

The American Deaf Community

For more than a hundred years, there was a concerted effort to eradicate any use of sign language in this country, and for all of that time American Sign Language was passed down, from generation to generation, without break, without faltering. Today, deaf children leave school after years of manually coded English and turn to ASL as their primary means of communication. Exposure to ASL can be delayed until adulthood, fluency in it can be thereby impaired, general linguistic competence can be thereby injured, but the great majority of deaf people will continue to use it as best and as soon as they can. Regardless of efforts to so—regardless of how hearing people try to imagine, reimagine, and reconstruct deafness—ASL and the deaf community, it would seem, will not be undone. (Baynton, 1996, p. 163)

Deaf ASL signers are able to acquire the language, traditions, and social behaviors that are the common features of American Deaf culture, but the channels of language acquisition are largely different from those in the mainstream society. Whereas spoken languages are transmitted from generation to generation within families, most Deaf people acquire sign language from other Deaf people and teachers because their hearing parents do not sign (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996, p. 48). While the existence of deaf people has been acknowledged in the mainstream society, Deaf culture is an unfamiliar concept to most people. Deafness is largely defined as a physical disability that can be mitigated with modern technology and accommodation such that people who are afflicted by deafness can be realigned with the mainstream society (Lane, 2002). It has not occurred to many people that deafness can also be a cultural attribute of a deaf community and that deaf people have their own language that is distinct from their spoken language. In addition, they unconsciously adhere to the definition of *culture* as one's membership in a group, more specifically, as belonging to a family within a community, where language, tradition, and social behaviors are shared and passed on from adults to children in successive generations through familial relationships (Baynton,

1996, p. 2). The use of the uppercase *D* and the lowercase *d* in the word *deaf* has significant meaning to those who are familiar with Deaf culture. Uppercase *D* is used to describe communities of sign language users with various degrees of hearing loss who subscribe to similar cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors relating to deafness. Lowercase *d* describes the audiological condition of deafness. Individuals who are *deaf* may not necessarily be *Deaf*.

Historically, the cultural attributes of deaf communities arose within the educational institutions for the deaf where the community members acquired and used signed language, formed lifelong friendships, and developed their community identities as deaf people. In a world without institutions for deaf people, deaf communities would not be easily formed and signed languages would not be used as widely as they are today (Monaghan, 2003, p. 20). After the first American public institution for the deaf, the American School for the Deaf (ASD), was founded in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817, a signed language was developed from a mixture of French Sign Language (the native language of the school's first deaf teacher), the indigenous sign language of Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, the indigenous sign language of Henniker, New Hampshire, and deaf children's home signs⁵ (Lane et al., 1996, pp. 56–58). The signed language continued to flourish through generations of deaf children at ASD and other institutions for the deaf. Some of those deaf children became teachers and served as the signed language models for deaf children at the institutions. Some deaf graduates of the institutions had deaf and hearing children to whom they passed on their signed language. The founding of other institutions for the deaf spread southward and westward from the first institution in Hartford, and deaf communities formed around the institutions to maintain community ties (Lane et al., 1996; Padden & Humphries, 1988). With geographical separation, dialects of the signed language emerged in different communities.

Until the early 1960s, this language was simply called “the sign language” (Padden & Humphries, 2005). It finally received a name in 1965 when William C. Stokoe, Carl Croneberg, and Dorothy Casterline published the first linguistic analysis of what they called American

5. Home sign is a system of gestures spontaneously created in a single family with at least one deaf family member (typically a child). Because family members do not know sign language, they invent gestures to communicate with their deaf member (Goldin-Meadow and Mylander, 1994).

Sign Language; this was the first study of any signed language in the world (Liddell, 2003, p. 2). This linguistic validation of ASL should have been cause for celebration, but instead it initially created anxiety, confusion, and anger (Liddell, 2003, p. 4; Padden & Humphries, 2005, pp. 125–128; Schein & Stewart, 1995, pp. 23–24). Anxiety emerged because the community struggled to understand ASL as more than just a way to communicate with hands and eyes and to equate its linguistic status with that of English, which had been long held as standard. Confusion occurred because it was difficult for the Deaf community to discuss ASL as a language in the midst of label changes: from *the sign language* to *American Sign Language* to *Ameslan*⁶ to ASL (Padden & Humphries, 2005, pp. 126–127). Anger arose because the community’s belief that ASL was an imperfect system was challenged. Stokoe was attacked by people inside and outside of the American Deaf community because of his assertion that ASL was a valid linguistic system and should be used as a medium of instruction in the education systems for deaf children (Padden & Humphries, 2005; Schein & Stewart, 1995). A few decades later, ASL is now a popular language studied as a foreign or second language in secondary schools and postsecondary institutions (Padden & Humphries, 2005; Rosen, 2010).

STANDARD ASL

Since the early linguistic studies of ASL, standard ASL has been sustained and shaped by ASL teaching curriculum, canonical publications (such as ASL dictionaries and textbooks), ASL proficiency evaluations, and professional organizations. Croneberg (1965) explicitly stated that “the body of signs used at Gallaudet, then, must contain the main base of what we call *standard ASL*” (p. 319, emphasis added).

In addition, a common belief within the Deaf community is that early ASL acquisition and ASL exposure are important factors in developing ASL proficiency (which is usually standard ASL). For example, Deaf people who are proficient in ASL are either part of the Deaf generational lineage or have attended special schools for the deaf where ASL is the norm. In contrast, deaf people who are less proficient in ASL are assumed

6. The term “Ameslan” was coined by Louie J. Fant (1972).

to be raised by hearing families or be schooled in a mainstream educational setting where ASL has a marginal role in an English-dominant curriculum.

