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## Introduction

Together with formal logic and computer skills, English is considered nowadays a key tool for educational and occupational career. According to the British Council it is currently spoken by 1,8 billion people around the world; it serves as an official language in 53 countries and as *lingua franca* in many others. It is a language of education, politics, art, engineering, business and leisure.

The above mentioned facts are significant for every individual who wants to be successful, both in personal and professional dimension. Deaf and hard of hearing people are naturally a part of this reality: in order to become well-educated and competitive on the job market they have to get all the necessary knowledge and skills. However, their problems are connected mainly with using language, as it was formulated by a vice-rector of Gallaudet University, R.O. Cornett: *This is not voice but words – that is a real problem of the deaf persons*. Difficulties in speech perception, problem with spontaneous access to semantics, syntax and morphology of their national languages – all these factors conform to difficulties with effective language perception and production. It is also evident that these problems do not disappear during the process of learning a foreign language.

It is sometimes suggested that deaf people do not need foreign languages but rather foreign sign languages. Nowadays sign languages are treated as a genius solution enabling communication of the deaf and hard of hearing people with other members of society. However, even their effective usage does not allow deaf and hard of hearing people free access to the world-wide treasure of knowledge, the key to which is hidden in the ability to use English.

In Europe English in many countries is a non-native language and millions of Europeans each year learn it at schools, universities and private tutorials. This is also true for deaf and hard of hearing education: during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century teaching English as a foreign language to the deaf and hard of hearing was recommended as obligatory in many European countries, mainly of Central and Western Europe. Because of a lack of specialized teaching methodology, in each

country groups of teachers or even individual teachers tried to work out effective legal solutions, class structure, methods and forms of teaching.

Fortunately, the teachers' – our – paths crossed. English – a common language of all the teachers who undertook the task of teaching it to deaf and hard of hearing population – helped not only the students, but enabled us - their teachers – to get to know each other, establish meaningful contacts, exchange ideas and solutions and finally – prepare this book.

The book *Teaching English to the deaf and hard of hearing in Europe – state of the art and future challenges*, is a unique sort of publication. It resulted from personal meetings, discussions and exchange of knowledge and information among a group of brave and generous teachers who started the job of teaching English as a foreign language to the deaf and hard of hearing in their countries and finally decided to share their experiences with others. It is a long-awaited fruit of moments of uncertainty and helplessness, flashes of brilliant ideas and hours of hard work. This is also a sign of significant relationships with our students – for whom we spent long hours preparing new teaching materials, sleepless nights on night trains and countless hours in airport lounges while waiting for transportation to conference, workshop and meeting venues.

The book is divided into two parts. The first one is devoted to the presentation of a general picture of deafness nowadays, from a perspective of people personally involved in organizing English as a foreign language for the deaf and hard of hearing classes. It starts with a chapter by Kazimiera Krakowiak, a professor of linguistics and a mother of two adult deaf sons. In her essay she points to chances and barriers created by contemporary anthropological trends in pedagogy of the deaf. After discussing biologist and sociologist perspective she points to personalism as a common ground that might make it possible to re-establish quality deaf education in a responsible and effective way. The second paper in this chapter was also prepared by a linguist, Professor Franz Dotter from Klagenfurt. He presents his experience and views on what language development of deaf students should look like. These two texts are both complementary and different in their nature, and they mirror the reality of the deaf world, where strong proponents of oralism try to convince sign language users to back their position, and vice versa. The last text in this part, Elena Intorcía's, shows yet another perspective: that of the personal experience of deaf people themselves.

The second part of the book comprises 8 chapters. Each of them was written by a teacher of English as a second language working in different countries. It starts with a paper by Elana Ochse who aims at presenting English for the Deaf as a special kind of English for Specific/Specialized Purposes concept. She argues that ESP might be an enabling tool in the Deaf discourse community working in Multimedia and Cinema. The second paper was elaborated by Edith Kontra from Hungary and presents the manifold struggle of Deaf foreign language learners in that country. Analyzing her informants' opinion she argues for the implementation of barri-

er-free education, the use of the deaf national sign language across the curriculum including foreign language teaching, the need for educators who can sign, and also for the provision of Deaf teachers. Pat Pritchard from Norway presents the English curriculum and examinations for Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing in her country and gives a description of a research study into Deaf pupils' acquisition of British Sign Language in the classroom. Jitka Sedláčková and Zuzana Fonioková from the Czech Republic present the methods of teaching reading skills in a foreign language class and the implications these different methods have for teaching foreign languages to the deaf. They concentrate on the significance of reading strategies for acquiring reading skills in both L1 and L2. Their colleague from the Czech Republic, Marie Doležalova describes in a more general way the situation of the deaf language education in the Czech Republic, especially in the context of a strong movement of the deaf in the Czech Republic who want to be regarded as a cultural minority with a sign language as their mother tongue. Next three texts describe teaching English a foreign language to the deaf and hard of hearing in Poland. Ewa Domagała-Zyśk's text presents the general outline of the deaf language education in Poland and organisation of the *English for the deaf and hard of hearing* classes at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The research part of her paper is devoted to the writing output of different groups of the deaf and hard of hearing learners of English. Continuing this experience, Anna Podlewska devotes her paper to the significance of using Cued Speech as a tool for developing both receptive and productive language skills. She presents the basis of her approach to foreign language instruction that incorporates Cued Speech as one of the modes of communication used in the classroom. Anna Nabiałek presents the assumptions, programme and some aspects of teaching English as a foreign language to Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing students at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, while Beata Gulati describes the art of teaching and learning English as a foreign language at Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, the university that can be proud of several years of work in this field.

The publication is intended for foreign language teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing or university students who are considering becoming such professionals. Its purpose is to provide information and guidance about particular approaches, teaching methods and communication strategies. The decision on what ideas should be incorporated in particular curricula, however, is still in the hands of the teachers. The papers presented in the book do not form a ready recipe – they should rather be treated as voices in discussion about the most effective approaches, methods and techniques of teaching English as a foreign language to the deaf and hard of hearing.

Both the editor and all the authors fervently hope that the readers will find this book supportive in developing their English teaching and learning skills.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the encouragement of several people who believed in the sense of my work of teaching English as a foreign language to the deaf and hard of hearing students and motivated me to do research in this field. First of all I would like to express my sincere thanks to Professor Kazimiera Krakowiak who first realized the significance of organizing foreign language classes for the deaf and hard of hearing at KUL and supported the project throughout all these years with her invaluable linguistic advice and personal warmth. My work was also professionally supported from the very beginning by the Ombudsman for the Disabled Students at KUL – Professor Bogusław Marek. Professor Marek's constant interest in my work, all the signs of belief in its sense and significance, together with immense personal kindness was an invaluable source of strength.

I would like to address special words of gratitude to professor Elana Ochse from Torino University, for proofreading the book before its publication and for suggesting a lot of valuable linguistic and content improvements.

And finally special words of thanks to my former and present students who willingly wanted to *learn and teach* together with me and at the same time immensely enriched my professional and personal life. I suppose these words of gratitude should be addressed not only to my students, but to all the deaf and hard of hearing students who work with all the authors.

*Ewa Domagała-Zyśk*

PART ONE  
DEAFNESS IN CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH





# My deaf child – who is she? Who is he?

## Reflections on the hidden anthropological principles of the contemporary conceptions for audiophonology and pedagogy of the deaf

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*A very basic question and a task appears – for all, in what way, among all these multiple conditions, how can human dignity be preserved?*

Karol Wojtyła: *Człowiek jest osobą.*<sup>1</sup>

“My deaf child – who is he? Who is she?” Hearing parents ask this question with anxiety at the beginning, and later with fear, pain and fright. This is a fundamental question. It faces them all the time. It confronts them even when they are not asking it straightforward. It is present *implicite* in all the thoughts and feelings of parents who are given information about their son’s or daughter’s hearing impairment.

