

12 Data Collection in Sociolinguistics

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Chapter Overview

During the data collection phase of sociolinguistic projects, sign language researchers face some challenges that are unique to the deaf and hard of hearing communities; and these challenges may affect the process of collecting targeted data. The challenges are related to the set of social characteristics of the communities, the visual nature of sign languages that require video recordings, which compromise the nature of confidentiality, and the sensitive social relationship between sign language researchers and deaf and hard of hearing individuals. This chapter highlights the methodological strategies applied in the studies of sign languages that addressed the challenges.

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The main areas of sociolinguistics that researchers can pursue with their studies of sign languages are variation, bilingualism and multilingualism, language contact, discourse, and language policy and planning. The most recent comprehensive sociolinguistic review on sign languages is *The Sociolinguistics of Sign Languages* edited by Ceil Lucas (Lucas, 2001): each chapter in the volume is dedicated to a sociolinguistic area, complete with the discussion of relevant studies and methodologies. For all the differences between areas, data collection methods are similar with respect to the distinct focus placed on the social characteristics of Deaf¹ communities and on the nature of data collection in sign languages. The similarities may apply to all areas, except for that of language policy and planning, which usually focuses on governmental and non-governmental organizations and their communication artifacts with respect to policies and planning, whereas the other areas largely focus on individuals' use of language in their respective communities.

As in all sociolinguistic studies, researchers must consider their goals and interests when they design their research studies; but that is only half the battle. Researchers must also consider the geographical and social characteristics of a community that have defined language varieties (in an inclusive sense, languages and dialects) when it comes to determine the appropriate data collection methods. If two researchers have the same goals and interests but the communities in which they are interested have completely different geographical and social characteristics, the researchers must design data collection methods that are appropriate for their respective communities. In other words, one method is as successful as the other if they are truly designed to accommodate the targeted communities and their particular geographical and social characteristics. With the Deaf communities, sociolinguistic researchers face special challenges through the different phases of the sociolinguistic projects: recruitment, data collection, and data presentation. In this chapter only recruitment and data collection will be discussed. The challenges are related to the set of social characteristics that are unique to Deaf communities, the visual nature of sign languages, which requires high-quality video recordings that compromise the nature of confidentiality, and the sensitive relationship between sign language researchers and Deaf community members, which is based on social status.

This chapter addresses the special challenges outlined in the previous paragraph and provides a description of data collection methods that are used in the sociolinguistic studies of deaf and hard of hearing people whose primary means of communication are sign languages in their respective communities. The recent and refined data collections methods described in the chapter are derived from selected variation and corpus studies (variation studies typically require sign language corpora of various sizes) produced in the recent decade on the following sign languages by the following teams: American Sign Language (ASL) by a team of Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, and Clayton Valli (2001); African American variety of ASL (hereafter Black ASL) by a team of Carolyn McCaskill, Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, and Joseph Hill (2011); Italian Sign Language (LIS) by a team of Carlo Geraci, Katia Battaglia, Anna Cardinaletti, Carlo Cecchetto, Caterina Donati, Serena Giudice, and Emiliano Merghetti (2011); British Sign Language (BSL) by Gary Quinn (2010) and by a team of Kearsy Cormier, Jordan Fenlon, Ramas Rentelis, and Adam Schembri (2011); and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) by a team of Rachel and David McKee and their associate, George Major (2011). BSL and NZSL are in the same language family, on the basis of their histories and linguistic constructions, and the researchers

have collaborated with each other in some ways, but ASL and LIS are very different from these sign languages, and they are different from each other as well. Even with ASL and LIS as mutually unintelligible languages, the researchers of ASL and LIS may consult each other on the shared methods and data interpretations and can communicate with the researchers of BSL and NZSL as well. Furthermore, some of the research groups have developed websites that store sign language corpora, for the purpose of sharing their data and methodologies worldwide. Here are examples of such websites: the British Sign Language corpus project (www.bslcorpusproject.org), the Australian Sign Language (Auslan) Sign Bank (www.auslan.org.au), the Black ASL project (blackaslproject.gallaudet.edu), and Progetto corpus LIS (Italian Sign Language corpus project, w3.uniroma1.it/progettolis).