In reality, it is possible that there is more than one ASL standard in the American Deaf community based on social factors such as generational status, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and region. Education is another aspect that is strongly linked with the reality of the American Deaf community. For example, deaf education has a historical and ongoing impact on the language of instruction for deaf and hard of hearing children. Given that English is the national language in the United States and that Americans are expected to be proficient in English, proponents and opponents of ASL as the language of instruction have exerted both educational and political pressure. To complicate matters further, an increasing number of deaf and hard of hearing students are being schooled in mainstream educational settings with a variety of communication methods (from English-only to bilingual–bimodal practices), and a decreasing number of students are enrolled at special schools for the deaf where ASL is usually practiced. Another factor to consider is the viewpoints of the deaf communities and even individuals on which ASL forms and features should be deemed standard or acceptable to distinguish them from the forms and features that are based on English. This volume presents the results of an exploratory study to determine the linguistic and social factors that govern attitudes toward signing among the diverse social groups in the American Deaf community.

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Attitude is defined as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). The particular entity being evaluated is called the *attitude object* (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, p. 583). In the study presented here, the attitude object was a deaf or hard of hearing person’s signing. Because the attitude object is a language, the study focused on affective, cognitive, and behavioral types of evaluative responses toward particular language varieties (that is, languages, dialects, pidgins, and creoles) based on stereotypical perceptions of social groups who use those varieties (Preston, 2002; Campbell-Kibler, 2006, 2009; Garrett,

2010). Responses toward language varieties, which are attitude objects, are based on two perceptions: a sensory perception of linguistic items in a language variety and a stereotypical perception of a social group that uses these items. Linguistic items can be found on different linguistic levels from phonology (in the specific sense) to discourse (in the broadest sense). For example, on the phonological level, one community may produce a vowel in a word differently from another community (e.g., vowels /e/ and /i/ in *pin*); on the lexical level, two mutually intelligible linguistic communities use different words to refer to same objects (e.g., *soda/pop/coke*, *sofa/couch/davenport*); and on the grammatical and discourse levels, one community can have a sentential construction different from that used in another community to produce the same meaning (e.g., *She is usually home at 7* / *She be home at 7*).

Linguistic items usually evoke a stereotypical image of a social group. For example, the grammatical construction of *She be home at 7* is a typical and acceptable construction in AAE but it is not typical or acceptable in Standard English. This is where a stereotypical perception of a social group comes into play. The variants of a linguistic item are used by members of a social group to identify speakers who are socially similar or different; in other words, the variants carry *social meaning* for people to implicitly perceive and inform each other of their social characteristics (Garrett, 2010; Campbell-Kibler, 2009). Social meaning may elicit different evaluative responses toward a person's language and, in a social context, influences the social standing of members of a linguistic community. Attitudes toward language varieties are generally influenced by the process of language standardization (Garrett, 2010, p. 7).

When one language variety is deemed "standard," it impacts (usually devalues) the status of other language varieties and of social groups using those language varieties in a particular context (Garrett, 2010), and members of society, regardless of their social status, consciously or unconsciously "subscribe to the ideology of the standard language" (Milroy, 2001, p. 535) because of their belief in correctness. Even with people's awareness of a standard language or language variety, "standard" is relative based on perceptions within geographical regions. For example, the deletion of *r* in "car" (i.e., /ka/) is perceived as standard in New England, as is the presence of *r* in "car" (/kar/) in the South (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006, p. 12). The sentences "they go to the **beach**," "they go to the **shore**," and "they go to the **ocean**" are judged to be Standard English as well, depending on where the sentences are used (p. 12).

ASL AND ENGLISH IN THE AMERICAN DEAF COMMUNITY

In many ways, English is the standard language of the United States, and non-English languages (e.g., Spanish, Chinese, Navajo) are generally relegated to secondary status. Not only is English highly valued in the country, but the Standard English variety is highly favored over other English varieties (e.g., African American English, Appalachian English, Chicano English). In that sense, one must be proficient in Standard English in order to be a productive and respectable member of American society.

ASL is a full-fledged language that is historically, grammatically, and structurally independent of spoken English. ASL arose from the mixture of French Sign Language, home signs, and an indigenous sign language that was in use by American deaf people prior to the founding of the first school for the deaf (Lane et al., 1996; Lane, Pillard, & French, 2007; Groce, 1985). ASL is expressed not only with manual signs but also with grammatically obligatory and optional nonmanual signals produced on the face and upper torso. It is both a stigmatized language in mainstream American society and the standard language in the American Deaf community. The growth of ASL course offerings is phenomenal; for example, from 1987 to 2005, the number of U.S. public high schools offering ASL classes grew from 17 to 701 (>4000% increase) (Rosen, 2010). Also, ASL is among the top minority languages in the United States (Lane et al., 1996, p. 42; Padden & Humphries, 2005, p. 9).

It is difficult to determine the number of native⁷ or near-native deaf and hard of hearing ASL signers in the United States because various reports of the ASL population estimate run from 100,000 to 2,000,000, and the methods of gathering or calculating the estimate are questionable (Mitchell, Young, Bachleda, & Karchmer, 2006). Approximately 8% of deaf children in the United States have at least one parent who is deaf or hard of hearing, but an account of how many homes use ASL as the home language is not available (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). About 4.8% of deaf children have one hearing parent and one deaf or hard of hearing parent, and approximately 3.5% have two deaf or hard of hearing parents. Moreover, deaf and hard of hearing children who have at least one deaf parent are more likely to use sign language at home and school than those who have hard of hearing parents (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2005,

7. *Native* means acquiring a primary language fully during the critical period, the first few years of childhood.

p. 243). Ninety-two percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents and it is very likely that these deaf children are not exposed to ASL at home with their families (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004), so they usually acquire ASL at schools where deaf children use ASL as the communication medium with their peers and the school employees. However, ASL as the medium of classroom instruction has never been unchallenged. There have been many attempts in the past 150 years to replace ASL with oral and visual-kinetic communication systems that are designed to express the constructions of English (Baynton, 1996; Lane et al., 1996).

