

5-1-2013

Acquisition of the English Language: An Examination of Deaf Students and Literacy

Kristin Mahoney
Western Oregon University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Disability and Equity in Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mahoney, Kristin, "Acquisition of the English Language: An Examination of Deaf Students and Literacy" (2013). *Honors Senior Theses/Projects*. 54.

http://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors_theses/54

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Senior Theses/Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@wou.edu.

**Acquisition of the English Language:
An Examination of Deaf Students and Literacy**

By:

Kristin Mahoney

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Robert Troyer,
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

Western Oregon University
May 2013

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Forward.....	iv
Literature Review	1
Introduction	8
Common Misconceptions.....	10
Nomenclatures/Abbreviations.....	14
Language Acquisition.....	15
Effects of Recent Legislation in Public Schools	19
Model of a Deaf School in the 80's.....	21
Model of a Modern Deaf School.....	23
Problems in the Schools.....	24
Conclusion.....	28
Works Cited.....	30

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Robert Troyer, my thesis advisor, for helping me move past the idea phase, directing me to numerous sources, and reading multiple drafts of this thesis.

I would also like to thank Dr. Gavin Keulks, the honors advisor, for always answering my random questions honestly and earnestly.

And finally, I would like to thank my Dad, Mom, and sister Megan for their support throughout this long process and for giving up valuable family time for this project.

Foreword

The topic of deaf students gaining English literacy became fascinating to me because of my interest in ASL combined with my love of literature. In my second ASL class at Western Oregon University, my ASL professor, who also happens to be deaf, showed my class a children's book about how sign language came to America. While he flipped through the pages, I noticed a remarkable difference between the word choices and sentence structure in that book and the stories I read as a child. The book, produced by a deaf publishing firm, was very different from other types of writing I had seen over the years. It was then that I became interested in how children who are deaf learn the English language when they cannot hear the language being spoken.

I also gained interest in the writing aspect of this topic when I took a writing class at Western and was partnered with a deaf student for the final project of the term. I found his writing style much different from my own, though the content was very similar. Many of the common words used in a paragraph, such as "and", "the", and "a", were missing from his papers and the order of the words were often different than normally seen. I wondered how someone gained entrance into college without learning the basic sentence structures of academic writing. His work, on a conceptual level, was on par with any average student in college, and I knew he had to have received a

decent, if not, excellent education in middle and high school. So I began to wonder how an educated deaf student could lack the fundamental English writing skills that most hearing students learned in elementary school.

Literature Review

For my thesis, I examined many different articles and books regarding the topic of deaf students gaining English literacy, the policies in place, as well as the problems surrounding such a daunting task. I have organized this literature review chronologically with the oldest article/book first and the most recent last.

1980's

How one gains a language has had decades if not centuries of research. However, acquisition of a language for a deaf child has only just recently gained some semblance of research. Kathryn P. Meadows-Orlans gives the best summary of acquiring a signed language as well as the dominant language of the hearing world into which they are born. In her book, *Deafness and Child Development* (1980), she explains the possible situations a deaf child can be born into. For example, a deaf child can have either deaf or hearing parents who potentially use or don't use a signed language in their home. She goes on to explain how teaching deaf students has always been a heated topic and how the controversy surrounding this subject now influences much of the deaf culture.

Carol J. Erting in her book, *Cultural Conflict in a School for Deaf Children* (1985), continues this idea of acquiring a language but also discusses the

theory that deaf parents do want their children to be successful with the English language in certain situations but the deaf parents also emphasize that they have a language for everyday communication that should not be marginalized. Erting describes a school, where she once worked, which uses Manual Encoded English and doesn't allow ASL in their classrooms.

Furthermore, all teachers and parents were required to speak as they sign every word spoken. All children were also required to have some form of a hearing aid. While she saw many benefits to this method, she found this approach limiting as well as potentially hurtful to deaf culture. Many things have changed since the 80's and certain mandatory requirements, such as insisting that hearing aids should be worn, is considered a breach of personal rights.