Nature of Social Characteristics of Deaf Communities

In the sociolinguistic literature, a certain set of geographical and social characteristics have been identified as factors of language variation; the factors are typical in variation studies, but they could apply in other areas of sociolinguistics that deal with the use of language in targeted communities. The geographical and social factors that are described as external constraints in the literature – as opposed to internal constraints, which are linguistic factors – have been repeatedly shown to be significantly correlated with linguistic variation in the respective communities. Region, gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are the typical external constraints under observation in sociolinguistic studies. The typical external constraints are observed in the sociolinguistic studies of Deaf communities as well, but, due to the unique histories of these communities, sign language researchers are compelled to include other external constraints, which are typical of them and have a significant correlation with linguistic variation: language use in the home, age of sign language acquisition, and type of education.

Deaf communities are the microcosm of the larger communities – namely the hearing ones – in their respective countries; so it makes sense to observe the typical external constraints in the sociolinguistic studies of sign languages. These are region, gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The Deaf communities reflect the social diversity that exists in the larger societies. Geographical and social factors, which explain the natural or man-made boundaries between existing communities, often play a role in the formation of language varieties (see Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006, pp. 28–43). The geographical and social factors can also be compounded by others, particular to the communities. In the geographical sense, communities can be separated by natural or man-made boundaries, for example by natural geographic barriers (rivers, mountains, or swamps), settlement patterns, political borders, social stratification, and economic ecology – that is, geographic concentrations of occupations (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006). As communities are in relative isolation from one another, language varieties arise naturally and are defined by their communities' culturally bound communication practices, which are passed down through generations. However, the main difference between spoken languages and sign languages is in how the languages are transmitted and in how the population,

environmental, regional, and educational factors play a role in this process; thus the social characteristics that are of particular interest in the Deaf communities are language use at home, age of sign language acquisition, and type of education.

Generally speaking, spoken languages are practiced in different units of the hearing communities, from individuals to families to institutions, and they are widely available for children to acquire. But sign languages are not as widely practiced in the hearing communities in which deaf and hard of hearing people are members. National censuses may not contain a direct question about disability, much less one about deafness, but if such a question is included, deafness may not be distinguished from the other disabilities and there may be no question of sign language use. For instance, there is no systematic data collection on sign language or ASL use in the general US population (Mitchell, Young, Bachleda, and Karchmer, 2006, p. 307). With no direct data available, researchers often resort to their own sources to make an estimate of the deaf and hard of hearing population. The population estimates of deaf and hard of hearing people can vary and one should exercise caution and investigate the methods of population estimate (Mitchell et al., 2006). However, deafness being a low-incidence disability, with the number of deaf people who are proficient in sign language, the proportion of deaf and hard of hearing people is expected to be extremely low. For example, the United States has a population of nearly 313 million, and the general but unconfirmed estimate of deaf people who use sign language is 500,000 (Mitchell et al., 2006, p. 328), but there are other estimates, reported elsewhere, that run between 100,000 and 15,000,000 (p. 307). The large variation in these estimates is attributed to anecdotal evidence, methodological differences, and a conflation of the estimates for the population of deaf people who use ASL and for people with various degrees of hearing loss regardless of their communication preferences. In New Zealand, out of 4 million New Zealand citizens, the estimate of the deaf population is between 4,500 and 7,700 (McKee, McKee, and Major 2011, p. 490). In Australia the deaf population is estimated to be of 7,000 out of 22,685,018 (Johnston 2004, p. 367).

It is safe to say that in the most parts of the world communities have a similar proportion of deaf and hard of hearing members who use sign language. In 2012 the World Federation of the Deaf estimated the number of deaf people in the world at 70 million; in the context of the world's population, this figure is well below 7 billion people as projected by the US Census Bureau in 2012. In other words, around 1 percent of the world's population are deaf or hard of hearing. Even though sign languages are generally limited to communities of deaf and hard of hearing people, it is important to know that not all of them use sign language. There are various natural and accidental causes of deafness; it can happen at any age. If we are to focus on deaf and hard of hearing people who have acquired sign language, the proportion is even smaller. Hearing people with personal or professional connections to someone in the Deaf community (a family member, friend, teacher, interpreter, or researcher) and can converse comfortably in sign language can be considered members; but, even so, it is unlikely that there is a large segment in the hearing population of people who are skilled in sign language and maintain connection with Deaf communities on a regular basis.

