% (Schuldtroth, 1980). In the next six years, the decline was accelerated: 22.5% fewer deaf students attended residential schools between 1979 and 1985. In this same period, there was an increase of 16% in local school attendance by deaf children (Schuldtroth, 1988).<sup>3</sup>

The shifting of demographics of deaf children away from the traditional residential school had an impact on the deaf community's sense of boundaries. Instead of designated pastoral spaces, deaf children found themselves among other children, in local public schools. With the disappearance of the residential school boundaries, new anxieties arose among community members who lived through the transition from the traditional school to the integrated school. Boundaries are no longer determined by actual walls, but by other means, less physical and more psychic.

### The Workplace

In another work, I asked what precipitated such a profound change in the ways Deaf people talked about themselves and their language (Pad-

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that between 1970 and 1983, there was a steady decline in total numbers of the hearing-impaired (Allen, 1992). Because of a rubella epidemic, an unusually large number of deaf children entered schools in the years 1964-1965; these children began leaving schools at the time these surveys were taken.

den, 1990). Why did they change the name of their language from "the sign language" (Burnes, 1950) to "the American Sign Language" (Stokoe, Croneberg, & Casterline, 1965) to "ASL"? There were several influences, one of which was the expanding of research into deaf people's lives and their sign languages. The fields of psychology, linguistics, and anthropology undertook research on topics ranging from structural properties of sign languages, acquisition of sign languages in young deaf children, and the sociology of deaf people. The effect of science's interest in sign language and Deaf culture was to cast legitimacy on them.

But these are influences from outside rather than within the community. What changes took place to bring the community to a different standard of self-description? I have argued that another profound influence has been changes in the work lives of Deaf people. They took up different kinds of occupations, as a result splintered their communities into middle-class and working-class groups (popularly called "grassroots Deaf"), and strove for different kinds of ambitions than the previous generation of Deaf people.

Until about the middle 1960s, the primary occupations for deaf people in the United States were either the "solitary" trades (shoe repair, upholstery, printing, or factory assembly) or as teachers or dormitory supervisors at residential schools (Crammatte, 1987; Cronenberg & Blake, 1966; Braly & Hall, 1935). Teaching at that time had little of the trappings of "professional" life: There were few qualifications other than a college degree, and sometimes not even that was required. Deaf people were insulated from the ranks of management; nearly none were elevated to principals or supervisors in their schools. The working-class standard within the community was so predominant that it was entirely appropriate and common for deaf teachers to moonlight as printers at local newspapers or upholsterers to supplement their small teaching incomes.

There were several consequences of the emergence of professionalization within the deaf community, the most significant of which was new social tensions between the middle class and the working class within the community. Teachers and other professionals no longer moonlighted in blue-collar jobs; they fled the Deaf clubs and the bowling alleys, leaving behind the working class. Deaf clubs in the United States today have now/here near the popularity they enjoyed in the 1940s and 1950s, when they were packed every weekend night. After World War II, the Los Angeles Club of the Deaf was at the height of its strength; it owned a building in the center of town and was the political and social center of the deaf

community. It is now defunct, its social and political functions distributed elsewhere in the community (DeBee, 1985).

The flight of Deaf people from the traditional club has variously been blamed on television, the videocassette recorder, and the telephone. As the argument goes, as Deaf people turn to more private pursuits, they lose interest in the traditional group activities. I see the changes as stemming from the rise of the Deaf middle class in the United States, causing new tensions in deaf communities. Along with the new economic lives of the Deaf middle class came a desire for the trappings of middle-class life: to conduct one's business by telephone instead of the traditional face-to-face encounter and to participate in the consumption of television and all it promises. The Deaf middle class has pushed for closed-captioning of television programs and telephone relay services allowing them to telephone hearing individuals through an intermediary, the telephone relay agent. With the diminished role of the Deaf club, it became important to seek out a way to describe group cohesiveness, the reason for such a strong sense of group membership, even if many Deaf people no longer went to clubs.

### The "Cultural" Definition

In an edited volume published by the National Association of the Deaf (Garretson, 1991), authors were asked to preface their articles with brief biographies of themselves. Older deaf authors followed tradition and described themselves in medical terms, how they became deaf and at what age. One said he "became deaf from spinal meningitis at the age of five"; another reported that he "began to lose his hearing from German Measles when he was nearly six, becoming totally deaf at the age of eight."