Oliver W. Sacks, in his book *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf* (1989), writes about deaf culture and how sign language is at the center of it. It begins with the history of deaf people and the evolution of the culture as well as the recognition of ASL as an actual language instead of a pidgin language. He also speaks about the advancement of deaf people and staking their claim on the world. For example, he writes about the 1988 revolt at Gallaudet University when the students rallied to protest against having a hearing president of the university. They staged this revolution and won, which solidified their place as users of a language and citizens of a culture

that will not be shoved aside. This book gives vital information about the evolution of deaf culture. However, as is common in much of the available literature, it is written by a hearing person looking in on a different culture. He's an outsider, and while outsiders can have vital insights on a culture, it isn't the same as an insider's perspective.

M. Virginia Swisher who wrote *The Language-Learning Situation of Deaf Students* (1989), discusses the problems deaf students face during their time in school. The article begins by explaining the viewpoint many have towards ASL regarding its' uniqueness as both a minority language in the hearing world and a majority language for an entire culture. In order to function in the society in which they live deaf people must become bilingual. This article also addresses the growing custom for deaf students to attend universities or colleges where, many times, they are placed in classes for remedial English because they were ill prepared in their elementary or secondary education. This article examines much of the issue that I explain in the body of my thesis.

1990's

"I see a voice" by Jonathan Ree (1999), deals with the history and development of deaf culture and the many challenges deaf people face in their

daily lives. By setting up a historical background, he shows the progress society has made in its' treatment of the deaf. In his opening the author talks about how the voice defines us, makes us who we are. Many believe, without our voice we are unable to communicate thus we lose who we are. In the deaf community, voice is very controversial, with debate focused on whether or not a deaf person should learn to speak or assert that sign language is their voice. Many of the controversies surrounding deaf culture deals with the acquisition of a cochlear implant or other forms of hearing aids, which promote the idea of "hearing" as being the "preferred" way of life. This conflict also coincides with the idea of children learning a spoken language to adapt to a hearing world. While the deaf community is small, it is strong in its' convictions. Many deaf people feel pressured, from both sides, to accept or reject the idea of a cochlear implant. Many parents also feel pressure to pick a side on whether to mainstream deaf children into hearing schools or to find a deaf school even if it is much farther away. Ree's book addresses these issues along with other controversies in the deaf community. The second section of the book discusses the evolution of the "signed" language: what was once a stunted language grew into one with depth and beauty. Much of the book covers common misconceptions surrounding the deaf community. The major one, in this section, is the idea that deaf people must somehow make up for what they lost. In reality, they haven't lost anything but gained a language and

an entire culture. This section helped inform the common misconceptions section of my paper.

2000's

Barbara R. Schirmer, who wrote *Language and Literacy Development in Children Who Are Deaf* (2000), discusses how deaf children acquire the linguistic knowledge required for basic written essays. It also examines methods for teaching students who are deaf as well as formal and informal ways of testing these methods. This text, furthermore, links theory and practice for the development of activities used in classrooms.

John T.E. Richardson and Alan Woodley's article, *Approaches to Studying and Communication Preferences among Deaf Students in distance Education* (2001), examines the different approaches deaf students take to higher education. While their test scores are the same, if not higher in certain areas than their hearing counterparts, they had difficulty with written assignments or had to go to greater lengths to complete them. Richardson and Woodley also noted that there isn't an indigenous writing system used by deaf people so they have taken on the writing system of the spoken language in which they live, like English. This is an important distinction from a bilingual learner who might have learned to read and write in their native

language—they are better equipped to use those methods to learn a second language through reading and writing as well as speech.

Next, I examined the book, *Literacy and Deaf People: Cultural and Contextual Perspectives* (2004) which is a compilation of articles edited by Brenda Jo Brueggeman and published by Gallaudet University Press. Many of the articles talk about deaf culture's recent shifts in attitude towards literacy. They point out the dominance of hearing culture in the educational system of deaf schools and explain how the deaf community is addressing this issue. The second part of the book focuses on bilingual development and multicultural involvement in education for deaf students. This book also addresses the ability to become bilingual in both the hearing and deaf language and how it can be acquired despite someone's age. This supports my theory that acquiring English literacy and being able to participate in the hearing world does not mean deaf people need to "lose" their deaf culture.