The answer to this question determines whether the child is accepted into the family. The content of their answer determines if the child is rejected, accepted under the condition that he or she “eventually will hear and will be the same as the other children,” or accepted unconditionally, with care, love and affirmation, just as he or she is, together with her or his “problem,” “burden,” or “strangeness.”

Parents need an answer which is invigorating, open to hope, showing the way of development and education. What kind of answers do the specialists give: doctors, psychologists, pedagogues, speech therapists? What answer can be given nowadays, on the basis of contemporary knowledge about a person with limited aural sensitivity?

This question is somewhat philosophical. Can we place it in the fields of the specific areas of knowledge, pedagogy of the deaf and audiophonology? Or should we treat it as a question of “common sense philosophy,” and give everyone a chance to answer it in an individual, subjective way, according to one’s religion, ideology or philosophy of life? Is it possible to give an objective answer to this question?

Seeking the truth means putting forward new questions. The answers are rarely complete and final. Answers given within specific areas of knowledge are never complete. At the same time we must note that everyone who takes up any activity

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<sup>1</sup> Fragment of a speech during the III session of the Second Vatican Council.

for hearing-impaired children, more or less consciously accepts a specific answer to these questions: they are establishing anthropological assumptions for their work.

Such an assumption is essential if our work is to be reflective and orderly. It is very useful to consciously realise what the content of this assumption is. Proper recognition of the content of the assumption and its implications is extremely important. When it is unconsciously undertaken, it usually leads to non-reflective submission to the indoctrinating power.

The basic philosophical assumptions concerning human beings in general are called anthropological assumptions. They can be formulated in different ways. In order to better describe the main problem, let us formulate some exemplary questions:

- Who is a deaf person in the light of contemporary knowledge about hearing impairment? What is the difference between him or her and a person who uses his or her senses properly? In what way does limited access to acoustic waves influence a human being's existence in the world? In what way does such limited access to the impressions coming from one of the senses determine a human being's existence as a member of a family, society, nation and all of mankind?

- What do we know about the inner world of the deaf? Is it similar to that of hearing people? Or is it rather "a silent world," which consists of concrete picture images, a world which is not named and not set in order by the use of logic and language, a world which is deprived of the transcendental dimension and the social and generational memory?

- What type of knowledge about the world is accessible to the deaf, whose psychological access to other people is limited? What kind of the picture of the world does a deaf child construct? Is it a picture filled with only sensual, concrete things, which are lacking their logical order based on categorisation and connections between the impressions? In what way do children categorise the impressions without the use of language?

- Does the knowledge of deaf children have to be as drastically limited as teachers' experiences and their assessments of teaching results from the schools for the hearing-impaired children show? Is it possible to make up for all these shortcomings with the help of rehabilitation and special education?

The above-mentioned questions enact a procedure of going from the anthropological problem to questions concerning psychological and psycholinguistic assumptions which form the basis of the pedagogical conceptions that are based on anthropological assumptions.

The goal of this paper is to select and categorise the fundamental anthropological assumptions, which are hidden in the main conceptions of the contemporary pedagogy of the deaf and audiophonology. The task that is being undertaken by the author of this paper is to try to recognise these assumptions and discuss the problem of the consequences of their thoughtless acceptance for the development and education of the hearing impaired children, their rehabilitation and revalidation.

On the basis of the audiophonological and surdo-pedagogical works published in the last thirty years in Poland and abroad, and taking into account observations of the practical activities and discussions concerning revalidation, rehabilitation, bringing up and education of hearing-impaired children, three groups of anthropological assumptions can be distinguished, which lie at the basis of the pedagogical conceptions that are described theoretically and used in pedagogical practice. In order to arrange and characterise them, we can give them the following names:

- Biologism
- Sociologism
- Personalism

The above distinction is based on the analysis of the portrait of the hearing impaired person which is shown in the formulation of the research problems, psychological and pedagogical reflection and in the rehabilitation, revalidation and education programmes. The prevailing assumption is the thesis that this picture derives from the attitude towards the deaf, and on the other hand it forms an implication for this relation. This division and terminology does not mean that there are three separate conceptions, clearly stated by the authors before they start their research. It is usually the case that it is possible to identify – using deductive thinking – the fundamental anthropological theses, which are assumed even without clearly stating them, since the attitudes implicated by them usually make a very clear concretisation of these assumptions. The method of this paper, which is a kind of essay, makes the author feel relieved from the duty of providing the reader with all the sources and references. It is possible to provide all the footnotes, but it would be very tiring for the reader.

The attitude known as **biologism** has at its source the perception of a deaf person as a living organism in whom one of the organs has been seriously damaged. This is supposed to be the reason why the entire organism functions incorrectly and is not ready to adjust to the environment. In the process of each person's development, one can observe many dysfunctions and deficits. Good hearing, especially hearing that makes it possible to perceive the sounds of speech, is viewed as the most important feature of every human body. Each person is biologically adjusted to language development, and that is why he or she can readily communicate with other members of his or her species, and function in society in a human way of existence. Taking such an assumption as the basis, hearing impairment can be viewed as a loss of a constitutional attribute of the *Homo Sapiens* species. The above thesis is not usually formulated *expressis verbis*. However, it penetrates into all the reflections made in the biological trend. All activities concerning deaf people, especially children with deep pre-lingual loss of hearing have as their goal the so-called "humanisation" of the deaf.

The source of biologism, which is a prevailing trend in the contemporary pedagogy of the deaf, can be found in medical sciences. Biologism derives its semantic tools, terminology, clinical research methods and style of describing and interpreting the results from medicine.. Its own value system is built on these assumptions. The

system is crystallised around such terms as *health and illness, neuro-sensory disorder, ability and disability, treatment, prosthesis, rehabilitation, norm and deviation*. According to this concept, each deaf or hard of hearing person is a *chronically ill, deviant, handicapped*, human being a person who needs therapy, rehabilitation and special methods in upbringing. All these can help a deaf person reach as normal as possible a state.

The conceptions based on the biological theory give the child and his or her parents hope, since different methods of help are presented to them: treatment, prosthesis, rehabilitation and revalidation. The goal of all these activities is improvement of the overall physical condition and compensation for its deficits in order for the individual to gain not only health, but also strength, power and efficiency (see: *vālidūs*(Latin) – powerful, strong, healthy, influential, efficient). In other words: the plan is to be able to function according to the ideal norm. For hearing-impaired children, the most important element of this model norm is to be able to hear and speak.

Biologism is a position characterised by anthropological reductionism, which is expressed by the consequent interpretation of all the psychological functions of the deaf person in strict correlation with his aural functions and speech activities. Speech activities are perceived as a kind of function of the organism for which hearing activities are a central link. Language, which is essential for speech processes, is perceived only as acoustic signals. Its complicated semiotic structure, conditioned by social, biological and cultural elements, is not taken into account. Modern brain research and the achievements of cognitive psychology allow pedagogues who are biologically oriented to look into this complicated processes of transformation of information. This enables them to come closer to the reflections of the humanistic sciences that have been concentrating on the non-biological sphere of human existence.

Many of the conceptions based on biologism point to the role of society in the development of a hearing-impaired child. The role of the child's mother, who is simultaneously also a therapist, and the role of different specialists engaged in the therapeutic, rehabilitation and educational processes are underlined. Society is also treated as a source of the main value, a norm. The role of society is to provide examples that can be followed, and role models with whom a deaf child can identify in order to reach as closely as possible a normal state.