History of Deaf Education in America

Before the 1860s, deaf schools in America used manual-based instruction, meaning that the instructors and school staff signed with deaf students. Although the schools were concerned about deaf students' abilities to read and write English, they did not place great emphasis on the students' oral communication skills (Baynton, 1996; Lane et al., 1996). In fact, instructors were more concerned about subject-matter content that deaf students received than how well they developed oral communication skills. During the 1860s, a movement began to make U.S. deaf schools exclusively oral. This change reflected the situation in Europe, where oralism had gained greater momentum. During a conference of educators held in Milan in September 1880, delegates from deaf schools in France, Italy, several other European countries, and the United States debated the mode of communication to be used in deaf education. The American delegates had serious reservations about the effectiveness of instructing deaf students through oral means of communication, but the Europeans were impassioned about the need to restore deaf children to mainstream society, which they said could be done only by banning sign languages from schools and encouraging students to lipread and use the spoken language of their respective countries (Gallaudet, 1881). The resolutions passed at the closing of the conference ensured the dominance of oralism, and the deaf schools in the United States and Europe underwent major changes that affected not only Deaf students but also Deaf instructors, future generations of Deaf graduates, the livelihood of the Deaf community, and ultimately Deaf culture.

In the United States, most Deaf instructors were replaced by hearing instructors to nurture students' speech and residual hearing abilities. Every year, some deaf students failed to develop speech acceptable to hearing instructors and administrators, even after many years of speech training. In

addition, the schools' focus on oral communication skills overshadowed instruction in academic subjects (Baynton, 1996; Lane et al., 1996). Deaf students could not acquire language normally through the oral mode of communication, which affected their learning of academic content. Academic expectations for deaf students were then lowered because they did not learn at the same rate as their hearing peers.

Oralism continued to dominate American deaf education until the second half of the 20th century, when questions were raised about the benefits of teaching deaf students through oral-only instruction and research studies confirmed the status of ASL as a natural language (see Stokoe et al., 1965; Stokoe, 1972; Klima & Bellugi, 1979). After years of consistently poor performance in reading, writing, and academic subjects, some educators realized that deaf students needed to communicate visually in order to learn well. However, after a long period of repeated attempts to supplant ASL, it was difficult for many to embrace ASL as a natural medium of instruction (Lane et al., 1996). Common misconceptions about ASL abounded: ASL is broken English, ASL is a gestural system with a flexible or nonexistent grammar, ASL is too conceptual to be a language, ASL does not have abstract forms, ASL is not a language because it has no written form, and ASL is a crutch for deaf children that hampers their development of written English (Lane et al., 1996; Schein & Stewart, 1995; Wilcox & Wilcox, 1997; Liddell, 2003). These misconceptions fed the skepticism about the linguistic status of ASL.

Current State of Deaf Education in America

Deaf schools have been the crucibles for the acquisition and maintenance of ASL (Lucas, Bayley, & Valli, 2001, p. 52). Even though deaf schools went through the period of oralism when sign language was banned from the classroom, Deaf students secretly used ASL with each other and ASL was continually passed on from older children to younger children. Most deaf schools eventually dismantled the oralist practice, but condescending attitudes and misconceptions about ASL remained. Based on statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, Mitchell and Karchmer reported that the number of deaf and hard of hearing students per thousand school-age population decreased from 1.2% in 1976 to less than 1.0% in 1986 but increased in 1993 to 1.1%, where it has remained stable (2006, pp. 96–97). Although the number of deaf and hard of hearing children has been approximately the same, the number of children attending special schools and programs for the deaf has decreased

because of the rise of mainstreaming.⁸ Before the 1960s, almost 80% of U.S. deaf children attended residential schools for the deaf (Lane et al., 1996, p. 244); by 2010, the percentage had declined to 24.3% (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2011). The implication is that because the combination of speech and signs, most likely Simultaneous Communication, is used in some mainstream programs, more deaf and hard of hearing students have been exposed to it than before.

In deaf schools (including residential schools and special educational centers for the deaf), deaf and hard of hearing students stay together and enjoy the advantages of having accessible visual communication in every aspect of school life. Mainstreamed deaf and hard of hearing students do not have the same advantages. They tend to be widely distributed among neighborhood schools, and the schools have an extremely low number of deaf and hard of hearing students relative to the rest of the school population (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2006, pp. 95, 99). Mitchell and Karchmer report that, based on the Gallaudet Research Institute's 2002–2003 Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth, 80% of the participating schools serving deaf and hard of hearing students in the mainstream setting have three or fewer deaf and hard of hearing students, accounting for 40% of the 40,282 deaf and hard of hearing students reported in that survey (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2006, p. 99; Gallaudet Research Institute, 2003). In addition, almost one of every five deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstreaming is the only such student in his or her school (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2006, 99).

Within mainstreaming, there are four different kinds of instructional settings for deaf and hard of hearing students: regular education, resource rooms, and two different forms of self-contained classrooms (Karchmer & Mitchell, 2003; Stinson & Kluwin, 2003). In a regular education setting, deaf and hard of hearing students receive the same instruction as their hearing peers in all classes, with or without special accommodation. A resource room is similar to the regular education setting except that the students need to report to a few classes with special education teachers and receive specialized educational services catering to deaf and hard of hearing students. One form of self-contained classroom is the setting where deaf and hard of hearing students stay with special educa-

8. Mainstreaming is the practice of integrating deaf and hard of hearing students, as well as students with disabilities, with nondisabled students in regular classrooms with appropriate accommodation.

tion teachers for most of their classes, which tends to be isolated from the rest of the facilities for hearing students. Another form of self-contained classroom is a residential deaf school, where students may attend some classes while attending other classes in another educational facility serving hearing students.

The placement of deaf and hard of hearing students in one of the four instructional settings is based on the students' degree of hearing loss and their teachers' and parents' input, which together determine the communication method designed for the students' needs (Karchmer & Mitchell 2003, 2011). For example, students with profound hearing loss tend to be placed in the programs where signing or Simultaneous Communication (signing with speech) are used, whereas students with milder hearing loss are in the programs where speech is the primary instructional mode. Karchmer and Mitchell (2011) reported that in 2003, 90% of deaf and hard of hearing students attending deaf schools received instruction through signs or a combination of signs and speech (p. 22). Karchmer and Mitchell (2003) also found that almost 70% of the students in self-contained classrooms received sign- or sign-supported speech-based instruction, nearly 80% of the students in the regular school setting received instruction through speech, and 75.1% of the students in resource room setting receive speech-based instruction (see Table 1).

