Ling 190: Heritage Language Experience.

**ASL as heritage language in hearing children of deaf parents.**

There are likely to be at least 1.5 million hearing people with deaf parents in the United States (Bull 1998), making up about 90% of all children of deaf parents (Schein and Delk 1974).

PERCENTAGE ASL NATIVE PARENTS?

If a signed language is a family’s heritage language, will it consistently be passed on to hearing children and grandchildren? If not, why not?

CODAs: hearing children in signing families begin to acquire ASL along the same schedule as deaf children in such families (e.g., Orlansky and Bonvillian 1985).

- unproblematic acquisition of both speech and sign, following norms for bilingual acquisition (e.g., Holowka, Brosseau-Lapre, and Petitto 2002; Jones and Quigley 1979; Mayberry 1976).
- Like other bilingual children, young CODAs learn early to adjust their language choices to their addressees (Griffith 1985).

Research previously focused primarily on the earliest stages of language acquisition, presenting CODAs as natively bilingual in sign and speech (e.g., Petitto et al. 2001).

- Studies of bimodal bilingual adults have shown them to use their two languages creatively through simultaneous combinations of signs and spoken words and through speech that follows ASL grammar (Bishop and Hicks 2005; Emmorey, Borinstein, and Thompson 2005).

- Studies of ASL acquisition in infants and very young CODAs demonstrate bilingualism: “The Acquisition of Question Formation in Spoken English and American Sign Language by Two Hearing Children of Deaf Parents” by Michael L. Jones and Stephen P. Quigley

  This longitudinal study investigated the acquisition of question formation in spoken English and American Sign Language (ASL) by two young hearing children of deaf parents. The linguistic environment of the children included varying amounts of exposure and interaction with normal speech and with the nonstandard speech of their deaf parents. This atypical speech environment did not impede the children's acquisition of English question forms. The two children also acquired question forms in ASL that are similar to those produced by deaf children of deaf parents. The two languages, ASL and English, developed in parallel fashion in the two children, and the two systems did not interfere with each other. This dual language development is illustrated by utterances in which the children communicated a sentence in spoken English and ASL simultaneously, with normal English structure in the spoken version and sign language structure in the ASL version.

- Actual language use can be much less balanced, and depend on the addressee: Emmorey, Borinstein, and Thompson (2005) analyzed how 11 CODAs retold a cartoon
  - each subject retold the cartoon to an English monolingual and to other ASL-English bilinguals.
  - When communicating freely with other bilinguals, the participants rarely code-switched, producing only 5% of their ASL signs without speech, but often produced code-blends:
    - “23% of English words were accompanied by an ASL sign” (p. 669).
The blends were mostly to add info not present in speech – e.g. the richer representations of verbs from ASL.

Some participants produced occasional examples of ASL-influenced speech with simultaneous signing, and one produced almost the whole narrative that way.

However, adult CODAs vary widely in signing ability and in community affiliation (Preston 1994).

Little information is available about what happens between preschool and adulthood to cause this change and whether this common lack of sign language fluency stems from an initial failure to acquire the language or from later language attrition.

A dissertation examining both the language use of children in natural settings, and attainment and language use and attitudes in adult CODAs paints a different picture.


What kind of input is present:
- Dutch/NGT children were between 1 and 3 years old.
- To both deaf and hearing children, the majority of the mothers’ utterances (65% to deaf and 70% to hearing) were code-blends; i.e., they included both signs from the NGT and features of spoken Dutch, either mouthing or spoken words.
- The mothers used NGT alone with the deaf children in one-third of their utterances but with the hearing children in only 8% of their utterances.
  - 22% of the utterances addressed to the hearing children consisted of Dutch only.
- The code-blended utterances were not uniform:
  - those addressed to the deaf children generally followed the grammar of NGT,
  - many of those addressed to the hearing children were grammatical for spoken Dutch.
- The mothers increased the use of NGT and decreased Dutch to zero by the time the children were 6, the children's balance of the languages changed in the opposite direction.
- Also: mothers’ acceptance of code-blended utterances from children was a predictor of the amount of Dutch the children blended in their own speech.

Cultural affiliation: the status of CODAs is unclear.
- Singleton and Tittle (2000): “Deaf parents are essentially raising ‘foreign’ children” (p. 227) and: they are “bicultural and bilingual members of the Deaf community” (p. 228).
- Both Preston (1994) and Bull (1998) described significant variation and uncertainty in CODAs’ cultural affiliations, with identities that shift across time and situations: “We are neither deaf nor hearing. We are both deaf and hearing” (Preston 1994, 236).