The programmes based on biologism encourage their application thanks to a kind of clear motivation that arises due to the use of humanitarian slogans. These programmes are practically based on the development of modern methods of medical treatment and prostheses technologies. They seem to be trustworthy thanks to the ideological order, which is based on the dramatic tension between the ideas of good (i.e. all healing activities) and evil (negligence of illness). The strength of this scheme is so powerful that it does not allow seeing the facts that not all activities intended to be good really do bring the expected results.. Fascination with modern technology makes it difficult to recognise the fact that medical sciences are in fact helpless in the face of the deepest level of hearing impairment and to acknowledge all the possible

side effects and harmfulness of the methods. The parents' rehabilitation hyperactivity and continual search for super-modern technical devices calm the parents' conscience, but at the same time it sentences them and their children to psychological stress and functional disorders stemming out of it. The so-called beauty of the ideal mother who is her child's therapist at the same time diverts our attention from the fact that this mother, overworked with multiple tasks connected with this model of rehabilitation is incapacitated, reduced to an object used to immediately fulfil the child's needs. She loses all the attributes of ripe motherhood and her child, in spite of his or her mother's apparent heroism, is actually psychically orphaned. At the same time, the child is deprived of personal autonomy because of its mother's overprotective behaviour. The next danger stems from the mixture of reductionism, which is hidden in biologism, along with economic reductionism. In such a situation, deaf people are perceived exclusively as clients for specialists and as consumer subjects of modern prostheses technology.

Modern conceptions of pedagogy of the deaf which aim at fighting with the reductionism proposed by the biologism standpoint underline the specific role of socialisation in the development of the hearing-impaired child. At the same time, they point to the consequences of negative social influence and improper education conditions.

The most important element of the next anthropological standpoint, which we call **sociologism**, is an acknowledgement of the importance of social conditions of life and human psychological development. This standpoint is recognised as a basis of the two opposite and fighting trends of modern pedagogy of the deaf, namely:

- A. Integrational sociologism
- B. Ethnological sociologism

Underlining their value, society attributes to an individual psychological development, which is connected in each of these trends with a different system of values and different conceptions of organisation working to solve the problems of deaf people.

The basis of **integrational sociologism** is a modified version of biologism. In the light of this conception, a deaf person is perceived as an individual whose organism does not function properly, and this influences his or her social functioning. The modification is expressed by enlarging the list of the causes of this handicap. Hearing impairment is perceived as a primary cause, but social conditions are perceived almost as important as biological ones. These social conditions are the following: social stigmatisation, distance, rejection by the family and society in general, isolation, mental barriers, lack of means of communication, a disadvantageous model of personal identification, and bad educational conditions at home and in school. Enlarging the anthropological standpoint allows building a more complete picture of a hearing-impaired person and his or her problems. It helps to reject the simplified way of interpreting the problem, meaning in a cause-effect dyad (cause: aphysical defect, effect: handicap) and to look for its explanation in a more complex, multi-faceted way.

Representatives of the integration trend assume that hearing-impaired people are members of society, so they should live, be brought up and educated together with hearing people. They should not be brought up in boarding schools, but in their family homes. They should not be educated in special schools but in public schools. The representatives of the integral trend underline that the main reason for the social distance between the hearing and the deaf is segregation, which closes the hearing-impaired people off in their ghettos, and makes it difficult for the hearing to learn about the problems of the deaf. Segregation and the collective style of bringing children up at special schools for the deaf are the main reasons for the language deprivation and educational disadvantages of the hearing impaired.

In practice, it appears to be extremely difficult for deaf children to attend a public school. The situation is also difficult for teachers. The representatives of integration postulate the necessity of creating a new type of institution: integration kindergartens, schools and integration classes in state schools.

Nowadays, we can observe the intense development of such institutions, constant changes in their organisational conceptions, chosen means of communication with the deaf, and methods of teaching. All discussions concerning them suggest that pedagogical reflection has been developing constantly and that new solutions are being sought after. At the same time, we witness the tragic situation of deaf children who encounter countless barriers while living among hearing people, even when they are treated with tolerance, goodwill and kindness. The biggest problem is the limited possibility of spontaneous communication, i.e. conducting a synchronic, eurythmic discourse between hearing and hearing-impaired people.

Opponents of integration interpret the standpoint of sociologism in another way. They appeal to the traditions of special schools for the deaf and to some circles for deaf and deaf-and-dumb people. They generalise the conclusions based on observations of life in these circles and underline the advantages which are provided for a deaf person in a community of people experiencing the same kinds of problems. These people are looking for arguments for the existence of such communities. They put forward both the theoretical arguments and the conclusions of scientific reports of ethnologists and ethnolinguists. These researches stress the diversity of cultures and the variety of their means of communication. The role of this language diversity is stressed, and all languages are treated as equivalent means of social communication. Transforming these theses into the pedagogical field of the deaf gives us a basis for an optimistic conclusion that hearing-impaired people can and should use the only language accessible to them, i.e. sign language. The thesis stating that there are superior functions performed through the sense of hearing for people is overthrown, which leads to the modification of the biologist's standpoint: this impairment of one sensory function does not lead to limitation of the person in general, but leads to "another quality." The person is "differently non-disabled." Each deaf person is capable in his or her own way. The most sharply-outlined thesis states, "sign language is the mother tongue of all deaf people."

In this light, a deaf person is not perceived as handicapped as long as he or she lives in a society made up of the deaf. It is said that deaf people create an independent culture, based on their own language transmission and their own hierarchy of values. The society of the deaf is described in a way analogous to descriptions of other ethnic or language minorities.

Ethnological sociology is usually connected with epistemological and ethical relativism, based on a thesis that there are no universal values, inevitable for the development of humankind. The representatives of this trend assume that the deaf can be happy while living in their own community. Since they understand each other well, they are not treated as handicapped (the hearing are handicapped), and therefore, they do not have to undergo humiliating rehabilitation and revalidation procedures. Thanks to such communities, the deaf feel their autonomy. The paternalistic specialists, who do not understand the deaf, do not supervise them, as they are themselves handicapped. Harlan Lane (1996) calls this disability “*audism*.” This handicap of the parents and the specialists is manifested in perceiving reality with the use of one’s hearing abilities and leads to overestimation of the significance of aural perception.

According to the ideology of ethnological sociology, every deaf child is a member of *the community of the deaf* and he or she does not need to learn the national language. Deaf people who sign fluently in their deaf communities do not experience any difficulties in communication and do not feel inferior because of their speech disorders or language mistakes – which might be so tiresome in contacts with the hearing people. Sign language gives them a sense of security, protects them against the feeling of inferiority, makes them socially attractive and, first and foremost, makes it possible for them to be members of a community that fulfils all their psychological needs. Sign language makes it possible for them to create their own culture and live with dignity in “the silent world.”

Ideologists of this trend insist that it is not necessary for the deaf to know not only Strauss and Beethoven, but also Shakespeare, the Bible and classical philosophy. Their culture – the Deaf Culture – fulfils all their needs. This sub-culture fulfils all their needs, so both rehabilitation and special education (organised by hearing people) are not necessary at all. Education would be possible if the deaf wanted to learn the national language as a foreign language, thus obtaining some information about the culture of hearing people. At this point, there is a meeting place with the ethnological standpoint about cultural pluralism and anti-pedagogical philosophy. It is a very comfortable propaganda. First, it helps the deaf to throw away the feeling of inferiority and gain their own dignity. At the same time, it confirms their wishful thinking of being proud because of their different nature. On the other hand, it helps groups of hearing activists working for the isolated communities of the deaf to confirm their policy and get funds for promoting sign language. This is an example of the well-known mechanism of bringing into existence, by a group of lobbyists, the subject of their own activity. This mechanism is based on the mutual dependence

of the guards and the guardians, who in the end cannot exist without each other. Out of this inter-dependence, the most serious problems of deaf people arise. Being dependent on the kindness, care and reliability of other people, who themselves experience social distance from deaf people, can cause severe limitation of personal freedom and multiple blockages in psychological development. As a consequence of the translators' work, there appears a specific "knowledge regulation". It may lead to the creation of a false picture of the world, alienation and hostility toward hearing people, even their own parents. In some cases, there may appear a manipulation of entire communities of deaf people who easily fall into the mental enslavement of the hearing and deafened people who impose their own views and attitudes.