Along with the instructional modes of communication, some students are fitted with personal hearing devices to amplify their residual hearing. In the Gallaudet Research Institute's summary report (2011) of the 2009–2010 annual survey, 58% of students with hearing loss used hearing aids

TABLE 1. *Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in Instructional Settings, 2000–2001*

Instructional settings	N	Primary communication mode of instruction					Total
		Speech only	Speech and sign	Sign only	Cued speech	Other	
Regular school setting	11,442	79.7	18.4	1.3	0.2	0.3	100.0
Resource room	4,653	75.1	22.2	1.7	0.7	0.3	100.0
Self-contained classroom	10,190	29.9	63.3	5.0	0.6	1.2	100.0
Special school	9,029	8.9	74.3	15.4	0.0	1.4	100.0
Total	35,314	46.6	46.1	6.0	0.4	0.8	100.0

Note. Numbers are the percentage distributions. Adapted from Karchmer and Mitchell, 2003.

for instruction. Even though the number of cochlear implant users is small in the United States, it has increased rapidly from 5.3% of the 41,768 students in the 1999–2000 survey to 15% of the 37,107 students in the 2009–2010 survey (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2001, 2011).

The concept of using speech as a medium of instruction in deaf education is pretty straightforward. Deaf and hard of hearing students are encouraged to use their residual hearing and practice their oral communication skills with their teachers and with each other. The teachers speak to the students while being mindful of their students' special communication needs. Some students are fitted with personal hearing devices that further facilitate oral communication while some students prefer to do without. Speech-based instruction is prevalent in regular education and resource room settings, and students with milder hearing loss tend to be placed in these settings. Though not accounted for in Mitchell and Karchmer's statistical studies, it is possible that students who have profound hearing loss but possess good or excellent speech abilities may also be placed in these settings. Using sign communication as a medium of instruction is not as simple as it seems. Depending on school language policy and instructors' intentions, ASL may or may not be used in classroom. Even though ASL is accepted by some as a true language, its effectiveness as the medium of instruction is still hotly debated, especially when it comes to teaching English. Because deaf and hard of hearing students attend schools in United States, they are expected to achieve a certain level of literacy in English. The skepticism about the status of ASL may be one cause for the invention of manually coded systems for teaching English.

SIGNING VARIETIES

In the second half of the 20th century, when the ban on sign language use in classrooms started to be lifted, several educators developed communication tools to provide complete access to English by manual means. Collectively, these have come to be known as manually coded English (MCE). Examples of MCE are Signed English (SE), created by Harry Bornstein (Bornstein, Saulnier, & Hamilton, 1983); Seeing Essential English (SEE1), by David Anthony (Luetke-Stahlman & Milburn, 1996); Signing Exact English (SEE2), by Gerilee Gustason and colleagues (Gustason, Pfetzing, & Zawolkow, 1972; Gustason & Zawolkow, 1993); and Linguistics of Visual English (LOVE), by Dennis Wampler (1973). MCE systems, also known as “artificial sign systems,” can be used with

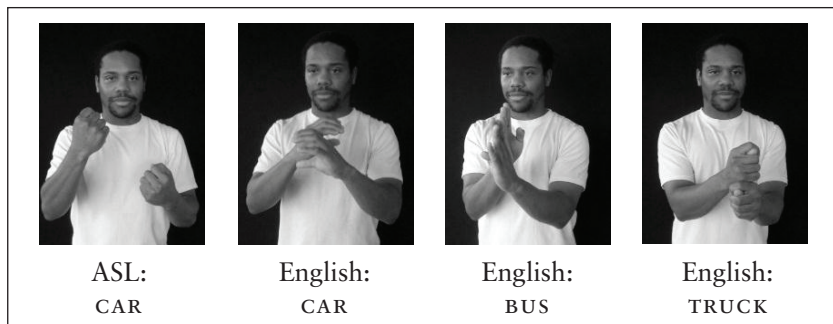


FIGURE 1. ASL sign and English-based initialized signs.

or without voice and are typically used in Simultaneous Communication⁹ programs (Power & Leigh, 2011, p. 39). For the sake of simplicity, only SEE₁, SEE₂, and SE are discussed here. MCE systems are designed in a particular way so that the essential features of English can be expressed visually; however, the systems differ from one another in their philosophy of how English should be expressed. In SEE₁, signs are designed to correspond with English morphemes or root words irrespective of conceptual meanings. For example, the English word “butterfly” is conveyed through two separate signs, BUTTER and FLY.¹⁰ SEE₂ developed from SEE₁ with a special concentration on the conceptual meanings of independent words and morphemes of English to which the signs corresponded. For example, SEE₂ has one conceptual sign for “butterfly” instead of the two signs used in SEE₁ (Gustason et al. 1972, 1993).

SEE₂ borrows some percentage of ASL signs, and the handshapes in the signs are usually modified to match the initial letter of the corresponding words, a process known as *initialization*. The signs CAR, BUS, and TRUCK are identical except for their handshapes: C for CAR, B for BUS, and T for TRUCK. The ASL sign for CAR is not initialized with the C handshape; this is an iconic sign that represents the hands handling a steering wheel (see Figure 1).

9. Simultaneous Communication is a means of communication in which a person can sign and speak at the same time. MCE systems are typically used in this manner because they are based on English, but with ASL it is difficult to express oneself clearly through Simultaneous Communication. See Tevenal and Villaneuva 2009 for further discussion.

10. It is a convention in sign language studies to use small capital letters for English words (glosses) that represent ASL or MCE signs.

Signs must be created for most closed class words (such as articles, prepositions, and pronouns) and morphemes for which there are no equivalent ASL signs (*a, the, of, -ed, -ing, -able, dis-, un-*, and so on). The handshapes of these morpheme signs usually correspond with the initial letters of the morphemes. As an example, an excerpt from the Pledge of Allegiance oath, “one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all,” is translated into SEE2 in Gustason et al. (1972) to show how English words should be signed (see Figure 2).