Language choice by hearing signers elsewhere: in villages around the world where deaf people make up a relatively high percentage of the population, both deaf and hearing villagers are fluent in the village sign language.
Nonaka (in press) and ABSL researchers point out that in such villages there is little to no distinction between deaf and hearing people in education, occupation, or social identity.

But: hearing signers in the Thai village where she did her research, Ban Khor, seem to use sign only with deaf people or “when they are unable or unwilling to be heard” (p. 5; footnote 5), for example, when riding a loud tractor or when trying to keep a secret.

Carol Padden (p.c.) reports the same thing about hearing signers of Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL) in southern Israel.

Also in the now-extinct such community on Martha's Vineyard.

CONCLUSION: it is remarkable that use of sign among hearing native signers is so little, even in the absence of social stigma or any reported cultural difference between hearing and deaf members of the community.

• On the influence of language ideology:

Kroskrity reports that ideology in which “maintaining maximally distinctive languages that can serve as the symbolic and communicative vehicles for their indexically associated social identities” among Arizona Tewa supports language&ethnicity maintenance in multicultural/multilingual environment.

These attitudes include an “ideological preference for convention and precedent” (p. 336),

linguistic purism, through which multilingual fluency is valued but language mixing is dispreferred,

“strict compartmentalization,” in which linguistic levels or codes are clearly associated with specific situations, and

the “linguistic indexing of identity,” through which speakers mark their situational roles through particular language practices.

The actual language practices of CODAs - children and their parents

FAMILY observation study:

Middle child - age 12

![Figure 2: Family 1 Tinkertoys: Middle Child](image)

![Figure 4: Family 1 Dinner: Middle Child](image)
- The children use signing with parents, and speech (only) with siblings

However, this neat division breaks down in communication of the children with mother in family 3:

![Graph 9: Family 3 Marbles: Middle Child]

- Family 3 mom can hear somewhat, and is a skilled lipreader – hence, children don't use just signing with her.

Actually, parental choice of code in the study is also based on the addressees:

![Graph 14: Family 3 Dinner: Mother]

Influence of people other than direct addressees is apparent from comparing these two graphics:

![Graph 19: Family 3 Bingo: Mother and Youngest Child with Hearing Camera Operator]  ![Graph 20: Family 3 Bingo: Mother and Youngest Child with Deaf Camera Operator]
• The oldest children did more signing to their siblings when the parents were participants.
• Additionally, the oldest child in family 3 addressed his mother more in turns using only sign, while his younger brothers were more likely to include speech as well.
  ◦ The fact that the 16 year-old in family 1 and the 9 year-old in family 3 both behaved differently from their younger siblings—even the 11 year-old in family 1—suggests that birth order may play a stronger role than age.

• Explicit directions to sign work for one turn.

• There were a few examples of possible cross-linguistic influence in both directions. Misunderstanding his mother’s signed prompt to ask his grandmother how old she was, he told his grandmother, “I’m old four” and then—after further prompting—asked, “What you’re old?
  ◦ English wh-question rule applied to ASL underlying sentence structure!

Language ideology and socialization:
The parents reported that they regularly encourage their children to sign to allow the parents to follow their conversations; given this prior socialization, the children would most likely interpret “best behavior” to mean increased signing.

THE INTERVIEW STUDY WITH ADULTS
• Participants: 13 adult CODAs from 11 families.
  ◦ All but one of the interviewed CODAs have two deaf or hard-of-hearing parents, and all have only hearing siblings. All of their grandparents are hearing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Description of parents’ hearing status</th>
<th>Sign language interpreter?</th>
<th>Birth rank among siblings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>both deaf</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>oldest of 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F deaf, M hard-of-hearing</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>only child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>both deaf</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>youngest of 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>both deaf</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>second of 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>both deaf</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>fourth of 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>both deaf</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>third of 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>both deaf</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>second of 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M late-deafened, F hearing, not involved with family</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>oldest of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>both hard-of-hearing</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>oldest of 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bev</td>
<td>40’s</td>
<td>both deaf</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>second of 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>both deaf</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>oldest of 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyce</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>both deaf</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>youngest of 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>M deaf, F hard-of-hearing</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>oldest of 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• The interview questions covered topics such as
  ◦ the interviewees’ experience and skill in sign language,
  ◦ typical interactions within the family,
  ◦ connections to the Deaf community, and
• Ultimate attainment:
  ◦ 3 of the 13 interviewed CODAs sign ASL fluently enough that they reported deaf people regularly mistaking them for deaf.
    ▪ Bev and Daniel said they feel more comfortable using ASL than English
    ▪ Boyce emphasized the balance between his two languages in exposure, use, skill, and emotional connection.
  ◦ April is an ASL interpreter who feels that her English is stronger than her ASL, but who was thrilled the one time a deaf person mistook her for deaf; generally people ask whether her parents are deaf.
  ◦ 6 of the others (including 3 in the same family) described their signing as “English sign language,” “Englishy,” or “transliterating.”
  ◦ Of the final 3, Allison and Rachel stated that they are comfortable signing with their parents but self-conscious about signing with deaf strangers (Rachel used definitely ASL, not Englishy signing), while Lisa said that she is “in no way fluent in any type of sign” but knows enough for basic communication.