In sharp contrast, a younger group of authors omitted such references and reported instead that they were "born deaf to deaf parents." One wrote that she was "the oldest of three daughters of a Deaf family," and another listed a comedy talk show on Deaf culture as a recent career accomplishment. With the adoption of the "cultural" came a conscious rejection of the medicalized self.

To use a cultural definition is not only to assert a new frame of reference, but to consciously reject an older one. The medical definition is predicated on repair and replacement; it sees the past as littered with failure and ignorance. The cultural subscribes to an ideal of equality, that all languages and cultures are equal because they are adaptations to the conditions of life. The cultural sees the past as a rich resource, making the

present possible. Certainly the richest resource of the Deaf community is its sign language. ASL, made possible by its preservation across generations of Deaf people (Kannapell, 1989; Woodward, 1982; Padden & Humpries, 1988; Bienvenu, 1991).

But the cultural definition continues to perplex many. If Deaf people are indeed a cultural group, why then don't they seem more like the Penan of the island of Borneo, or the Huichol of Mexico? In open forums, professional anthropologists have been invited to offer their perspectives on whether Deaf people and their culture constitute a "true culture."<sup>4</sup> Deaf people lack their own burial rites (unless one counts the intensely personal testimonials that are the hallmark of a good Deaf funeral), do not wear traditional clothing, and do not have distinctive food (but they seem to engage in different eating behaviors). How can they be truly called "cultural"?

The type of cultural definition that notes food, burial habits, clothing, or the like rests on a view of culture as carefully bounded and carefully separate from other influences. But in the modern world groups coexist and are influenced by each other. Deaf people's demands for a new definition of themselves are not unlike the demands of the Wampanoag Indians of Massachusetts, who went to federal court in 1977 asking for the right to sue for lost lands (Clifford, 1988). The Indians were residents of Mashpee, "Cape Cod's Indian Town," and as part of their petition to the court portrayed themselves as descendants of earlier tribes dating back to the seventeenth century. Like Deaf people, the Wampanoag live among others, even marry others. Their daily rites may not seem very different from their white neighbors, yet they have a name for themselves and they share certain beliefs about each other.

The issues that Deaf people debate have a great deal to do with boundaries between themselves and others, about exclusivity and authenticity. The issue of exclusivity comes up in the question whether Deaf people constitute a "real culture" or "just a subculture." Since they do not bury their own dead or have unique food rituals, they should be a subculture, or subsumed under the category of American culture. The issue is less about which of the two is the right definition, or the better definition, than about the consequences of one definition or another. The term "subculture" to non-academics suggests subordination.

Authenticity likewise involves the power to define. A deaf person by medical standards is one who is "severely to profoundly deaf," or who attains a certain score on a test of hearing. A Deaf person is one who knows the language and knows the ways of the group. An authentic Deaf person would be someone who has Deaf parents, attended a school for deaf children, and the informal list continues: attended Gallaudet University, has deaf children, married another Deaf person. The obvious, of course, is that such individuals have some kind of hearing impairment, but the categories of hearing measurement are subordinated to community and family affiliation.

In academic life, definitions of "culturally Deaf" are suspect as potentially stereotypic, but within the group they serve to reassure insiders and dismay outsiders. The reality of the "authentic" Deaf person is one that holds for just about any modern individual — it is an ideal. Not surprisingly, such individuals are not numerous. History and shifting institutional priorities have changed where deaf children attend school, bringing them into contact with different educational practices and different groups of people. It is more likely now than in the past for a Deaf person to attend institutions other than Gallaudet. What seems to be at issue here is whether the person has authentic loyalties (Kannapell, 1989), a commitment to the language and cultural ideals of the group.

### The "Bicultural" Definition

The term "bicultural" has only recently appeared on the scene in the community of Deaf people. Other than a logical extension of the cultural, what purpose does the term serve? To what does it refer? In a "Statement of Mission and Values" issued by the California School for the Deaf in Fremont (1993), the school lists ten tenets, including: "every [deaf] student has a right to an educational environment where he or she is able to understand others and be understood by others," and "staff members should be competent in American Sign language and have an understanding of and appreciation for Deaf culture."

It seems that the emerging intention of the term "bicultural" is not to be competent in two cultures, as bilingualism is to be competent in two languages, at least in its traditional definition (Grosjean, 1992), but to negotiate tensions between competing and profoundly contradictory beliefs, lives, and activities, those that are embedded in the lives of hearing people on one hand and those of Deaf people on the other. The term

<sup>4</sup> A recent example was a keynote address by J. Jorge Klor de Alva at the annual Conference of Educational Administrators Serving the Deaf (CEASD) in April 1994.