In SEE2, some signs are borrowed from ASL, including ONE, UNDER, GOD, WITH, FOR, and #ALL. Some signs (except the lexicalized finger-spelled item, #ALL) are not initialized with alphabetic manual handshapes corresponding with the initial letters of English words because the signs represent a single concept and do not have synonyms to differentiate with the initialized handshapes. LIBERTY is a derivative of the ASL sign SAVE and is initialized with the L handshape to correspond with the initial letter of “liberty.” NATION is understood as “country” in SEE2 but in ASL, it can mean several things depending on a context: “of course,” “natural,” “nature,” or “normal.” INDIVISIBLE and JUSTICE are signed with the combination of signed morphemes. INDIVISIBLE is signed with IN- as a derivative of the ASL sign DON’T with the initialized I handshape (instead of an open B handshape), DIVISI- as a derivative of DIVIDE with the initialized D handshape, and -IBLE is signed as ABLE. JUSTICE is signed with invented signed morphemes for SEE2, JUST and -ICE. With these SEE2 forms in the English order, it is possible to use them and speak English simultaneously. In contrast to SEE, ASL is a full-fledged language that is historically, grammatically, and structurally independent of spoken English. With the repertoire of manual signs, classifiers, and grammatically obligatory and optional nonmanual signals, an ASL signer can give a conceptually appropriate version of the same phrase (see Figure 3).

Signed English, another MCE variation, uses more conceptually accurate ASL signs that are signed in English order (Bernstein, 1990). Signed English also uses 14 sign markers to show plurals, verb tenses, possession, and some adjective and adverb morphemes (3–6):

1. Regular plural markers “-s” with the manual alphabet S used at the end of noun signs.
2. Irregular plural marker with a repeating movement in signs.
3. Regular past tense marker “-ed” with the manual alphabet D used at the end of signs.

4. Irregular past tense marker with the Open B handshake with one sweeping movement from the center of the body to outward.
5. Past particle marker “-en” with the manual alphabet N used at the end of signs.
6. Progressive tense marker “-ing” with the manual alphabet I with one swing motion at the end of signs.
7. Present tense marker “-s” with the manual alphabet S used at the end of verb signs.
8. Possessive marker “-s” with the manual alphabet S with the single wrist twist motion used at the end of signs.
9. Adjective marker “-y” with the manual alphabet Y used at the end of signs.
10. Adverb marker “-ly” with two manual alphabet L and Y used at the end of signs.
11. Superlative marker “-er” with the ASL sign MOST at the end of signs.
12. Superlative marker “-est” with the ASL sign MOST with the greater movement.
13. Agent marker “-er” with the two Open B handshapes signifying the sign PERSON at the end of signs.
14. Negative prefix marker (e.g., “un-,” “in-,” and “dis-”) with the ASL sign NOT.

Signed English is designed to use fewer number of markers to make it less cumbersome for children and adults to learn. In fact, Signed English users are encouraged to use as few as four markers (i.e., possessive, irregular plural, irregular past tense, and progressive tense) within a context (Bernstein, 1990, 6). MCE systems such as SEE2 and Signed English are instructional tools intentionally designed to develop English skills in deaf and hard of hearing children.

Unlike MCE systems, there is one type of signing that is not by design and that occurs naturally with ASL and English elements; it is called contact signing (Lucas & Valli, 1992). Because of its incorporation of English elements, it has long been known as Pidgin Sign English (PSE), but the word *pidgin* is not an appropriate term for contact signing because it does not have the typical pattern and history of a pidgin (Lucas & Valli, 1992; Mather & Mather, 2003). A pidgin is a simplified language with reduced phonology, morphology, and grammar that arose from extended contact

between groups of people who do not have a common language (Holm, 2000, pp. 4–5). A pidgin is normally based on a common language used in an area and is typically limited to a domain such as commercial activities in where the pidgin serves to make communication possible between different groups of language users. Contact signing is mistakenly called “pidgin” because it is considered a reduced form of English, but there is nothing reduced about it when it comes to ASL and even English characteristics. Contact signing takes on the richness of ASL with vocabulary, nonmanual signals, inflections in movement, and spatial locations. As for English in contact signing, it can be expressed by mouthing English words fully and fingerspelling English words or phrases. The amount of ASL