Although all of the interviewees reported knowing some form of sign, four of them have siblings who do not sign at all, and three have siblings whose signing knowledge is limited to fingerspelling.

• Language dominance
• Timeline and community factors for developing the pattern of dominance:
  ◦ For almost all of these CODAs, ASL is their parents’ preferred language, and spoken English is the language of school and the surrounding community
  ◦ Allison and April both located the beginnings of their shift from ASL-dominance to English-dominance at the point at which they started school.
  ◦ For the brothers Craig, Derek, and Kevin, the shift seems to have come earlier.
  ◦ The CODAs who learned sign first and ended up balanced or English-dominant all lived with or near hearing grandparents as young children.
    ▪ Such a living situation is not necessary for this outcome, however; Bev considers her siblings to be balanced bilinguals, while she herself feels stronger in ASL. The family had no hearing relatives living nearby and learned English from other kids and from TV.
    ▪ Bev’s preference for sign was likely influenced by the fact that she was undiagnosed as hard-of-hearing through her childhood (although her hearing was later corrected by surgery); she nevertheless acquired spoken English when very young.
    ▪ Daniel learned English from his hearing aunt around age 3; his feeling of ASL-dominance is perhaps based more on emotional connections than on actual fluency.

NOTE: we will discuss other studies which look at relationship between self-report and proficiency.
  ◦ The CODAs who had two parents capable of using spoken English with their children were the only interviewees with siblings who sign minimally or not at all
    ▪ Amount of parental signing varied: David’s and Lisa’s parents did not sign even to each other, while Allison’s and Rachel’s parents much preferred to communicate in sign with everybody.

• Production vs. comprehension: David, Lisa, and Rachel all reported being better productively than receptively in sign.
  ◦ This asymmetry reflects the fact that once learned, spoken language is easier for deaf people (and thus, for the parents) to produce than to understand.

DISTINCTION:
Children’s language acquisition is clearly related to their parents’ language practices at home; however, the children’s own language practices are not determined by the parents’ preferences.
• Children used speech rather than sign whenever they could get away with it
  ◦ regardless of their parents’ preferences and their own level of sign language competence.
  ◦ Only Boyce, reported that he and his brothers regularly codeswitched without noticing between ASL and English. All others signed with their siblings only for functional purposes such as communicating at a distance or keeping quiet in church.

• Voicing vs Englishy-ness of signing:
  ◦ April described her father’s signing as more ASL and her mother’s as more PSE (Pidgin Sign English)
  ◦ but... her father regularly used his voice when communicating with his children, while her mother never did.
  ◦ These differences between parents led to differences in how the children communicated with them.
• Individual relationships between parents and children seem to come into play in the children’s language practice and language competence
  ◦ Craig, Derek, and Kevin have a mother who signs ASL and a father with somewhat more hearing who communicates with his children using a combination of spoken English and English-based signing.
  ◦ The youngest child in that family is a sister with stronger ASL than most of her brothers. Significantly younger than her brothers and the only girl, she developed a closer relationship with her mother than did the boys, each one year apart in age, who seem to have spent much of their childhoods hanging out together.

• Changes in the parents’ lives influenced language choices for all family members.

• Changes in prevalent language attitudes outside the home also influenced family members’ language choices.
  ◦ For example, Sara’s parents did not sign to their hearing children when they were young.
  ◦ She noticed a marked contrast in how they communicated with her own hearing children years later: they made a point of teaching ASL to their grandchildren, reacting to a rise in that language’s prestige.