The percentage of deaf and hard of hearing people born to families of deaf and hard of hearing adults who use sign language as a primary means of communication tends to be very small by comparison to the percentage of deaf and hard of hearing people born to non-signing families with normal hearing. For example, in the United States approximately 8 percent of deaf children have at least one parent

who is deaf or hard of hearing (Mitchell and Karchmer, 2005, p. 243). About 4.8 percent of the deaf children have one hearing and one deaf or hard of hearing parent, and approximately 3.5 percent have two deaf or hard-of-hearing parents (p. 243). Moreover, deaf and hard of hearing children who have at least one deaf parent are more likely to use sign language at home and at school than those who have hard of hearing parents, but unfortunately the number of homes that use ASL as the home language is not available (Mitchell and Karchmer 2004). In contrast, 92 percent of the deaf children were born to hearing parents, and it is very likely that many of those children are exposed to alternative communication forms, which exclude ASL at home with their families (Mitchell and Karchmer 2004). There are some cases where hearing parents may be fluent in sign language; but the evidence is largely anecdotal and, as has been mentioned above, there is no systematic data collection concerning the language used at home by deaf children. With deafness as a low-incidence disability and the genetic factor that affects a minor proportion of deaf population, there is a strong possibility that the percentages are similar in the different Deaf communities around the world with the majority of deaf and hard of hearing people born to hearing parents. In this context, the population factor functions as a constraint on the transmission of sign language for deaf and hard of hearing people. And yet what contributes to the success of sign language transmission among deaf and hard of hearing people is the environmental factor, which is typically related to education.

Deaf communities have been typically formed in regions where special schools or education programs for deaf children were established. This is the case for ASL (Lucas et al., 2001), Black ASL (McCaskill et al., 2011), NZSL (McKee et al., 2011), and LIS (Geraci et al., 2011). Some Deaf communities can be formed in regions where there are no special schools but where deaf people gather for an employment, residential, or social reason. For example, BSL users live in Lancaster and Morecambe, where there are no special schools for the deaf, and some of them attended such schools out of town (Quinn, 2010, p. 477). Although there is a university in the town of Lancashire within half-hour's drive from both towns that offers courses on BSL and deaf studies, the university is not one of the typical institutional settings where deaf and hard of hearing children acquire sign language. For deaf people who have attended special schools for their education, the schools provide a rich language environment, sign language being used among deaf and hard of hearing peers and school staff. Deaf students who had little or no knowledge of sign language prior to the beginning of their formal education usually acquired sign language in the company of older deaf peers. This is known as "horizontal transmission," which is normal for the cohorts of deaf and hard of hearing children at special schools – as opposed to "vertical transmission," which is normal in hearing communities, where hearing children typically acquired their language from the preceding generation.

Schools for the deaf have long been considered to be the crucibles for the acquisition and maintenance of sign language (Lucas et al., 2001, p. 52); but, since the advent of mainstreaming,² whereby deaf and hard of hearing students attend regular schools with or without accommodation, the role of the schools for the deaf has diminished as a source of sign language input for such children. For example, before the 1960s, almost 80 percent of the deaf children in the US attended residential schools for the deaf; by 2010, the percentage had declined to 24.3 percent (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2011). The type of education is the decisive factor in whether deaf

and hard of hearing children acquired sign language during the course of their schooling, and it should be observed in the sociolinguistic projects on sign languages.

The type of education also correlates with the age of the participants. In sociolinguistic literature, the age of a generation is normally one of the social variables observed in linguistic community studies (Eckert, 1997, p. 152). But in the case of Deaf communities the educational and age factors are clearly related due to the passage of mainstreaming laws that encourage the placement of deaf and hard of hearing students in regular educational settings. In the large-scale sociolinguistic study of ASL, Lucas et al. (2001) put down the age factor as an external constraint based on the division of three generational age groups (15–25, 26–54, and 55+). This age division has been motivated by developments in the language policy of deaf education in the early 1970s with the passage of Public Law 94–142 (the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) and by the change in communication methods from oral to signed, which may not include ASL (Lucas et al., 2001, p. 35). In Italy a similar trend emerged in late 1970s with the passage of legislation on the mainstreaming of children with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing children (Geraci et al., 2011, p. 532). The same happened in New Zealand from the 1980s, when the mainstream placement of deaf and hard of hearing children was increasingly favored (McKee et al., 2011, p. 492). These developments in deaf education have produced a clear effect on the communication background of the generations of deaf and hard of hearing people.

With the educational effect on the language acquisition of deaf and hard of hearing signers, it can be very difficult to find a desired group of signers who acquired sign language during the critical period of their language development, as well as meeting the criteria of extensive and continued involvement in a Deaf community and choice of sign language as a primary means of communication. A particular recruitment method that proves to be useful is the employment of deaf local contact persons who possess the local network knowledge, have good social standing in Deaf communities, and can help recruit deaf individuals with the target social characteristics (Lucas, 2013, pp. 282–284). This method is commonly used in sign language projects such as the ASL, the Black ASL, the LIS, the NZSL, and the BSL projects under discussion here.