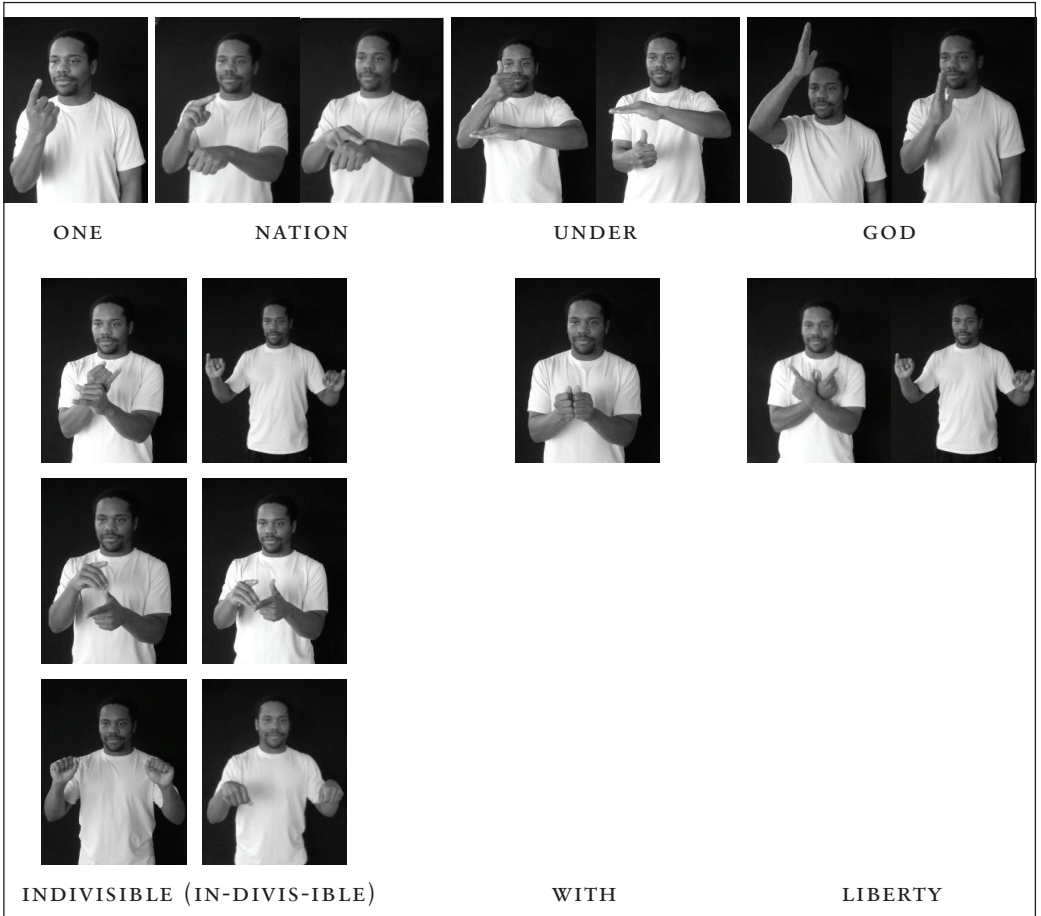


FIGURE 2. *Signing Exact English (SEE2) phrase. Gloss: ONE NATION UNDER GOD INDIVISIBLE WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR #ALL.*