The anthropological standpoint of biologism forms the basis of a fake and erroneous vision of a hearing-impaired person, reducing his or her image to the picture of their handicap and disabilities. Changing this vision leads to creating another fake vision which hides the disability under the mask of "cultural difference." If Lane is right that the process of depreciation of the deaf community by specialists in the biologism trend is being done behind the "mask of philanthropy," we should say that there is the danger of another kind of depreciation, another "mask of philanthropy," that of "cultural difference." This danger is primarily due to phenomena that can be called "illusion of non-disability" and "illusion of autonomy". To be subject to this illusion – like any escape from the truth – brings immediate benefits, but in the end makes it difficult to adapt to reality, restricts the freedom of the person and impairs his or her integral, multi-faceted development, especially the development towards values. The trap of illusions of non-disability and autonomy particularly threatens the deaf and hard of hearing who combine their life goals with the autonomy of the whole group and lose their emotional bond with their families of origin.

It is necessary to realise the fact that the desire of the deaf for group independence is on the one side a reaction against the danger of real paternalism by specialists, based on the thesis of biologism. On the other hand, it is one of the characteristic features of modern culture, in which the tendencies of globalisation and unification are fighting with the tendencies of autonomy for different ethnic, age or social groups, or of the groups of people gathering together to reach their common goals (e.g. the homosexual movement).

There are many dangers stemming from taking up the ethnological sociologism theses. Their main cause is a fake picture of deaf people and their position in society. Three of these dangers should be described more precisely:

1. First of all, the deaf members of these societies that live in economically disadvantageous countries are in great danger. The social welfare funds do not meet the needs of all the social groups. Representatives of the trend of ethnical sociologism proclaim slogans about the independence and autonomy of deaf communities. At the same time, the members of these groups claim a right to receive financial help from the government in order to provide the deaf people with interpreters and translators



who will enable the deaf to communicate with hearing people. What would the consequences of the lack of money for interpreters be?

2. The second danger is a kind of a social orphanhood of deaf children. It is a well-known fact that more than 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents, families in which the other members of the family hear and use the national language. Inclusion of these children into the community of the deaf and identification with the deaf community takes place when the deaf child begins his or her school education, i.e. after this developmental period whose main task is language development. In order for sign language to be a mother tongue of the child, it has to be learned from the child's mother, or to state it more precisely, from both parents in the natural family environment. Parents communicate with their child using the language that was used by them to understand the world around them. They share their thoughts, emotions, opinions and desires with the use of this language. Parents acquaint the child with all the elements of that language. If the parents are deaf and the sign language is their own language that they use fluently, this language becomes the mother tongue of their child. The hearing parents and teachers are not able to re-arrange all the functions of their brain in order to use sign language. They can learn only a part, a poor substitute of it. In what way can sign language become the mother tongue of a deaf child born in a hearing family? Is it possible to avoid the psychological deficits connected with retarded language development?

3. Sign language does not have a written form. The scientific output of humankind is consolidated in a written form. In order to access these possessions, one has to know the national language, at least its written form, which is a secondary form of the spoken language. Pedagogical experience shows that the basic condition for fluent knowledge of the written form of a language is to know the spoken form of that language. Until now, we do not know how to transmit the morphological and semantic elements of language through written means. How is it possible then to create equal educational chances for deaf teenagers in countries without high schools and universities in which the students are taught by the use of sign language?

The questions, problems and warnings mentioned above, stemming from the realisation of the fashionable slogans and modern opinions, should be discussed more precisely. However, they should not be treated as warnings against sign language in itself.

Sign language, as a phenomenon of human culture that arouses strong contradictory emotions, deserves special attention. At the beginning, it was a language of the people rejected by society, since it was a secret code of Parisian beggars. The person who described it first was Father Charles Michel de l'Épée. In the XVIII and XIX centuries, De l'Épée and many other advocates of sign language showed and justified its usage in the education of the deaf. Their educational efforts made it possible to communicate with the deaf living in communities of hearing-impaired people gathering at special schools for the deaf. Each community created its own version of sign language, to some extent similar to that used around, and was dependent (espe-

cially in its semantics) on the spoken language used in the country. This dependency means that sign language is perceived as a different means of transmitting the same content that can be transmitted when using spoken language, i.e. as a gestural and mimical form of the national language. In the past, deaf people using sign language had serious difficulties in learning their national language, both in its spoken and written forms (on its lexical, semantic, formal and grammar levels), and that is why there were a lot of controversies concerning sign language. From the end of the XIX century till the end of the XX century, there was a dominant perception that sign language is the stigma of the deaf-and-dumb handicapped. It was only at the end of the XX century that a revival of the pedagogical reflection concerning this phenomenon took place. This renaissance was possible thanks to the efforts of preparing a linguistic description of sign language, pointing out the fact that it is different from the national language. In spite of their genetic relations with national languages, sign languages are autonomic language systems based on their own procedure of meaning coding.

Sign languages still remain mysterious phenomena, which have not been thoroughly researched and described yet. There have been some experiments of describing and evaluating sign languages in linguistic categories used in the description of ethnic sound languages. However, these should be treated as inadequate. Sign language is only seemingly similar to the ethnic languages. In fact, it is a completely different phenomenon. It is a psycholinguistic phenomenon which appears in the situation of the lack of possibility of hearing speech sounds, and its appearance is conditioned by social and educational factors. It is a natural, autonomous phenomenon, and pedagogues cannot "rule" it, as it is confirmed by the results of the attempts of reforming sign languages. These attempts enriched sign languages, but the other way around, not in a way predicted by the authors of the projects of the artificial hybrid languages (the so-called didactic signs and language-sign systems).

The experience gained over the past few years by special schools in Poland has provided sufficient evidence of the strength and creativity of sign language. Teachers inspired and educated by Professor Bogdan Szczepankowski (1999) try to use a pidgin-type artificial language whose syntax and inflection is modeled on the Polish language, while on the expression layer it uses sign language and finger-spelling. It is recommended to speak in Polish simultaneously while using it, and in practice this boils down to speaking in a specifically deformed variant of Polish. Deaf students willingly include in their own language "new" signs as neologisms or neo-semantisms, but they are not influenced by the linear and inflectional structure of Polish, so they tend to use non-inflectional forms, arranged in accordance to the spatio-temporal order of sign language sentences.

Those who treat sign language as a symptom of an illness are mistaken. Its sources lie in the self-healing abilities of the human mind that is able to transgress its barriers. The fact that we know little about sign language does not change the fact that it is proof of the great possibilities of the human mind: it is an example of the human

mind's victory over the body's disabilities. It is the existence of this phenomenon that brings us to discuss the question who a deaf man is.

The reflections concerning the mystery of sign languages can be a good starting point for discussions about the third anthropological standpoint present in contemporary audiophonology and pedagogy of the deaf, namely personalism.