The Visual Nature of Sign Language

There are two aspects of language ability displayed by language users in general: linguistic competence and linguistic performance. Linguistic competence is the knowledge that language users have about a language and their ability to use it; in contrast, linguistic performance is the production of actual utterances, which may include errors or forms that language users deny using. If questionnaires are used in the data collection, the self-reported data from language users may be helpful in an analysis designed to reveal how participants perceive their own language use; this ties to linguistic competence, but often these users' linguistic performance contradicts their perceived knowledge of the language. This is the main reason why sign language corpora are essential for sociolinguists; it helps them analyze actual utterances.

Sociolinguists interested in capturing utterances that are spontaneously produced in a specific context have to be cautious with the interview portion in a data collection. When language users are aware that they are being observed, they may exhibit self-consciousness in their language production and adjust their language to the perceived preference of a researcher. The presence of a recording device can make language users feel self-conscious. Even with the recording device concealed, the mere presence of a researcher influences language users' linguistic behavior. This phenomenon has been addressed by sociolinguists starting with Labov (1972), who discussed it as the "observer's paradox" (see McCaskill et al., 2011, p. 51). In any sign language project, capturing the targeted data in a natural form is already a challenge because of the visual nature of sign languages and because of a set of social characteristics that are unique to Deaf communities. The researchers have also to consider the problem of the observer's paradox and the sensitivity of signers to the audiological status and ethnicity of interviewers or interlocutors.

The modalities of languages – spoken and signed – are the key factor that affects the use of a recording device in data collection. With spoken language in the oral-and-aural modality, researchers enjoy flexibility in the choice of recording format, which can be audio only or audio-visual. With advances in audio recording technology, powerful audio recording devices have become increasingly portable, affordable for sociolinguistic researchers, and less distracting to interviewees. With sign language in the visual and kinetic modality, however, a video recording device is an absolute necessity and the filming process is usually more overt. To ensure visual clarity in the filming of a signing production, signers must be in a well-lit setting and with their heads, hands, and torsos entirely visible to a camera. Also, the seating must be arranged to help with the clarity of the signing; for the interlocutors to see each other and the camera to be able to record, a pair of signers must be seated next to each other, with their fronts turned slightly toward each other, and a group of signers must be seated in a semi-circle (see Figure 12.1). In some cases a video camera must be placed close to the signers, to capture a full view of the signing. A backdrop may be necessary to help with the clarity of the signing and the face and body movements. With these arrangements and the use of video recording devices that feel intrusive to the participants, the problem of the observer's paradox becomes much more acute.

To address the problem of the observer's paradox and the fact that language users may be inhibited in their language production when they are aware of being observed, Labov (1972) developed the sociolinguistic interview, which encourages speakers to use the vernacular – their everyday language. Since the goal is to gather as much informal language production as possible, the sociolinguistic interview is designed to reduce the power differential between the interviewer and the interviewee by avoiding a formal language variety, by keeping questions brief, and by including topics (such as childhood games, dating patterns, marriage and family, dreams) designed to encourage an informal language production. Also, the chance of getting informal language production may improve if the interviewer has similar social characteristics with the interviewee(s). The sociolinguistic interview technique has shown to be effective in sign language projects (see McCaskill et al., 2011; Lucas et al., 2001; Lucas and Valli, 1992).

The location is another thing to consider when planning an interview. In Geraci et al.'s (2011) study, the researchers filmed their LIS signers in an environment familiar



Figure 12.1 An example of signers sitting in a semi-circle with a deaf interviewer facing them. Frame grab from video clip. Courtesy of Black ASL project.

to them, at a club for the Deaf or in a restaurant where the deaf signers were patrons. In the study of ASL, Lucas and her associates (2001) collected their data from a number of groups at community centers, at schools for deaf students, in private homes, and, for three groups, in a public park (p. 40). In the study of NZSL, McKee, McKee, and Major recruited signers at a Deaf school reunion, a Deaf youth camp, and a Deaf club and interviewed them in a semi-secluded area (2011, pp. 76–77).