"bicultural" is being used to describe a way of conceiving boundaries between Deaf and hearing people in a world where the residential schools and the Deaf clubs of the past no longer exist.

### *The "Bicultural Self"*

In our book on Deaf culture (Padden & Humphries, 1988), we described the everyday talk of Deaf people as marked by a certain style of self-reference, a way of positioning the self relative to others. One example came from a conversation about an acquaintance who was VERY HARD-OF-HEARING.<sup>5</sup> It was understood that the person in question was someone who could hear very well, exactly the opposite of the sign's literal English translation.

As we studied this thread of significance, we found another related term. Someone who is A-LITTLE HARD-OF-HEARING is one who does not hear well at all, again the opposite of its English translation. What the two phrases together reveal is a network of meaning in which DEAF is seen as a central state of being, and to be A-LITTLE is to be a slight departure from this central state. VERY, on the other hand, represented a large departure, toward the more distant and opposing pole, HEARING. We proposed the idea of a "different center," around which ideas and beliefs are organized in ways shared by Deaf people.

More generally, the signs DEAF and HEARING are not only labels of hearing condition, but are actively used in everyday talk as labels of position. At times the labels are used without reflection, as in VERY HARD-OF-HEARING, and other times consciously and deliberately. A running joke at schools for the deaf is to refer to the opposing, or visiting, Deaf football team as HEARING. The labels are usually recognized as mistakes, but participants revel in these extensions of meaning.

These labels often surface in subtle shadings of common talk. Recently I was at a gathering of family members discussing land that they were considering buying. The father explained that the developer planned to build a home next to his son's. The son corrected him and said that the developer actually planned to build elsewhere and the lot next door would be occupied by "someone hearing." The comment is odd, stating the obvious. Every lot in the area will be built on by a hearing family. What

the son meant was that someone outside the known set, in this case other than the son's family and the developer, would occupy that land. DEAF means "known," "of the set," and HEARING means "not known," "not of the set."

To invoke the labels of DEAF and HEARING is to call up a web of relationships between what is central and what is peripheral, what is known and what is not known, and what is familiar and what is foreign. To talk of these terms is to offer a counterbalance between two large and imposing presences in Deaf people's lives – their own community and the community within which they must live, among hearing people. For Deaf people the poles of everyday life are the language and ways of the community within the language and ways of others, the English-speaking society of North America.

These ways of conceiving the self also can be seen in what I call "urban folk tales," following Brunvand's (1989) coining of the term to describe popular but rarely verifiable stories of Deaf Americans. The tales tell of the dangers of living as a Deaf person in an almost entirely hearing world. In one widely circulated version, a Deaf man is mistaken for a fugitive and chased on foot by an FBI agent (or an agent of the CIA or Secret Service) who calls out to him to stop or he will shoot. The Deaf man fails to hear and is indeed shot and killed. The story is said to have appeared on the front page of the Chicago (or Seattle or Los Angeles) newspaper. The tale is a popularized fantasy of an unprotected and innocent Deaf citizen suffering at the hands of a faceless official hearing person.

The same fears and worries also color how real-life events are told. Several years ago a prominent Deaf man was found shot at pointblank range in the basement garage of his high-rise apartment building. His wife had gone up to their apartment alone while he unloaded the trunk of their car. When he failed to appear, she went down to investigate and found him dead. The shooter was never apprehended and the murder remains unsolved. The case was extensively discussed, reviewed, and speculated upon. A robber must have shouted to him to turn around, many believed, and when he failed to respond, shot him dead. It is of course entirely possible that he died while trying to resist the robber; indeed, many hearing victims are shot in this way. But it was far more meaningful to speculate that he died at the hands of someone relentlessly hearing.

The stories and anecdotes tell of ways of positioning self and other, and tell how to make sense of the actions and activities of people's lives. The material of language, words and signs, exist as points of reference, as they contemplate the irreducible tensions of their lives.

<sup>5</sup> I follow the standard convention of representing ASL signs with capitalized English glosses.