In contemporary anthropological thought there are several versions of **personalism**. Understood broadly, personalism includes all the philosophical, psychological, pedagogical and social doctrines accepting the specific value of a person in him or herself and postulating their comprehensive development. On the basis of this theory, a human being should always be treated as a subject and goal, not as an object, a tool or a means to achieve something. Each of the personalism variants is based on concrete philosophical and psychological principles. Christian personalism is deeply rooted in theology and is strictly connected with existentialism and Christian realism. In Poland, the best known form of personalism is the personalistic thought of Card. Carol Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II.

The basis of the Christian personalism is enclosed in the definition of a person as a unique, individual and autonomous bio-psycho-physical and spiritual subject, who is able to act in a rational, social and free way in the spheres of culture, truth and beauty in order to harmoniously enrich themselves and other people. Human beings have their own dignity which is independent of temporary conditions or features. The source of this dignity is the salvific love of the God-Creator, expressed in the Death and Resurrection of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

This picture of a man includes: 1) his body that exists under the rules of biology; 2) the psyche developing through the sensual exploration of the world and the interpersonal relationships with others and 3) the spiritual element developing through a person's relationship with God. The human being is a subject who is developing and fulfilling the potential of his humanity in an integral way, in all of these spheres: biological, bio-psycho-cognitive, social, ethical and religious. Care for the pupil's integral development is a task of his or her teachers and a subject of pedagogy.

The answer to the question "who is a deaf child?" based on the theory of personalism consists first of all in the thesis that a deaf child is a person worthy of care and unconditional affirmation despite the degree of hearing loss, level of his rehabilitation achievements, lack of speech, speech retardation, or the way of communicating with other people. The child's dignity, none of the child's other characteristics or the goal of our activities, is a sufficient motivator for the parents' and pedagogues' care for the child's proper living conditions, development and education.

The personalistic theory neither enlarges the problem of the hearing impairment, nor denies it. It allows avoiding reductionism and concentrates on the child's disability and its consequences. Disability is treated as a natural characteristic of the human condition. It is considered to be a great harm, weakness, and limitation. A person's weakness and limitations put them in a situation in which it is necessary to cross barriers, take up effort to win victories over evil and look for what is good. Disability is

a source of suffering, but this suffering can have a special value in a person's spiritual development. Both for the handicapped person and for his or her family, it creates a kind of test that is both purifying and strengthens spiritual forces. Thanks to this, a man can see more clearly the most important values that help to decide the sense of life. In the light of this conception, all the activities taken up for the good of the disabled (healing treatments, rehabilitation, revalidation) acquire a new dimension: they become acts of love. However, they have to be directed at the authentic good of the person, not at any other goals. The activities directed at confirming the social dignity of hearing-impaired people, at finding one's own place in society, at improving the quality of the deaf child's life and at magnifying the educational chances of the deaf—all these activities acquire a new and important dimension. They should be directed at creating the proper conditions for the integral development of the human being, i.e. his or her full physical, psychological and spiritual development.

Parents have a natural right and duty to bring up their children. Family is the most proper environment in which a child can live, develop and have access to all the values created by people for the good of other people. A society and especially the specialists taking care of the deaf are responsible for securing social support for the family in the task of bringing up the deaf child, and the child is expected to fulfil his or her developmental potential. In other words: the family and the deaf child him- or herself need social support in order to develop in an integral way and to fulfil their human nature. This is a task for specialist centres, schools for the deaf and other educational institutions i.e. special, inclusive or state schools.

Choosing proper organisational solutions and methods of conduct is still the most difficult problem. From the personalistic viewpoint, it does not present a simplified model of what is best and good for all. Every child's needs and the needs of his or her family have to be diagnosed individually, honestly and acutely. Solutions should be worked out for each child individually. A recipe for making everybody happy does not exist.

Personalism helps us to avoid utopia, but it does not protect against the drama of the mystery of the different natures of people. Society has been trying to deal with this mystery from the very beginning, looking for ways of behaving towards these members of society who are not standard, like the majority of people. In the light of personalistic philosophy, each and every human being is a mystery. The mystery of the handicapped person is a multiplied mystery, the mystery of the "double strangeness" of a person.

We can encounter the mystery of the person by meeting him or her. A meeting with a stranger is a phenomenon of the pedagogy of special educational needs. Contact with the other, and especially the act of talking with a deaf person is a specific kind of meeting in which we can get closer to the other person's mystery, taking part in the drama of the sensual and language handicap. At the same time, it is possible to be involved in the most amazing humanistic phenomenon – mental crossing of the biological limitation.

Meetings among people are possible thanks to the “gift of words,” which in fact is an ability to use signs. Each child receives this gift thanks to their mother, family, and the maternal community’s mediation. The deaf child, to whom relatives are not able to give this “gift of words” as a sound language, has to look for his or her own ways of communicating with others. Sign language can serve as such a means. It has been developing spontaneously in the communities of the deaf. It has been developing because of the helplessness of the hearing people, who are not able to share the language of the entire society with its deaf members. The deaf people who fulfil their “gift of words” through sign language deserve to be admired.

Admiration and respect for sign language does not free the parents and the teachers, and especially the pedagogues undertaking scientific research, from the moral obligation of finding better, more universal means of communication between hearing and hearing-impaired people. In fact, it is the other way around: the phenomenon of sign language is a kind of inspiration for seeking the methods that will enable the deaf to learn their national language and also foreign languages in their spoken and written forms.

A reasonable expectation is due to the belief that if people with profound hearing impairments have the ability to spontaneously create new languages of their own, they most surely can also acquire existing languages. They are also able to communicate with hearing people and come into contact with the national and global culture. However, it is necessary to equip them with full and convenient sensual access to the word. For five centuries, since the time of Jerome Cardano, a belief was held that it is enough to provide the deaf with access to written words.

Today an empirically confirmed thesis should be taken that this is not enough. There are also strong arguments for the possibility to acquire language on the basis of multi-sensory speech perception, especially when unified conditions are created to communicate properly with the child since the very early days of his or her life in the family and later on in kindergarten and at school. More and more areas of hope are revealed by the most contemporary scientific research confirming the existence of a bio-neurological basis for the deaf person’s linguistic development.

The principle of integral development is staying in a good relationship with others. Good relationships, based on mutual love, can be established in a family in which all of the members of the family communicate using the same language. The anthropological standpoint of personalism gives the strongest basis and the greatest motivation spur for these surdopedagogical conceptions that aim at working out and promoting the methods of spontaneous communication between the hearing and hearing-impaired, children and their parents, pupils and their teachers. One such method of communication is Cued Speech (Krakowiak 1995, Domagała-Zyśk 2006), and other methods of verbal and spoken communication with the deaf.

The consequence of accepting the assumption of Christian personalism, especially in this form, which is contained in the teachings of John Paul II, is concern for the integral development of each person. Development directed towards the values

recognized is expressed in the great synthesis in his words: "Build a civilization of love." The foundation of the civilization of love according to papal teaching is truth. A moral obligation resulting from this teaching is to seek the truth. This also applies to parents and teachers who have been summoned to educate their hearing-impaired children.

Parents looking for the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this paper have to make a choice not only based on the basic anthropological standpoint, but also concerning the methods of conduct. The same choice has to be made by pedagogues of the deaf. Nobody is freed from making a choice. Nobody can free him- or herself from the responsibility of a choice. There is a tension in this choice that is comparable to the tension of all of man's choices. The shortest way of describing this drama can be found in the poetic words of a Polish poet, Jerzy Liebert: *Having made a choice once, I have to make a choice forever.*"

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# What language development in deaf and hard of hearing children should look like?