Sensitivity to the Social Characteristics of Interviewers and Interlocutors

Normally sociolinguistic researchers in sign language projects conduct free and structured conversations to collect data from participants with target social characteristics. During a free conversation, participants can sign among themselves without a researcher being present. This is designed to help them be less inhibited in their signing and it encourages spontaneity in their discussion. While it is a good way to gather natural data, the free conversation has its limitations. Typically the conversation lasts about 20–30 minutes, depending on how well the participants know each other and the topics of conversation; but it may last for only a few minutes if the participants know each other very well and feel no need to continue the conversation. Also, the number of tokens that appear in the free conversation might not be enough, depending on the choice of statistical methods (see Aguilar-Sánchez,

2011) and on the goal of the research. For that reason a structured conversation is conducted to capture target data. The typical forms of structured conversation are interviews and lexical and phrasal elicitations. For the lexical or phrasal elicitations, an interviewer uses cue cards with pictures, as used in McCaskill et al. (2011), in Geraci et al. (2011), and in McKee et al. (2011), or written words from the spoken languages, as used in the BSL study and in the NZSL study to get the participants to produce their own signs. If the interviewer signs a certain concept, it is very likely that the interviewer's sign would influence the participants' choice of sign; so the use of cue cards is the safe way to elicit target signs or phrases.

One thing that sign language researchers are always conscious about when conducting free and structured conversations is to manage the social sensitivity of participants. The participants' social sensitivity can manifest itself in their conscious or unconscious choice of signing when they are in the presence of an interviewer. It is true that participants may be sensitive even to each other's social characteristics. For example, in Lucas and Valli's (1992) study of contact signing (which is cited frequently in the context of the effect of social sensitivity on communication), social sensitivity often manifested itself in switchings between ASL, Signed English (an invented manual code for English), and contact signing (a mixed system combining core features of ASL and Signed English along with the continuous voiceless mouthing, which is a common feature) when deaf signers experienced change from a deaf interviewer to a hearing one. Even in the company of deaf ASL native signers, a few signers chose to use contact signing or Signed English instead of ASL. The signers' self-consciousness (which led them not to use ASL) could be caused by the relative formality of the interview situation, which included the presence of a video camera and the lack of familiarity with the interviewer and other interviewees (Lucas and Valli, 1992).

Sign language users can be sensitive to a signer's audiological status (e.g., hearing or deaf). The Deaf/hearing dichotomy is a relevant criterion in defining in-groups and out-groups in a Deaf community and is used as a guide in determining a signer's language preference or skills. The terms "Deaf" and "hearing" have particular meanings in the Deaf community: "Deaf" is used to describe someone who is a skillful ASL signer and who understands and observes the values, behavior, and customs of the Deaf community, while "hearing" is used to describe someone who is not as skillful in his/her use of ASL and is less familiar with the Deaf community. Although a signer's audiological status is included as a trait of the Deaf and hearing identities, the audiological status is not visible; so the signing skills are used instead as an indicator of one's audiological status. Even though a number of identities are relevant in the Deaf community – hard of hearing, late deafened, mainstreamed student, cochlear implant user, hearing child of deaf adult (CODA), hearing sibling of deaf person – the identities of "Deaf" and "hearing" have a particularly powerful influence on language production (Hill, 2012, p. 160).

The social considerations of racial/ethnic background and audiological status can also interact to affect interview situations. It is suggested that interviewers share the same ethnicity as their interviewees, so the production of informal language can be encouraged. For example, some black deaf participants in McCaskill et al.'s (2011) Black ASL study explain that they stylistically shift their signing when engaging in a conversation with a white signer. These instances of style-shifting can be explained by Giles' (1973) accommodation theory, which accounts for how language behavior

may change according to the perceived language preference of an interlocutor. Another example in the Black ASL project is that, at some point during the data collection, a white hearing researcher who was skillful in ASL was mindful of the influence of her racial identity and audiological status on the sociolinguistic interview between a black deaf researcher and a black deaf interviewee; she managed to lessen her influence by staying in the background during the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewee met with the white hearing researcher and signed with her. When the interviewee asked about the researcher's audiological status, the interviewee made a dramatic shift across modalities, from signing to speaking, even though they had understood each other's signing perfectly prior to the discovery of the white researcher's audiological status as hearing. This is a striking example of how the researcher's audiological status can influence the participant's language use; but it is in fact quite common for deaf signers to switch to contact signing or to Signed English when they learn the audiological status of a hearing person (see Lucas and Valli, 1992, pp. 53–66). Depending on their research goals, researchers and interviewers should always consider the potential effects on language exchange when exercising their discretion in revealing or concealing their social characteristics in a language situation during data collection.