## Reorganization of Boundaries

### *The School*

In recent years, not only did enrollments decline at residential schools, but fewer children boarded at the schools (Schildroth, 1980). Month-long stays are no longer permitted; today children who board at residential schools typically return home each weekend to their families. The classic school for deaf children of a generation ago no longer exists, as its boundaries have become more permeable. In this context, debates rage over whether the modern pattern of schooling for deaf children ensures a good education (Commission on Education of the Deaf, 1988). Leaving aside the question of whether the current model is beneficial or not, what has been the impact of this changed style of schooling on the deaf community? At least one impact has been a heightened sense of boundaries, expressed in the form of debates over languages and cultures. In this sense, the debates make explicit what did not have to be said a generation ago.

The vocabulary of languages and cultures has found its way into the school in the form of calls for educational reform. A number of schools have proposed new "bilingual-bicultural" programs in which the school aims to educate children in two languages, ASL and English, and in two cultures, those of the larger society and of Deaf people. Not surprisingly, most of the schools calling for this kind of reform are residential schools, historically educational havens for young deaf children. Teachers are encouraged to restructure curriculum and classroom practice to reflect a new emphasis on culturally relevant education for deaf children. The reform movement has taken on a name, "Bi-Bi," and has given rise to newsletters, workshops, and conferences around the country.

As part of our research project studying early reading and writing in young deaf children, our group visited a Bi-Bi residential school and observed activities in classrooms. We wanted to know how a philosophy centered on notions of language and culture would be translated into classroom practice. In a third grade classroom we found the first indications of this fairly new effort, in which aspects of the new curriculum and new teaching practice were manifested in the teacher's depiction of distance and relationship between ASL and English and their respective cultures. In much the same way that the community talks of what is known and familiar and then what is not known and distant, teachers in

Bi-Bi classrooms extend these metaphors of explanation into classroom practice.

We videotaped and transcribed a Deaf teacher explaining to her students how to carry out an experiment described in a textbook on science. The teacher had previously explained to us that many of her students were only barely able to read the textbook, so she would need to adapt the activity of reading to accommodate them. The task was to do science, but the teacher saw her task as broader than just science, to include reading and acquisition of scientific knowledge. The teacher needed to teach the specialized, not obvious knowledge of science – in this case, whether vinegar introduced into baking soda will cause a gaseous emission and hence a chemical change.

Her strategy was to make transparencies of the relevant pages in the science textbook and invite the students to read lines from the page with her. As she read each line, she began a mode of explanation that moved between the textbook and the resources of sign language. Broadly, her style of explanation drew from vernacular forms of talk used in the Deaf community but adapted for use in the classroom. We call this adapted style of talk "school ASL" (Sterne, 1993) because it has a number of features that seem specific to the context of instruction around and with English. Some of these elements involve purposely distancing scientific concepts through English fingerspelling and other linguistic devices, drawing comparisons between known popular elements and new scientific elements, and drawing equivalences between ASL and other systems of English.

**Distance.** Fingerspelling is usually described as a device in ASL for representing written English in manual form with handshapes forming letters of the alphabet. What is rarely acknowledged is how the system of fingerspelling has come to signify a relationship between ASL and English. The science teacher frequently fingerspelled, and she often did it as a way of purposely highlighting scientific vocabulary to show its distance from everyday concepts in ASL. One example was the teacher's careful explanation of the scientific concept of "problem":

SAME MATH, KNOW STORY, WRITE, SAY: [role shift]: "SUPPOSE [you] HAVE 8 APPLE, THEN [you] TOSS-OUT 4 APPLE TOSS-OUT 1. HOW MANY APPLE [you] HAVE REMAIN?"

[Just like in Math, you know the story that goes (in written English), "Suppose you have 8 apples, then you throw away 4, how many apples do you have left?"]



4. RIGHT. SAME 1 PROBLEM [false start] P-R-O-B-L-E-M. THAT P-R-O-B-L-E-M [points to class] FIGURE-OUT, ANSWER. QUESTION. PROBLEM NEGATIVE? NO. ONLY QUESTION.  
 [Four, that's right. Just like the idea of problem, I mean "problem." A problem is what you need to figure out, to answer. A question. Is a problem a negative thing? No, it's just a question.]

The teacher made a point of fingerspelling the word "problem" so as to distinguish it from the common definition of problem of a personal difficulty or struggle. By fingerspelling the word, the teacher had effectively distanced it from the common known definition, thus establishing its special scientific meaning.

In another example, the teacher is reading from the screen the list of materials needed for the experiment and then she turns to the class:

WHAT F-U-N-N-E-L-S? F-U-N-N-E-L-S... [picks up funnel from table] F-U-N-N-E-L. [displays funnel] WHY USE IT?  
 [What are funnels? Here's a funnel... For what purpose is this used?]