"What Does Culture Have to Do with the Education of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing?" written in 2004 by Claire Ramsey explains how culture can affect peoples' perception of a specific group. She states that popular definitions of culture are "problematic," especially when it comes to broad groups such as "special education" students. Ramsey elaborates by explaining how deaf children face two cultures: that of the mainstream hearing culture and the culture of American Deaf people. Deaf children are

border dwellers who are never fully enveloped in one culture. As they grow, they make a decision to choose the ASL/signing -Deaf Community or the hearing society. Ramsey asserts that regarding the choice between deaf culture or hearing culture there is never truly a middle ground. Living in both worlds means potentially compromising one or the other. One remark she fails to make is that technology is helping bridge this cultural gap. Now it is much easier for the deaf and hearing to communicate via phone with video translators and texting.

Children are born into a culture courtesy of their parents' heritage, but deaf children specifically are born into a hearing world but are immediately part of deaf culture, though they may or may not have had the choice or opportunity to become part of either culture. The main controversy within deaf culture is the issue of deaf children getting cochlear implants and/or hearing aids. Either way, deaf children will need to learn English or another language in a much different way from children who can hear the language being spoken. This is the basic premise for my research, the acquisition of a second language, which acts as the primary language when it comes to reading and writing. However, Ramsey's article is geared towards people who have a much narrower view of culture and, thus, acts as an introduction to deaf culture. Deaf culture consists of the practices, ideals, and the approach to the world that is shared by all deaf people who choose to align with these

principles. Deaf children are caught between cultures especially if the child has hearing parents. They will be part of the hearing culture because of their parents but if taught ASL while attending a deaf school, they could also become part of the deaf community. If a deaf student has deaf parents they could grow up in the deaf culture as the dominant culture while also partaking in parts of the hearing culture. Ramsey's article ends with explaining that the best teachers of English to deaf students are people who understand deaf culture.

Introduction

Just a few decades ago the gaps in the acquisition of the English language for deaf students was thought to be solved by limiting the use of sign language and increasing the use of spoken English. In order to grasp the English language, educators believed the use of a signed language hindered progress and limited intelligence. In today's society, however, the attitudes towards sign language have changed drastically. Today all scholars and most Americans in general acknowledge that signed languages are complex, expressive, and equal to every other spoken language in the world.

Deaf children with deaf parents get a different pre-literacy education at home than they do in mainstreamed schools. While many hearing parents teach their hearing children to read in the same way as the teachers in their children's schools teach it, deaf parents are unable to do this with their deaf children. Sounding words out or matching sounds with letters is impossible if the student can't hear these sounds. A different approach must be taken. This paper will clarify the approaches that have been used in the past as well as the methods currently being used and will make recommendations for future approaches. It will also address current misconceptions about deaf people and students.

There are many levels of deafness, but the main focus of this thesis is children who are deaf. This group is the one that runs into the most problems

when it comes to teaching reading and writing similar to the school system's way of teaching. This is aimed at teachers and administrators in public schools where mainstreamed deaf students need to learn to read and write in the English language so that, by the time they enter high school and college, they will perform at an equal or higher level than their hearing counterparts.

Common Misconceptions

Much of the deaf world and culture is shrouded in mystery for those in the hearing world. The lack of educational tools for the hearing about the deaf has led to certain misconceptions about the deaf community as exemplified by the following taken from the Metro Regional Service Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People:

All Deaf People want to be Hearing

While many who only have partial hearing loss or have lost their hearing later in life wish to regain their hearing, many are proud to be a part of the Deaf Community and enjoy the rich tapestry of Deaf Culture. They don't see this as a disability of losing a sense or as a hindrance.

Most Deaf People have Deaf Parents

In reality, less than 5% of deaf children have a deaf parent. Over 90% of deaf parents have hearing children and 90% of deaf children were born to hearing parents.

All Deaf People are Mute

This common misconception stems from the conscious choice many deaf people make to not use their voice. In reality some

deaf people actually do speak and do it well. Many of those who don't use their voice choose not to for many reasons. Some believe others will not understand them or their volume level will be too high for certain settings.

All Deaf People can read Lips

While many deaf people can become quite adept at reading other people's lips, many choose not to learn this craft. In reality, only 30% of the English language can be seen on the lips, because many words have the same outer mouth movements and only differ in the inner mouth articulations. Many of the people who choose to read lips are hard of hearing rather than entirely deaf; because they are able to distinguish some sounds reading lips is easier.