It is in the best interest of sign language researchers to make sure that a group of participants have similar social characteristics – depending on the kinds of data the researchers aim to have. The researchers also need to make sure that an interviewer has similar social characteristics, so that participants may feel comfortable in relating with the interviewer. In different sign language projects, deaf interviewers are typically employed; they can be local contact persons, research assistants, or researchers, although researchers tend to avoid acting as interviewers due to the power imbalance generated by their educational and social status.

Considerations for the Future

Researchers who are conducting sign language projects must always be mindful of the geographical and social constraints that define Deaf communities. The constraints can be similar to those of the greater societies of which the Deaf communities are a part, but researchers should also be aware of the unique characteristics that describe Deaf communities in their regions. In any case, researchers should be careful about the social characteristics of interviewers and interlocutors, particularly audiological status and racial/ethnic identity, in relation to the researcher's goal of obtaining targeted language samples. It is always a challenge to make signers comfortable in a setting with a video camera, but researchers can overcome the problem of the observer's paradox by following the design of the sociolinguistic interview and by using an interviewer who shares the same audiological status and racial/ethnic background as the interviewees.

Traditionally, one key criterion is that signers have to have native knowledge of sign language. Sign language researchers prefer to observe deaf and hard of hearing signers who acquired sign language during the critical period of language development – that is, during their childhood. For the majority of deaf and hard of hearing signers

who were born to hearing parents with little or no knowledge of sign language, the acquisition of sign language largely took place at special schools for the deaf. As long as they acquired sign language during the critical period, those are the kind of people that are qualified to participate in sign language studies. Another, albeit smaller, group of deaf and hard of hearing signers – those who were born to parents with the native knowledge of sign language – are also qualified. But in these days the recent developments in deaf education have affected the kinds of communication that deaf and hard of hearing children are exposed to and have widened the social gap between a group of people whose educational experience includes sign language as a primary medium of instruction and a group whose experience does not. Also, the number of mainstreamed deaf and hard of hearing children is larger than the number of those who attended special schools for the deaf. So a wide variety of communication and language experience is expected in most deaf and hard of hearing children, and it is highly likely that this has affected the way sign language is practiced today. In the future, the key criterion that signers have a native knowledge of sign language may be difficult to apply; and this is where employing local contacts to find native signers can be of advantage. However, focusing only on native signers does not reflect the reality of language practices in the Deaf communities. It is time to accept that variety of communication and of language experience has become the norm for deaf signers and that sociolinguistic studies of signers whose sign language exposure was delayed are highly encouraged, for the sake of capturing the linguistic and cultural realities.

Given the rate of change in sign language due to educational developments, the archival practice of collecting language samples is strongly encouraged; in this way the researchers can have access to data produced by native and non-native signers and can also investigate language change within Deaf communities. The advance in video and storage technology has made it affordable for sign language researchers to obtain recording equipment and to archive language samples. In addition, the technological advances have produced different kinds of new data – face-to-face video chatting and user-generated video-sharing on personal computers and on mobile devices – and such data can be included in sign language corpora as well (see Lucas et al., 2013 for a further discussion of the effects of new technologies on sign language research). The last decade has seen the apparition of large-scale sign language corpus projects such as the one discussed in this chapter. At the time of writing, the ASL corpus project is under development and will be added to the list of corpora that lend themselves to sociolinguistic treatment, helping researches to produce more findings and to contribute to better understandings of how sign language (and language in general) is used in the social-bound practices of a community with targeted social characteristics at a given time.

Notes

- 1 The difference between uppercase *D* and lowercase *d* in the word *deaf* makes much sense 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 cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors related to deafness. Lowercase *d* describes deafness as a physical deficiency, in medical contexts and from the medical viewpoint. Individuals who are *deaf* may not necessarily be *Deaf*. The lowercase *deaf* is a good catch-all term for a population of deaf people who may or may not be culturally Deaf and may

or may not use sign language as their primary language. But throughout this chapter, for the purpose of simplicity, I will use the lowercase *deaf* when I talk about individual people with deafness and capitalized *Deaf* with reference to places or communities that function as cultural institutions.

- 2 Mainstreaming is the practice of integrating deaf and hard of hearing students, as well as students with disabilities, with non-disabled students and having them participate in regular classrooms, with appropriate accommodation.

Keywords

accommodation theory; data collection methods; deaf education; interview; observer's paradox; recruitment; sign languages; sign language corpus projects; sociolinguistics

See Also

Chapter 2; Chapter 7

Suggested Readings

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