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## Abstract

The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities obliges us to perform an essential paradigm change from “poor disabled people” to “self-determined life of people with special needs under the equal rights perspective”. This paradigm change challenges all stakeholders in the educational process. In the case of deaf and hard-of-hearing children, it demands substantial changes in their education: They have the right to undergo cognitive and language development which conforms to that of hearing children. They also have the right to access all information and communication which is available for hearing people in a barrier-free manner. If the basic language development is not completed by the age of 6 years, school success and life chances are severely endangered.

The consequence is that mono- or bilingual furtherance from 0-6 years has to be considerably improved, obeying the findings from research on language development in hearing children. Moreover, training of professionals in the area and research have to meet international standards. Financial and organisational provisions have to guarantee barrier-free offers; parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing children need comprehensive counseling, at best in a one-stop-institution which comprises all possibilities of support and aids.

**Keywords:** deaf, hard-of-hearing, education, inclusion, paradigm change

## Preliminary remarks

This article deals predominantly with children who are so young that they are not yet able to finally decide concerning their identity. Therefore I will use the terms “deaf” and “hard-of-hearing” in their natural-scientific or medical sense, unless another use is

indicated. In order to avoid a too summative naming, I mostly use the phrase “deaf and hard-of-hearing” instead of “hearing impaired” in order to represent the whole group<sup>11</sup>.

## 1. Introduction: Looking back

Some decades ago (take e.g. the 1950s), in Central Europe it was rather clear what terms like “deaf” and what “hard-of-hearing” meant, in a medical perspective as well as in a perspective of identity (for a more detailed interpretation of the terms, see paragraph 3):

“Hard-of-hearing” persons were people who had a hearing problem but nevertheless were – besides their suffering from a lot of jokes about their “disability” – seen as members of the hearing community. “Deaf” persons were looked at as a very poor group, living outside the mainstream in their own “ghetto” and having – with a few exceptions – no access to a normal education and better life chances. For both groups, there were special schools which were known by the public as offering less qualification for a job than “normal” schools. In more detail, the schools for the hard-of-hearing were seen as clearly more advantageous than the schools for the deaf (this was the reason why many parents of “deaf” children tried to get their child to attend a school for the hard-of-hearing).

Technically, we have to take into consideration that in the 1950s electric hearing aids were only about 50 years old and the first transistorised aids were just appearing. Therefore, the nature and degree of a given “natural” hearing loss and the extent of care more or less determined the individual educational life chances of deaf and hard-of-hearing people. There was a very simple direct correlation between the degree of the hearing loss and the educational and job chances.

## 2. The main orientation of the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing persons in the first two thirds of the 20th century

For a long time, the pedagogy of deaf and hard-of-hearing children was – according to the so-called “spirit of the time”, concerning the view on people with disabilities – a pedagogy of low expectations by experts, including teachers. Almost no one cared about “self-determined life” of “disabled” people or about producing bad educational results with them. Politicians, experts and teachers had internal-

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<sup>11</sup> I neither deal with the different use of “deaf” and “hard-of-hearing” in different countries nor with the reasons for the identity decisions of persons with a hearing loss; cf. Dotter 2011.



ised the opinion that deaf and hard-of-hearing had – to a different extent – lower capacities for being educated than hearing subjects. This opinion was taught in all institutions which trained teachers as a natural law and almost no one asked whether the attitude against these groups and the methods could have influenced the bad results of education <sup>22</sup>. Naturally, also in these times there were engaged teachers and helpers, but they had almost no chance to offer adequate education because of the mainly oral orientation of education. This situation created a lot of frustration in teachers <sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, the sign language communities had no chance to develop their language competitively to spoken/written languages.

### 3. Not only terminology: the traditional “deaf” vs. “hard of hearing” dichotomy weakens

Depending on general and national cultural patterns, there was a rather rigid separation of “hard-of-hearing”, identified as oriented towards spoken language only, and “deaf”, identified as oriented towards some “assistive visual method” (their underdeveloped and unacknowledged sign languages) in many countries; an especially rigid separation seems to have taken place in some Central European, e.g. German-speaking countries. While more or less all stakeholders in the hearing society accredited to the hard-of-hearing that they could somehow “assimilate” to the hearing majority, the deaf were often seen as a “lost” group – even in pedagogy – for which not much could be done to convert them to a valuable member of the hearing society, except performing low level work without communication requirements. One evidence for this attitude is that many pedagogues argued that letting hearing impaired people orient towards sign language would confine them to a ghetto, while holding them off from that – even accepting an incomplete competence in spoken language and bad education results – would help them much more <sup>4</sup>.

The twofold meaning of “deaf” and “hard of hearing” hindered an objective view: Taken in their medical meaning, their use is simply a matter of audiometry and of setting a certain hearing loss in decibels as a limit for the use of the one or the oth-

<sup>2</sup> There was no consciousness concerning the rights of people with special needs which is reflected by the rejection of an appeal for subtitling in television by the European Court for Human Rights even in 2007 (cf. Dotter 2009b).

<sup>3</sup> Related to Austria, Migsch 1987 and 20 years later Krausneker and Schalber 2007 reflect this problematic situation very well.

<sup>4</sup> There are many parallels to this attitude in the pedagogical coping with blind and partially-sighted persons. The difference is that the “educability” of members of these groups was discovered some years before that happened for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

er. Taking this view, there are very few people who show a more or less total loss of hearing and have to be named “deaf”. All others are then – logically – understood as “hard-of-hearing” and ordered along a scale of severity of their hearing loss. The crucial point here is that those people identified as having a “severe hearing loss” – sometimes expressed by phrases like “bordering to deafness” or “only residual hearing” – naturally heard “something” but this “something” was not sufficient “to learn spoken language in a natural way”. Exactly the last phrase was used by oralists to define “deaf” by taking the language learning function as a criterion. Despite this statement, even the “residual hearing” judgment was taken as an argument to declare these people as being able to orient towards spoken language only, using the medical definition instead of the language learning function: by the medical definition they fell into the group of “hard-of-hearing”. Using this strategy, the number of “really deaf” people who should be allowed to use a sign language was minimised against all objective needs of the different individuals. Later, a second group was rated to get advantages from the use of sign language: those out of the hard-of-hearing who had an “additional disability”. However, this term has to be evaluated critically because it was sometimes only used as an “immunising strategy” to avoid the discussion why oral methods did not lead to sufficient success: some “intellectual deficit” within the child was used to exculpate the teachers and their inadequate methods.

The second meaning of “deaf” and “hard-of-hearing” is socially oriented and means the self-identification of an individual: The default interpretation is that the “hard-of-hearing” identify with spoken language and hearing culture while the “deaf” identify with sign language and deaf culture. There are two shortcomings in this everyday usage: “Deaf” people living within a hearing majority always had to be somehow “bilingual” in order to cope with their social situation. They were just barred from a competitive use of spoken/written language by the “only-oral”-method. And there were always people who did not follow the expected behaviour: There were and are “hard-of-hearing” also using sign language and there were “deaf” only using spoken/written language by their own decision. These outsiders were always neglected by pedagogy, research and even had several problems when they wanted to join the “normal” groups of deaf or hard-of-hearing people.

If we look into pedagogical literature, we often find a mixing of the meanings of the two terms mentioned. This either darkens the tenor of many texts or is even used for the manipulation of readers: Authors first write about “deaf” adults who really identify with the sign language community, using the social meaning; then change to small “deaf” children who naturally were not able to identify themselves yet with any community, using the medical meaning. Using this bewildering method, authors give the impression that these two groups comprise the same members. The medical use of “hard-of-hearing” for children who have not yet decided concerning their identity is even worse: taking it as an argument that all these children should undergo a spoken-language-only education because, turning the meaning of “hard of hearing” from its medical to its social variant in one sentence.