All Deaf People use Sign Language

While many choose to use American Sign Language or some other sign system, some choose other options to communicate. Some who lose their hearing later in life don't use sign language.

Deaf People Lead Different Lives from Hearing People

In reality, deaf people lead very similar lives to hearing people. They drive cars, get married, have children, go to school or work, go to the market or to the mall, and pay their bills. Certain differences do exist, such as where they attend school or how they use the phone.

Deaf People can't Use the Phone

In reality, new technology has led to the advancement of tools for the deaf including ones allowing them to use telephones. Most deaf households have a special ringer with a flashing light to signal when the phone is ringing. Once on the phone, many have built in video chat options where two deaf people can see each other and sign. They also have the ability to speak with hearing people through the use of TTYs/TDDs (typewriters) which are directly connected to the phone lines. Or they can use a rather new device: video translators.

Deaf People Can't Enjoy Movies or Music

What about Beethoven? He was deaf and become one of the world's greatest composers. Deaf people "feel" the vibrations in the music rather than "hear" it, like their hearing counterparts.

Also, there are deaf dancers, musicians, actors, and entire deaf theatre companies such as the National Theatre of the Deaf. In movie theatres or on DVD's there is the option of captioning or other audio/visual tools to aid them.

All Deaf People use Hearing Aids

While many people benefit from the use of hearing aids due to their ability to amplify loud sounds such as alarms or honking horns, which can allow them to avoid potential accidents or dangers, many don't benefit at all. In reality, hearing aid usage depends on several factors depending on the individual person.

Hearing Aids Restore Hearing

"Hearing aids amplify sound, but do not correct hearing. They have no effect on a person's ability to process that sound. In cases where a hearing loss distorts incoming sounds, a hearing aid can do nothing to correct it. In fact, it may make the distortion worse. A hearing aid may enable a person to hear someone's voice, but not be able to understand distinct words".

All Deaf People are less Intelligent

“The inability to hear affects neither native intelligence nor the physical ability to produce sounds”. When a person doesn’t hear or speak this doesn’t, in any way, mean they are less capable of learning and gaining knowledge. The stereotype of “deaf and dumb” is considered highly offensive in the Deaf Community.

Nomenclatures/Abbreviations

ADA: American Disabilities Act

ASDC: American Society of Deaf Children

ASL: American Sign Language

CC: Closed-Captioning

CODA: Child of Deaf Adults

DHH: Deaf or Hard of Hearing

DOD: Deaf (child) of Deaf (adult)

ESL: English as a Second Language

HoH: Hard of Hearing

MCE: Manually Encoded English

NAD: National Association of the Deaf (USA)

NTD: National Theatre of the Deaf (USA)

SEE: Signed Exact English (North America)

SL: Sign Language

TSS: Telephone Device for the Deaf

TDI: Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc. (USA)

TTY: Teletypewriter

WFD: World Federation of the Deaf

WFDYS: World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section

Language Acquisition

“The main educational hurdle faced by deaf students is acquisition of the language of the community into which they are born- acquisition not only of speech production but of the linguistic system itself. For many students the language of the community becomes neither their first language, in the sense that they may never achieve native-like grammatical competence in the language, nor, in the traditional terms, a second language, in the sense that they may not be exposed in early life to any other language they can readily acquire.”

The Language-Learning Situation of Deaf Students (1989)
~M.A. Swisher

In every culture, language is a primary unifying factor that connects people. From birth, a baby begins to learn the language spoken in the house. Be it Spanish, English, or American Sign Language a baby learns to communicate with their parents. While there are many stages to this learning process the steps don't vary much between spoken languages (Lightbrown and Spada). Children who live in households with access to different levels of reading material and whose parents talk to and read to them tend to succeed in school. The opposite of this, where children don't have access to the same materials as their schoolmates and whose parents don't participate in discussions or stress the importance of reading and writing, tend to do poorly

in school, though there are exceptions. In her article "*What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school*", Shirley Brice Heath stresses this difference in child raising and the impacts it can have on children. A child who grows up in a literature rich home with parents who have discussions with them, has a better chance of succeeding in school than a child who grows up in a home without literature or discussions. Despite both children having the same ability to learn, it shows that "nurture" is an important part of education (Heath).