As she fingerspells, the teacher displays a countenance of puzzlement. She wrinkles her nose as she fingerspells the word "funnel" and moves her hand to one side so as to look at it. The discourse device serves to distance the word, set it up as alien and unknown. The teacher has effectively marked an English word, a tool in a science experiment. In a way, the teacher has mimicked her children's view that things English are often foreign and difficult to comprehend.

**Linking.** The teacher then proceeds to demonstrate how foreign things can be understood. She turns next to baking soda, a necessary ingredient in the experiment, but senses that her students may not know the term "baking soda." She explains:

B-A-K-I-N-G S-O-D-A, B-A-K-I-N [while pointing to words on overhead projection], THAT SAME [picks up box of baking soda and points to "baking soda" on box while mouthing "baking soda"].  
 [Now baking soda, baking - right here on the screen is the same thing as this box in my hand.]

<sup>6</sup> Fingerspelled words are represented by capital letters separated by hyphens. Fingerspelled loan signs are represented in glosses with an initial # sign. "CL:" means a single classifier predicate. "Over time" is a notation showing aspectual inflection on the predicate.

SEE THAT BEFORE, CL:arm&hammer logo? THINK #ALL, MAYBE #ALL HAVE, [points to box] HOME IN COLD, R-E-F, CL:[puts box in fridge] BOX-ABSORB, SMELL TERRIBLE, [points to box] BOX-ABSORB-over time, CAN.  
 [You've seen it before, the picture of the arm and biceps? I think all of you, maybe all of you have this at home in your refrigerator. It absorbs bad odors in the refrigerator, over time it absorbs (odors).]

She provides an explanation which in large part describes to the children the familiar orange box of Arm & Hammer baking soda with its emblem of an arm and biceps. She explains what it is used for, then connects it to its place on a list of materials for a science experiment. She seems to intuitively understand what a young group of children who can barely read are likely to know, and what it will take to make them understand something they do not yet know. She believes that if they cannot yet read the words on the object, in this case the box of baking soda, then the visual elements of the object will be especially salient to them.

**Framing equivalences.** Finally, the teacher offers ways of moving between languages and systems, from ASL to fingerspelling to print, each a stop in an interwoven system of symbols. When she introduces the experiment, she says:

#DO SCIENCE #DO SCIENCE. WILL TALK ABOUT, REMEMBER CHEMICAL CHANGE, C-H-E-M-I-C-A-L C-H-A-N-G-E [writes "chemical change" on the board]. WHAT MEAN? WHAT MEAN [points to words "chemical change" on board]?  
 [What are we doing in science today? We're going to talk about - remember this idea of chemical change? Chemical change? What does it mean, what do these words here mean?]

First she signs, then she fingerspells, and then she writes the words on the board. They are equivalent, she tells her students by example. Here's the sign, and there is an equivalent in fingerspelling, also in print. They are all connected. Her young students know the languages have equivalences, but aren't quite sure exactly how. She will be their model for moving smoothly between languages, from one world of meaning to another.

The question here is what is linked, in what form, and by what means. The systems of signing, fingerspelling, and print are not merely different languages or representations of different languages; they are markers of distance and proximity, of difference and similarity. The teacher skillfully uses the systems both to convey meaning and to convey systems of meaning - of the everyday to the scientific, of the familiar to the new.

The practice of distancing systems, then later showing they are equivalent, may draw in large part from a practice of conceiving the self in positions relative to others. The sentiment of self as intimate and other as distant reappears in numerous forms throughout the discourses of school and other activities of everyday life. To the outsider, the subtle countenances of puzzlement and distancing might seem small, but they comprise active ways of positioning, from belief to practice. In the world of the other is English and, for young deaf children, science and the practices of the larger society. The teacher plays the role of modeling a "bicultural" life, showing how to link the parts together and how to understand them relative to one another. In knowing what is distant and not understood, she teaches students how to understand English, science, and other practices of the larger society.

### *The Workplace*

I have pointed to a number of important shifts in the work lives of Deaf people, from essentially a one-class community to a split working-class and middle-class community (Padden, 1990). Among the more important of these changes has been the growth of a professional class in the Deaf community, from teachers of deaf children to sign language teachers and the social service professionals.