• Reasons for variation in signing ability in CODAs:
  ◦ exposure to the signing Deaf community
  ◦ the parents’ speech and hearing
  ◦ each child’s relationship to his or her parents
  ◦ parental preferences
  ◦ parents’ social class and education
  ◦ attitudes of hearing grandparents and general prejudice

Awareness of variation: many of them expressed a concern that perhaps they were not the best people for me to interview, as they were not typical of CODAs in general. This impression of their own atypicality was held by CODAs at all degrees of cultural Deafness and ASL fluency.

CONCLUSIONS:
Between these fluent bilingual children, signing was available as a communicative resource but never the default option.

• “Given that the hearing children even in these culturally Deaf families tended toward speech whenever communicatively possible, it is no surprise that children whose deaf parents have strong skills in spoken English might grow up with limited signing skills—as did some of the interviewed adults—and therefore restricted access to membership in the Deaf community.”

• Some of the choice to use speech as much as possible may be attributed
  ◦ to efficiency (no need to be looking at the speaker) and
  ◦ fluency (in emotional arguments, it's too much effort/time to sign).
  ◦ But not all – some can be arguably due to self-identification with the Hearing world.

• Change to dominance @ school entry.
• The combined influence of hearing peers and Deaf world distinctions is likely to influence many CODAs to develop an unquestioned assumption that the normal language choice when addressing a hearing person is spoken English.
  ◦ If this strong connection between the hearing status of the addressee and language choice extends to hearing siblings or if the person being addressed is a hearing playmate, the only way not to exclude a deaf parent who is an unaddressed participant in the interaction is to sign and speak at the same time.
  ◦ Given the major grammatical differences between ASL and English, creating a complete message in both at once is a challenge even for fluent bilinguals.
  ◦ While they expressed frustration with this situation where they are excluding parents, “It does not seem to have occurred to any of these CODAs that the way around this impasse would be to sign to each other without speech.”

• Neither CODAs nor the Deaf community at large appear to view cross-generational language maintenance among hearing descendants of deaf people as an important site for the preservation of a potentially endangered sign language.
  ◦ Instead, Deaf community attention tends to focus on ensuring that deaf children of hearing parents have access to the sign language.
  ◦ Sign language does not seem to be considered the heritage language of CODAs and their children in the same way as immigrants’ languages are considered the heritage languages of their descendents across generations.

• Despite this difference, CODAs seem to be overall more similar to than different from second-generation immigrant children. Some differences:
  ◦ Immigrant children are likely to have grandparents who are monolingual in the heritage language, while CODAs are likely to have hearing grandparents.
  ◦ The difficulty of understanding spoken language without hearing it may lead CODAs to develop better productive skills in ASL; in contrast, immigrant children may be better passively than actively.
  ◦ CODAs who are fluent signers may tend to use less codeswitching with their siblings than do many similarly fluent second-generation immigrants

FULLER COMPARISON WITH HERITAGE SPEAKERS OF IMMIGRANT LANGUAGES
In the United States, the most common source of family bilingualism is immigration.

• Fishman (1972; 1980) and Veltman (1983) have described the three generation pattern of language shift that immigrant groups typically go through.
  ◦ The members of the first generation to move to the United States (AS ADULTS) remain more or less monolingual in their native language, with varying degrees of acquisition of English as a second language.
  ◦ Their second-generation children are bilingual, and
  ◦ the members of the third generation are monolingual in English.

• Within the second generation, competence in the heritage language can vary from full fluency to minimal passive knowledge.
• Large scale survey studies (e.g., Alba et al. 2002; Portes and Schauffler 1994) give an idea of the speed of language shift—including both acquisition of English and loss of the heritage language—in different communities, as well as some of the community factors that play a role in that shift.

• A number of studies indicate that
  ◦ in families in which the immigrant parents speak little to no English, English first gains entry into the home when used between siblings, even as the children continue to use the heritage language with their parents (Nguyen, Shin, and Krashen 2001; Young and Tran 1999; Zentella 1997).

• Factors influencing HL maintenance in second generation:
  ◦ parents' fluency in English,
  ◦ parental choice of language in actual use at home,
  ◦ age of interruption,
  ◦ the influence of peers at various stages in life (e.g. language choices in English-French bilingual family).

SUMMARY: consistent parental use of a heritage language at home can foster their children’s acquisition and use of that language with all family members when they are young, often with English codeswitching. However, as the children get older, especially as they enter adolescence, when the environment outside the home is consistently English-speaking, the children are likely to use increasing amounts of English when addressing any family members whose comprehension is sufficient.