Meadow, in her book *Deafness and Childhood Development*, addresses the idea of where and when deaf children acquire their first language, be it English or some form of sign language.

Situation of First Language Acquisition for deaf children:

- 1) Children whose parents are deaf and use American Sign Language as their primary way of communicating in everyday life.
- 2) Children whose hearing or deaf parents use a combination of American Sign Language and spoken English in everyday life.
- 3) Children whose hearing parents use only spoken language.

Many people assume that children who are deaf have deaf parents; however, only 5% of deaf children come from deaf parents (deaf.org). Thus, most times, hearing parents caught off guard by the pronouncement that their child is

deaf must make the decision to use only English and/or to learn as much sign language as quickly as possible in order to use it with their child. The daunting task of learning a sign language as an adult can also influence this decision. Eventually, when the child reaches school age, the parents must choose to either mainstream their child in a hearing environment or send them to a specialty school where a sign language is the dominant language.

Most children are born with the capacity to learn all aspects of the mother tongue or the language spoken in the home. With deaf children a portion of this education, the audible facet of language acquisition is lost. For deaf children, with hearing parents, the language learned at home isn't the dominant language spoken in the society they are living in, and the child quickly has to learn a second language while also learning the signed language, if they want to partake in both the hearing and deaf societies in which they were born. Luckily, with children, acquiring this second language is much easier than learning a new language at a much older age. Hearing children in a similar situation, with say Spanish as their home language and English as the second language, are surrounded by the spoken words of English and immersed in its social use, both in school and in society.

For typical hearing students, much of elementary school language arts classes are spent teaching students how to transfer their spoken language skills to reading and writing as well as the formal pronunciation of words.

While spelling, generally, isn't an issue for hearing students who have the ability to "sound out" a word, it is very problematic for deaf students who have to "sight" the word, which makes teaching literacy much harder. As a deaf student progresses through elementary school linguistic elements of sentence structure as well as other written elements can become harder to understand, and for a teacher harder to explain. By the time many hearing people reach high school or even college, the words and syntax of academic writing are almost second nature and don't require much attention when it comes to writing papers or essays, though many university and colleges require at least one course devoted to 'college writing'. The problem faced by many deaf students, as well as any other bilingual student, is the challenge of mastering the academic register of English reading and writing. However, for bilingual students in a college setting, this problem is reduced because of the time spent immersed in hearing the English language. For deaf students, the situation would be like a hearing person who must learn a new language only through reading and writing, never being allowed to speak it, then being thrown into an environment where they are expected to read and write at the same level as native speakers. This is so different from how most people learn language (orally first, then in writing) that the situation inhibits native-speaker-like or even typical second language acquisition processes.

Effects of Recent Legislation on Public Schools

With such a huge push for literacy and education in today's society, legislation such as No Child Left Behind causes added strain and stress for educators across the country. This has increased the significance of high stakes testing, which, in turn, means educators are forced to "teach to the test". By having a heavy focus on the test, many teachers are forced to accelerate the pace of the material covered which, at times, can hinder children who need to spend more time on certain areas. Memorization is substituted for comprehension, and for many students this format is ill matched to their method of learning.

The No Child Left Behind Act was implemented in 2001 under the Bush administration and is a "standards based" reform in which emphasis is placed on statewide test scores meaning benchmark grade levels must show remarkable improvement from the previous year in order to escape reprimand. Students with disabilities or handicaps, despite the level of that disability, are expected to show some form of progress if not full performance at grade level. This leaves many people uneasy, considering that many children take longer to perform at grade level despite the teacher's abilities as an educator. Schools are required to fulfill the needs of the students through specialty classes or in class assistance. Bu with budget cuts and schools failing state mandates many of these students are slipping through the cracks. This

means many deaf children who are mainstreamed into public schools, need more one on one time with the teacher to learn a language that they cannot speak or hear but are required to read and write in and they aren't getting the full assistance they may need. And with classroom sizes increasing and the requirements of administrators to implement top-down reforms, many children do, in fact, get left behind. This is contrary to the spirit of the law in which all children can succeed given the right education.