In the last few decades, we could observe new technological developments, e.g. the cochlear implant – CI – and the considerable improvement of hearing aids, the internet as a source for communication, and digital video technology. There are also new social developments, e.g. probably starting from a general individualisation process going on, young people do not anymore connect to only one group; the strong adherence to clubs and similar is weakening. These developments have as a side effect that the rigid dichotomy “deaf” vs. “hard of hearing” cannot be held anymore: especially the members of the group of people with a CI decide individually how to move within the hearing society or within the groups of deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

#### 4. The big paradigm change

When we look at the world view sources which instigated deaf education, we can identify the “save their souls”-motivation first; then enlightenment stressed the right for all people to participate in its movement. In nationalism there was no place for another language any more which meant the worst backlash of deaf education, having its culmination in euthanasia and sterilisation during Nazi times (cf. Dotter and Okorn 2003). Only in the last part of the 20th century, people with disabilities could establish one of the last emancipation movements and were able to change their situation in the last decades on the basis of a comprehensive understanding of human rights: Especially by the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities from 2007 on and by national laws the respective countries have declared that they are willing to execute a substantial change in treating people with special needs: What was an act of voluntary care before, emanating from compassion and/or ethics and belief, now is turned to a right, by that especially signalling that human rights are not reducible for these groups and concretising these rights in terms of special needs<sup>5</sup>.

#### 5. The challenges of a revisited education of deaf and hard-of-hearing persons

As mentioned above, we are now confronted with a sharp paradigm change from “poor disabled people” to “self-determined life of people with special needs under the

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<sup>5</sup> For sign language politics cf. Krausneker 2008.

equal rights perspective". This and the results of research in language development force us to change the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children substantially: We have to offer a language development to them which conforms to that of hearing children. This development has to lead to equal command of one or two languages as we know it from the average hearing person. And the child has the right that (s)he can complete this process in its main structures and basics by the age of 6 years; otherwise school success is severely endangered. The question is how this can be done, starting from the reality of parental knowledge and actual training of educators.

## 6. Language learning of hearing children, a showcase for the learning of deaf and hard-of-hearing children

### 6.1. The language learning context

Important steps of language acquisition happen already during the first year; the basics of vocabulary and grammar are acquired during the first two to three years. Influencing factors are the genetic determination of the language acquisition process and the cerebral development, e.g. the lateralization of the language centres (cf. Locke 1997).

For a positive development, a rich linguistic environment and motivation towards an exchange using language are necessary both in the family context and in community institutions. Parents often show such a supportive and motivating behaviour spontaneously (cf. "Motherese"/"Mutterisch"/"baby talk"). For children suffering from severe deprivation or isolation that experience a first contact with language years after they were born there is a danger that their language skills (especially concerning grammar) remain below average (cf. Curtiss 1977).

Therefore it is important for parents, persons working in early intervention, pedagogues, teachers and therapists to:

- have a comprehensive knowledge of the internal (biological) and external (dependent on experiences) requirements of language acquisition
- know about techniques for an early recognition of possible risks and evidence that language development is affected or for an existing deviation from normal language development
- intervention at the earliest possible moment (preemptive, promotional, and therapeutic measures)

Up to 20% of the children who are educated monolingually in German show linguistic deficits (for children with another linguistic background, the numbers are partially even higher); studies at the school entrance argue more than 30% of the children would need a promotion of language skills (cf. Pochert et al. 2002). The origin of these linguistic deficits is often the language development during the first three

years (cf. Weissenborn 2003). Looking at these facts and results for hearing subjects, a delay in language development may even be more threatening for deaf and hard-of-hearing children. To give just a short impression of important dates: Usually from month 12 on (within a span of month 10-14), children produce their first words. In month 18-24 they reach the so-called “50-words-mark”: The child should master about 50 words and reach the first stage of questions (“what (is that)?”). This leads to a significant increase in vocabulary and also to combinations of two or three words, which indeed do not correspond to adult grammar but show the emergence of syntax. If the child has not achieved approximately 50 words at the age of 24 months, it is termed a “late talker” and has a 50% risk for a delayed language development. With months 30-36, we observe the first use of “I” and an enormous increase of vocabulary. New words are created; the number of sentences containing several words increases, grammatical competence increases; the second stage of questions (who? how? why?) appears; simple sentences correspond to adult grammar, first combinations of sentences and the creation of subordinate clauses are used. By month 48, the child masters a lot of basic rules of adult language.

All these phenomena may appear in different children with a maximum difference of a year; however, they should disappear at the age of 4-5 years.

For deaf or hard-of-hearing children, whose parents decide for a bilingual early support and education, the following factors often influence their language development negatively:

- Sign language, visual communication, and systematic visual accompaniment of spoken language are not offered or offered too late.
- The implicit message of many governments and institutions – as interpreted from their practice – is: “If you are deaf, i.e. a bit retarded, then it does not matter if you begin to learn a sign language at the age of 6 or 10 years!”
- If sign language is offered, the exposition time is often too short.
- The ‘sensitive’ phases from 0-6 years are not taken seriously. Therefore we fail to exploit the plasticity of young brains for language learning and general cognitive development.

Concerning bilingualism, we find:

Children who grow up with several languages can differentiate between them from the beginning, and they also show the same developmental stages as monolingual children ... However, this doesn’t mean that the children have the same knowledge of both languages from the beginning. Rather, ... studies ... show that it is the knowledge of both languages together that corresponds in quantity and quality to the skills of a monolingual child of the same age. This means that a child who is learning a second language has at the same point of time fewer words at its disposal than a monolingual child. This indicates that at this early stage the capacity for language learning processes is biologically limited. Until now, however, there is no evidence for a conclusion – as parents often fear – that an early second language acquisition before the age of 3

results in negative consequences for the acquisition of the first language. ... but it is essential to clarify with controlled studies whether children who began their second language acquisition before the age of three actually have the same language skills in their mother tongue when they enter school as children who do not learn a second language. (Weissenborn Interview 2004; translation from German by F.D.)

The second language should only be provided by native speakers of this language because the phonetic-rhythmic characteristics of the language that is being acquired contain information the learners need for building up their knowledge of the language.

## 6.2. Gestures and signs in the development of language

Within the language development of children, gestures represent an important developmental stage (Vogt 2007: 13); with their aid, they develop strategies to get in contact with their principal care-givers. Gestures are already used during the first few months in the form of rhythmical and coordinated hand movements; sometimes it is difficult to decide whether they are being used in a communicative way as adults understand the term.

For children with a severe hearing-impairment who are educated bilingually, the importance of an early use of gestures is undisputed; a comprehensive offer of sign language gives them the chance to learn it as their mother tongue or preferred language (Leuninger 2007: 159).

They gain the attention of an adult with whom they want to interact or when they want a certain object through gestures, facial expressions and gaze. Some examples are indicative gaze, postures or grabbing gestures; these may be understood as a preliminary stage to first words (i.e. actual language signs). Children who use gestures are able to name objects at an earlier point in time than other children, and they often have more words at their disposal than the latter. (Vogt & Scheibert 2006: 181).

## 6.3. Summary

It is plausible to assume that the original language acquisition mechanisms are no longer or only partially available after the fourth or fifth year. The result is a relatively narrow time slot for a natural language development and the parallel development of cognition.

Increased educational and care-taking activities concerning language for deaf and hard-of-hearing children before the age of 3 are therefore urgently needed, independently of the parents' choice for a spoken-language-only or a bilingual method. Any delay concerning age-adequate language offers (also taking into consideration the accessibility of these offers for the child) has to be avoided. For sign language in a bilingual setting the same developmental rules hold.