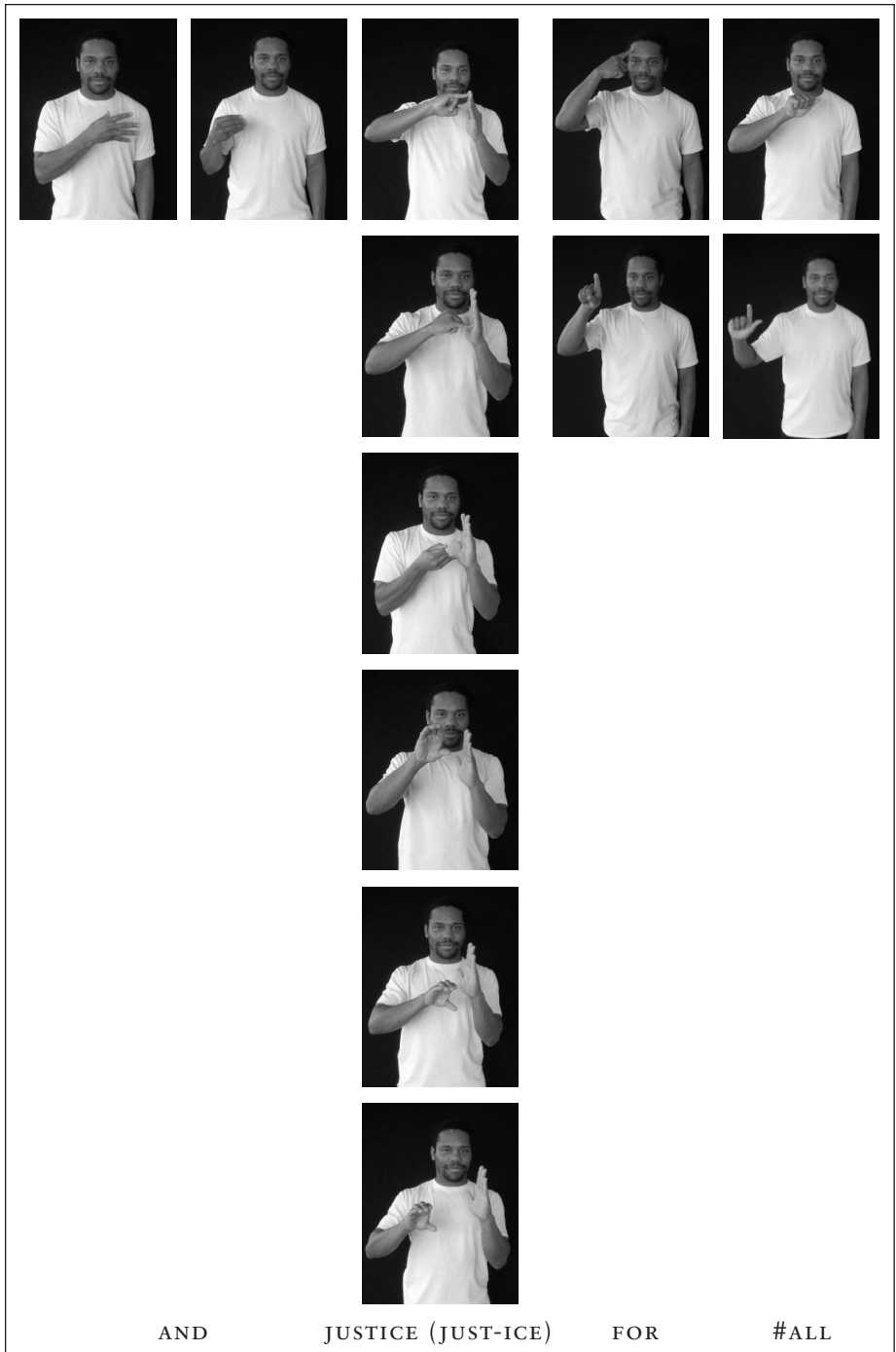


FIGURE 2. *Continued*

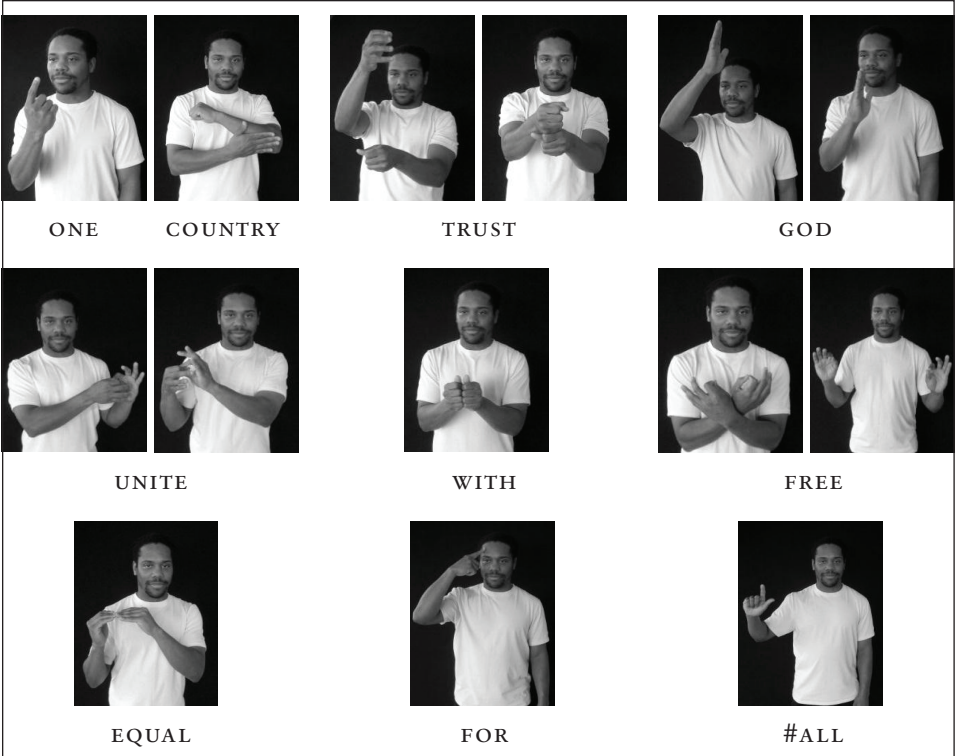


FIGURE 3. ASL phrase. Gloss: ONE COUNTRY TRUST GOD UNITE WITH FREE (left space) EQUAL (right space) FOR #ALL.

and English characteristics used in contact signing depends on the degree of ASL/English bilingualism of signers and a setting where conversations take place.

STEREOTYPICAL SOCIAL GROUPS FOR SIGNING VARIETIES

The attitudes toward signing varieties are tied with the perceptions of social identities related to deafness and signing abilities. The social identities in the American Deaf community are as follows: *Deaf* is a person with an entrenched cultural identity and a carrier of ASL; *hard of hearing* is a person with residual hearing and speech capacity and possible signing proficiency in ASL, contact signing, or MCE; *oral deaf* is a person with little or no hearing but has a strong preference in oral communication over signing for daily use; *late deafened* is a person who possessed normal hearing and speech abilities before losing them as a result of illness,

genetic predisposition, or accident; and *hearing* is a person with normal hearing and speech abilities in contact with a deaf community in whatever role.¹¹ Although these identities are presented in a simple manner, they are not as clean and fixed as they appear in the American Deaf community or, generally speaking, all deaf communities in the world. Throughout the world, deaf identities and a notion of Deaf culture may not be the same in all deaf communities because “the nature of deaf and Deaf identity in a given community depends on the forms of community and language” and with respect to forms, “the form any sign language takes is intertwined with the nature of the community that uses it” (Monaghan, 2003, p. 20).

Notwithstanding the complexity of deaf identities, the use of ASL is one qualifying property (i.e., shared language) signaling membership in the American Deaf community (Kannapell, 1994). Other properties such as a collective name, sense of community, shared and distinct values and customs, culture knowledge, history, social structures, and arts underpin a Deaf identity (Leigh, 2009). Even Deaf children are aware of the importance of language use to their social identities (Johnson & Erting, 1989). It is through interaction that the children develop their social identity based on language use and form, and their interactions form the language attitudes that lead them to favor a group that uses the language form more like theirs. Deaf children who are proficient in ASL communicate and associate with each other more often than do Deaf children who are less proficient in ASL (Johnson and Erting, 1989). To sum up the discussion on social identities, the use of ASL, contact signing, or MCE is a signal carrying social meaning for others to infer one’s membership in social groups in the American Deaf community.

ASL signers generally understand that the social identity of a listener influences a signer to choose a signing variety that aligns with the supposed communication preference of the listener. For example, Deaf signers use ASL with each other but consciously or unconsciously switch to contact signing or Signed English when a hearing signer joins in their conversation. When the hearing signer leaves, Deaf signers will revert back to ASL. However, a study by Lucas and Valli (1992) has shown that a social identity is not a significant factor on the change of signing between interlocutors. Lucas and Valli found that some Deaf signers will use ASL with a hearing person, and some Deaf signers will use contact

11. Please refer to Jacobs, 1989; Kannapell, 1994; Stone and Sterling, 1994; and Leigh, 2009, for further discussion on various identities in the Deaf community.

signing or even MCE signing with other Deaf signers. Other factors that influence signing choice with an interlocutor include formality of the setting, familiarity with the interlocutor, and pride in one's membership in a social group (Lucas & Valli, 1992, pp. 63–64).

Not only did Lucas and Valli (1992) examine the signers' choice of signing type in various situations, but they also examined the issues of how the signers' signing was perceived. The researchers had a panel of ASL language professionals judge a total of 20 clips of different signers as "ASL" and "not ASL." The experts were unanimous in their judgments of five clips as "ASL" and the rest as "not ASL." The same clips were tested on Deaf signers who had no linguistic training (i.e., "naïve" judges) and their judgments were not always in accordance with the master judges. The difference in results led Lucas and Valli to explore possible correlations with the judges' social characteristics. For example, on a particular clip, all master judges agreed that it was "not ASL," but 37% of White naïve judges judged the clip as "ASL" and 82% of Black naïve judges judged it as "ASL" (70). The discrepancy in judgment between White and Black naïve judges could be related to the salience of linguistic structures in their perception. For instance, a signer in the clip used contact signing with English word order but also used key ASL features such as eye gaze, referential spaces, and body shift (100). The saliency of these key ASL features in the Black judges' perception despite the obvious presence of English could account for the discrepancy in the results.