One Model for Teaching English to Deaf Students

In the late 80's, Carol Erting examined the Jackson School model during her time as a counselor for parents of deaf preschoolers. She looked at what worked and what didn't, especially when it came to the public's opinion of their approach to teaching deaf students English.

Many schools, like the Jackson School, use the "Total Communication" approach to educating deaf students. This is when parents and teachers attempt to use forms of English (explained below) so their children will have the best chances of acquiring English. The hearing parents and teachers use Simultaneous Communication where the primary goal is to teach English, both orally and through Manually Encoded English (MCE). Parents and teachers of this method are supposed to communicate through MCE even when speaking with another hearing person; this way learning is always occurring for the student. As part of using MCE, the adults are encouraged to sign every word, including articles such as "a/an" and "the" which aren't present in traditional American Sign Language (ASL). All students are required to wear some form of hearing aid as well.

Erting noticed that many of the parents were outraged that the primary language used for most deaf people outside of school wasn't being utilized by the school. She found that, "most Deaf parents [or parents with deaf children] are concerned that their children develop good English skills. However, they

[most deaf people] also recognize that they have a language-sign language- that takes the place of spoken language for purposes of everyday communication. Regardless of the label they use to refer to this sign language, they regard it as more efficient, natural, and esthetically pleasing than manually encoded English signing” (Erting, 236). In most Deaf Communities this still rings true today. Most choose to use ASL over MCE or spoken English even amongst the hearing community.

A Different Model for Teaching English

A much more modern approach to the education of deaf children is the integration of both English and ASL in the classroom. Many deaf schools use this system for their students, one example being the Oregon School for the Deaf in Salem Oregon. Their mission statement:

To provide a comprehensive K-21 educational program designed to meet the unique needs of students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (SHH) through a dual ASL/English model of instruction, assuring academic achievement to lead to a full range of post-secondary opportunities, employment, and productive citizenship.”

This model both embraces the dominant language being ASL and understands the importance and usefulness of learning English.

Problems in the Schools

There are many variations to and methods for teaching deaf students reading and writing of Standard English in the classroom, and “the efficacy of various methods of teaching language to deaf children has been hotly debated for over two hundred years. This controversy is an important part of the social and cultural context of the deaf child’s development, because it influences all the developmental issues related to deafness” (Meadow, 17). Making mistakes when it comes to teaching children anything can become a bigger issue later in life. Take, for example, the method of touch point math. Everything is counted using a dot system and while it works for children many adults who learned to count this way find it a hard habit to break. Teaching children an entirely new language, with concepts not used in their native language is both confusing and frustrating. If we assume that most deaf students enter school with ASL as their primary form of communication, we need to consider that ASL is used for manual communication only and the language itself doesn’t use a written system equivalent to other languages like Spanish or English. Richardson and Wooley also comment on this by saying:

“There are, however, no indigenous writing systems used by deaf people, and so they have to read and write in a spoken language such as English. Deaf people who acquire a sign language as their first language have to read and write in their second language, although

their situation may be different from that of hearing bilinguals who can communicate in two spoken language.” (62)

This is where the differentiation must be made between bilinguals whose first language is both spoken and written and the deaf. Deaf people are forced to use English as their first written language but it is considered their second language. In teaching a second language, the skills from learning the first language are often referred to, in order to aid in acquiring the language. However, for deaf students there is no literacy already in place when being taught the second language. It could be compared to, say, a native Spanish speaker who never learned to read or write in Spanish moving to the United States and learning literacy in English. While learning the spoken aspect is similar to when they learned Spanish, in regards to reading and writing there is no concept of literacy in place and the process is much more difficult. For deaf students it's even more difficult because they are unable to learn the language the same way for manual communication. There is also no written method in place for moving from, say, ASL to English which can become frustrating for deaf students as well as educators. While ASL and English have many similarities when it comes to word and sign choices, much is lost in translation in either direction.