The professional class began to emerge in the 1960s, following a larger trend toward specialization and professionalization in education. No longer would a high school or college degree suffice; teachers needed certificates and master's degrees. New specialties were offered for "RCDs" (rehabilitation counselors for the deaf), along with degrees in "elementary education," "post-secondary education," and so on, highlighting the burgeoning industry of special education in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, one of the major workplaces for Deaf people is the school.

In addition, as public interest in ethnic diversity increased, the demand for adult classes in ASL exploded, to an estimated 50,000 new students each year in the language (*San Diego Tribune*, January 27, 1989), with classes in colleges and universities and, in increasing numbers, even high schools. A new industry of sign language teaching emerged, with a demand for teachers of ASL and sign language interpreting.

Coming at the tail end of these changes in Deaf people's work lives was an event many have pointed to as a profound turning point in the Deaf community, the "Deaf President Now" movement. In 1988, the students at

Gallaudet University organized a large and visible protest of its Board of Trustees' appointment of a new hearing president (Gannon, 1989). They presented a list of five demands to the Board, including the replacement of the president with a deaf person and a change of balance of representation on the Board to a majority of deaf people. Some have likened the protest to a revolution, but I have claimed (Padden, 1990) that while it was a momentous event, it was largely a revolution of the middle class. The Deaf middle class demanded a reorganization of its workplace to accommodate Deaf people as managers, administrators, even presidents and CEOs.

Not surprisingly, issues of bilingualism and biculturalism have been deeply intertwined in the protest and its aftermath. The university, and many other workplaces involving Deaf and hearing people, continue an internal debate on a variety of issues related to language use in the workplace and how deeply they should change to accommodate "cultural differences" between hearing and Deaf people. In the universities, as anywhere else in the community, it is less clear than before where the boundaries of Deafness are, or what they mean.

The anxiety over boundaries is partly class-related. When the Deaf middle class left the Deaf clubs, they took a certain amount of class anxiety with them, reflected in the nostalgic ways in which they talk today about the clubs, sports events, and the churches. The "real" culture, as it was in the old days, is said to live on in the occasional meetings of the Union League in New York City, or in the covert betting behind the courts at the annual American Athletic Association of the Deaf Basketball Tournament. But the reality is that Deaf clubs attract far fewer attendees than they did thirty or forty years ago, if they still exist at all, and their impact on the professional class of Deaf people is more nostalgic than political or social. The class divide is wide and difficult.

As the professional class left the clubs and saw their schools change, they have found themselves marooned with uncertain boundaries in rapidly changing workplaces and social spaces. This is why, in the place of the schools and clubs of the past, there is a great deal of interest in languages and cultures, particularly in how they represent differences and distances.

### *The "Bicultural" Deaf Community*

To talk of the "bicultural" is not to talk about an additive state, to be of two cultures, but more about states of tensions. Deaf people coexist,

indeed work, with hearing people in different ways today than they did thirty or forty years ago. Their changing work lives have given rise to a new vocabulary that maps out, more carefully and consciously than before, differences in languages and cultures. The new vocabulary draws from the traditions of language study and cultural anthropology, borrowing from them the essential features of linguistic and cultural relativism, of legitimacy across languages and cultures. As the familiar walls of the deaf school began to crumble and Deaf clubs were reconstituted into working-class social sites, the middle-class professional Deaf people began to imagine new ways of representing themselves, largely in the form of calls for cultural ways of living and bicultural schools and workplaces. As the community travels through the modern world, there will most certainly be even newer vocabulary, seeking to stake out and mark the community's place in a continually changing world.

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## CHAPTER SIX

Early Bilingual Lives  
of Deaf Children

CAROL A. PADDEN

## Introduction

Deaf people join groups of people all over the world who must manage two languages, one of which is a dominant-world language and the other a minority, often unfavored language.<sup>1</sup> In the United States and Canada, Deaf people who use American Sign Language (ASL) as the preferred everyday language interact, often intimately, with individuals who use English – hearing teachers, relatives, and co-workers. Deaf people have many opportunities to use only ASL, but rarely can they avoid contact with English. They are more likely to have parents who use English than parents who use ASL. They are more likely to have teachers who are native speakers of English. Many have co-workers who speak only English.

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<sup>1</sup> I follow a convention used elsewhere in which the capitalized form "Deaf" is used in referring to those deaf individuals whose primary everyday language is American Sign Language. The audiological condition of deafness is marked with the lowercase form "deaf."