AMERICAN DEAF COMMUNITY'S PERCEPTIONS OF SIGNING VARIETIES

Since the introduction of English-based sign systems, the sign systems, ASL, and contact signing have coexisted, but some members of the American Deaf community are particularly averse to English-based sign systems for the historical, linguistic, and cultural reasons. There have been repeated attempts to replace ASL with English-based sign systems and oral means of communication with a lack of reverence for ASL as a linguistic and cultural treasure of the Deaf community. Despite a large body of research with evidence of ASL as a natural language, there has been a complete disregard, either out of ignorance or opposition, to using ASL. Because of this aversion, attempts have been made to standardize and preserve ASL through dictionaries, proficiency exams, teaching ma-

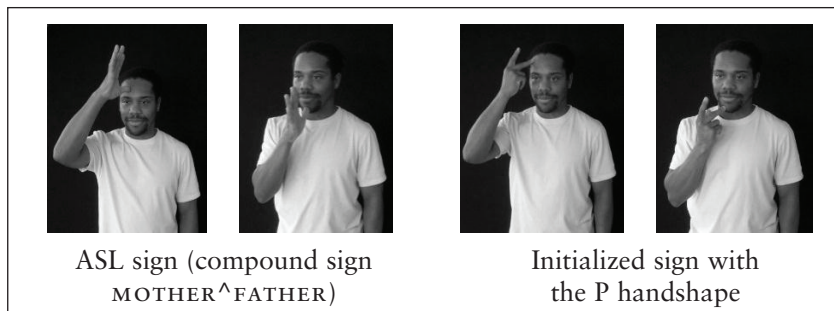


FIGURE 4. *ASL and initialized signs for PARENT.*

terials, organizations, and courses. One result of standardization is that signers develop certain attitudes toward other signers' use of linguistic items and features. These items can involve different linguistic levels from phonological (e.g., the use of a P handshape or a 5 handshape in the sign PARENT; see Figure 4) to syntactic (e.g., signing in ASL or English word order) to discourse (e.g., the use of eye gaze in signing). Differences between ASL and English-based signing systems are contrastive on most linguistic levels, but with regard to a contact variety possessing features from both ASL and English-based signing systems, the distinction is less clear and variation in contact signing is largely based on individuals. Consider a simple example of contact signing: a signer produces linguistic items with obvious ASL features on all linguistic levels, except for the syntactic level, on which some phrases produced are in English word order, and for the lexical level, where only four English-based signs AND, BUT, THEN, and BECAUSE are used instead of body shifts and other ASL conventions. These English-based signs (AND, BUT, THEN, and BECAUSE) are strongly discouraged in the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) teacher certification evaluation application and the ASL language proficiency evaluation instruction (ASLTA, 2010; Newell & Caccamise, 2008).

One may surmise that because the signer's signing has more ASL forms than English-like forms, it should be ASL, but it really depends on what is perceptually salient for the observer: (1) The signer could be perceived to be using ASL because ASL forms have a predominant presence in the signing compared to the marginal presence of English-influenced forms; (2) the signer could be perceived to be using contact signing because ASL and English forms are equally salient even though the number of English forms is minimal; or (3) the signer could be perceived to be using

English-based signing because of the striking presence of English word order and English-influenced signs that is too difficult to ignore. Even in the signing of the same linguistic items, a marginal presence of English-influenced forms can have a small, medium, or large effect on someone's perception of the signing.

Even though the members of the American Deaf community consider themselves a cultural and linguistic minority with ASL as the common language, the American Deaf community is not monolithic. There are a considerable number of deaf ASL signers who were born to deaf parents, exposed to ASL during the critical age of language acquisition, and attended deaf school. For that reason, there is a general perception that standard ASL is passed from generation to generation in Deaf families and is perpetuated in special schools for the deaf where ASL is the dominant language. Deaf people who are reared by hearing parents or schooled in a mainstream educational setting, however, are not considered fluent ASL signers because ASL may play a marginal role in an English-based curriculum. There are a disproportionate number of community members who were born to hearing parents and have attended mainstream education programs that might use English-based communication methods instead of ASL.

In deaf education, language of instruction is intricately linked with language acquisition and exposure for deaf and hard of hearing students because schools are usually the primary places for the students to acquire a language, be it ASL, spoken English, contact signing, or an English-based visual communication system. Behind every language of instruction, there is an educational philosophy that explains the choice of the language and the values that teachers and administrators want to instill in their students. If the language is ASL, the teachers and administrators may have the same respect for ASL as they do for English and convey the positive values of ASL by using it with their deaf and hard of hearing students. The positive values can be, for example, the status of ASL as a true language, the awareness of linguistic and cultural values of ASL, the pride of being bilingual with English and ASL, and the sense of being normal with the use of ASL. If the language is strictly English in an oral or manual mode, the teachers and administrators may not have as much respect for ASL as they have for English and they convey the negative values toward ASL by using only an English-based communication method with their students. The negative values can be the unacknowledged status of ASL as a true language, misconceptions of ASL, and the indignity of using ASL. If the

language of instruction contains both English and ASL components, it depends on how the teachers and administrators convey the message to the students with their actions and use of language.

Considering educational background, language acquisition and exposure, family hearing status, and one's communication preference, there are bound to be differences in opinions and viewpoints about ASL in terms of its standardization, its linguistic and prestigious status, and the extent of English influence on the signing. The differing perceptions of linguistic features and the role of linguistic and social information in attitudes led to the basic research question of the study: *What are the linguistic and social factors that govern attitudes toward signing in the American Deaf community?*

The study is basically an exploratory analysis with an attempt to find patterns in linguistic and social factors in the perceptions of and attitudes toward signing variation in the American Deaf community. Perceptions and attitudes based on social characteristics of the subjects (i.e., race, age of generation, and age of ASL acquisition) and the description of subjects' responses to the signing are discussed along with the subjects' attitudinal evaluation.