Once English has, at some level, been taught these students move on to high school and, later, college where they face a greater intensity of reading

and writing in English. Richardson and Woodley examined a British deaf student's process of writing follows:

“Indeed, some [students] appeared to draft their essays in grammatical structures drawn from British Sign Language which then had to be ‘translated’ into correct English. One deaf signer explained her study strategy in the following way:”

- Read several times a topic
- Write Notes
- Write in non-grammar format, i.e. BSL
- Then write in English
- Talk through with a person
- Final draft of an essay (takes 3 weeks!) (74)

Though British Sign Language is vastly different from American Sign Language the idea behind this quote is the same. The process deaf students go through is far more time consuming than for their hearing counterparts. Once they've arrived at, say a university, many deaf students find themselves in remedial English and writing classes tailored to English as a Second Language (ESL) students. This happens because, “many errors of deaf students learning English are similar to those of foreign learners of English as a second language, and written compositions of deaf and ESL students at the same level of proficiency look similar over all” (Swisher, 240). Trying to explain

these differences, however, requires a much different approach. To a native speaker of, say, Spanish, the idea that green comes before turtle instead of after is relatively easy. But explaining the meaning of articles or tenses when the students' first language has neither is incredibly difficult. Swisher goes on to explain:

“Deaf students have problems acquiring functors such as articles, prepositions, the copula, and markers for verb tense and aspect, as well as difficulty mastering complex structures such as complements and relative clauses. That such similarities exist is interesting, given that deaf students, unlike other learners of English, do not have access to spoken input.” (240)

Without acquiring these common grammatical markers, writing successfully can be rather difficult especially when it comes to higher education where the expectations are much higher.

Conclusion

There is a great need for a shift in how deaf students gain English literacy. It is a much needed change because of the amount of deaf students entering colleges and universities without the proper fundamentals. Changes have to be made at the elementary and/or secondary level or the cycle will continue. These changes must include: incorporating both ASL and English into every subject, having a testing strategy for both oral communication and written, and time dedicated to the basics of written English and how it differs from the “spoken” that most learn to write from. This approach, while partially incorporated in some schools across the nation isn’t fully implemented. This appears to be the best approach to teaching deaf students given recent practices as well as the overwhelming support dual ASL and English immersion schools get. While this process, in its entirety, is still theoretical parts of it has been shown to work, as in the Oregon School for the Deaf.

However, further research needs to be conducted regarding the writing of deaf students compiled over a course of a few generations. Perhaps we should examine the writing of deaf students from the 1980’s and compare it to that of current students, to see the changes made on both a large scale and a small scale. This will either prove or disprove the benefit of dual teaching versus other approaches such as the “Total Communication” Method. True

advancements in the literacy of deaf students can be made if schools are willing to examine their practices and to determine how their strategies has affected their graduates who moved on to higher education.

Works Cited

- Brueggemann, Brenda Jo. *Literacy and Deaf People: Cultural and Contextual Perspectives*. Washington DC: Gallaudet UP, 2004. Print.
- Erting, Carol J. "Cultural Conflict in a School for Deaf Children." *American Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 16.3 (1985): n. pag. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Apr. 2013.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. "What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and School." *Language in Society* 11.01 (1982): 49. Print.
- Lightbrown and Spada. *How Languages are Learned*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2006.
- Meadow-Orlans, Kathryn P. *Deafness and Child Development*. Berkeley: University of California, 1980. Print.
- "Myths About Deaf and Hard of Hearing." *Metro Regional Service Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People*. Minnesota Department of Human Services, n.d. Web. 02 May 2013.
- "Oregon School for the Deaf Fact Sheet 2010-2011." *Oregon School for the Deaf Biennial Reports*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 May 2013.
- Ramsey, Claire. "What Does Culture Have to Do with the Education of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing?". Gallaudet UP, 2004. Online.
- Rée, Jonathan. *I See A Voice*. New York: Metropolitan , H. Holt and, 1999. Print.

- Richardson, John T.E., and A. Woodley. "Approaches to Studying and Communication Preferences among Deaf Students in Distance Education." *Higher Education* 42.1 (2001): n. pag. Print.
- Sacks, Oliver W. *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf*. Berkeley: University of California, 1989. Print.
- Schirmer, Barbara R. *Language and Literacy Development in Children Who Are Deaf*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000. Print.
- Swisher, M.V. "The Language-Learning Situation of Deaf Students." *TESOL Quarterly* 23. 2. (1989): Print.