## 7. Central hypotheses

### 7.1. Equal ability of deaf and hard of hearing children to learn a language

There is no counterargument against the approach that the development of cognition and language in deaf and hard-of-hearing children should follow the same developmental phases as we know them from hearing subjects <sup>6</sup>(and these are not used as attempts to justify the failure of an inadequate method).

In the light of this hypothesis, many of the research results on so-called “delayed language development” in deaf and hard-of-hearing children are the results of a general ignorance of language learning processes and of an absence of adequate early intervention. As with blind children, possible delays or “disorders” can be avoided by an early enough and adequate intervention, only the forms of intervention are different due to the difference of the barred or limited sense. Much more effort has to be put into the first 6 years of language development and furtherance.

### 7.2. Language learning depends on the presented language system

In order to learn a language, any child needs to be exposed to a fully fledged language which is completely perceivable and producible for him/her. This hypothesis concretises that language can be learnt in several modes: acoustic, visual, tactile and that a language has to be complete (we must not underscore the learning ability of children by offering them only single words or short frozen phrases as “language”).

For parents aiming at a bilingual education of their child, “baby sign” (cf. Vallotton 2011 and Tiny Signers project) could be a step to enter sign language from the age of 6 months of their child, giving them some certainty in sign communication which can lead further on. Language assistance or day care using sign language also can help for sign language, but only if enough time is spent for this activity. In order to assist spoken language, early writing (from 4 years) can be introduced; in the future, this may also be valid for SignWriting.

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<sup>6</sup> It would be a topic of its own to consider what is discussed concerning early intervention and education for children with additional special needs besides deafness. The reason is that “additional impairment” was often used as a strategy immunising bad results from inadequate testing of deaf children: When a child did not perform well with orally presented tests or tests which demand orally oriented strategies, the testers legitimised their own misguided testing method by ascribing some “additional impairment” to the child. If a child really shows an additional impairment, the consequences for language development and support have to be considered very carefully.

### 7.3. Language learning depends on sufficient exposition time

In order to understand “sufficient exposition time”, we have to check, how long hearing children are exposed to spoken language before they begin to understand and later produce it. While hearing children are more or less automatically exposed to spoken language by hearing, children with a hearing impairment whose parents decide for a spoken-language-only education have to get the same access by using special help. Children with a hearing impairment whose parents decide for a bilingual education have to get sufficient access time to both languages. Help can be organised e.g. by using personal language assistance. From the hypothesis formulated in the paragraph title it is clear that one or a few hours of speech therapy or of sign language communication in a week are not sufficient to guarantee age-adequate language development.

### 7.4. We must not cross the border from early intervention/education to consciously hindering child development

Experts, people working in early intervention and teachers cross this border if they take the risk that a special method may restrict or constrain the language and cognitive development of a person, i.e. if there are clear delays detectable but there is no investigation into the reasons and no try out of alternative methods. In any case, the language development has to be monitored throughout the critical phase until the age of 6. If there are major delays, alternative methods or an increase of intervention has to be applied.

To avoid such risks, the developmental checklists for language and cognition used for children without impairment have also to be applied to deaf and hard-of-hearing children. We can assume that the – mostly bad – results of their application will very probably demand much earlier and more adequate intervention.

Starting with these hypotheses, we can identify central problem fields in deaf education<sup>7</sup>. The different factors named here lead to a displeasing mixture of negative attitudes or actions against deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. In most cases we cannot say that people applying parts of this mixture are hostile to the deaf and hard-of-hearing, but their behaviour leads to this impression and the outcome is clear discrimination. There are several scenarios where “defective” information is given to deaf and hard of hearing persons or incomplete communication happens.

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of best practice in deaf education cf. Marschark and Spencer 2009.



## 8. Central problem fields in deaf education

### 8.1. Problems emanating from “thinking schemes” or lacking knowledge of responsible persons

- Wishes of hearing parents: very understandably, hearing parents want a hearing child and therefore own the predisposition to accept proposals which promise that. Regardless, the parents are the decisive party concerning the education applied to their child. To decide, they should have sufficient information and the right that their decisions are respected and realised by the education system.
- Low expectations of doctors, teachers and other experts (implicitly or explicitly formulated) concerning the following “natural correlation”: “the higher the hearing loss, the lower the job and life chances”.
- Passing on of the old stereotypes on disability in general and hearing impairment especially in many trainings for pedagogical jobs; use of outdated references which mirror the ideologies of the first half of the last century.
- Ignorance and lack of judgement of many politically and administratively responsible persons.
- Experts avoiding the discussion on the adequacy of a certain method for a certain child by reference to the “quarrel of methods”. This term should generate the impression that there are simply different methods (most simply contrasted by the notions “oral” vs. “bilingual”) which are mutually exchangeable on the teachers’ private choice without any respect for the child’s situation and results of scientific research. The “quarrel” metaphor also signalsises that no discussion or exchange of arguments and facts could solve this dilemma for the individual child. By that, intensive research into methods and their results under controlled circumstances is hindered.
- An overall valid general human tendency towards “simple solutions”: this produces opinions like: “providing a sign language interpreter solves all problems”, neglecting the facts that interpreting does not mean automatically that the addressee understands the content and that only understanding results in sustainable learning.

### 8.2. Problems of accurate timing and of time as a resource in deaf education

In reality, many necessary things which should be done or happen in order to guarantee regular language development (cf. Klagenfurt Deafvoc2 resolution 2010) appear too late or even not at all. Newborn-screening for hearing loss is now standard in many countries, but the necessary follow-up is missing: immediately after the diagnosis of hearing loss we should enable the parents to support their child and also give professional assistance. A respective policy paper was developed in Ireland

which could serve as a best practice example for the whole process of inviting all stakeholders in the area and looking for solutions which are accepted by all participants during a series of negotiations, as well as for the outcome (cf. The Catholic Institute for Deaf People et al. 2009).

At the moment, delayed, missing or inadequate furtherance leads to a situation of language development delay which is already existent in kindergarten, but manifests itself clearly at the start of school. These lacking or inadequate early measures are the main reason for the bad testing results of deaf and hard-of-hearing children. The results then seem to confirm the stereotype that these children will fail in important tasks in principle and for their whole lifetime.

### 8.3. Organisation problems in deaf and hard-of-hearing children's education

The social and institutional structures yield several roles for the different participants in the education process which complicate the situation of all participants and may obviate meeting the children's needs; in short:

- Inclusion (i.e. abandoning special schools) is the ethically based goal of education; however, many questions concerning the offer of sufficient participation and communication in class remain unanswered as long as there are severe problems of personnel and financial resources. Many parents fear that decentralised inclusion will not be able to offer the same services as the centralised ones, even if these act rather traditionally.
- Professionals of diverse disciplines still act guild-like and not cooperatively; therefore parents and children are often lost between different recommendations and have to find a way between them for themselves, without any scientific or counselling assistance.
- Interests of some – mostly big and old – institutions which care for “disabled persons” traditionally stand against the interests of a “self-determined life”: If the “disabled” get more self-determined, some of the traditional “care for the poor disabled” has to be abandoned.

### 8.4. Problems of an evaluation which is not result oriented

Many institutions from Early Years furtherance to school are already obliged to apply a plan of furtherance for every child of the target groups. These plans should be more complete, e.g. should list all necessary aids and personal assistance. Additionally, the individual children's development should be monitored regularly and a result oriented evaluation should be performed. Special attention has to be drawn to results in cognition, communication and language. These would bring much more clarity concerning the assignment of personnel and the use of budgets.

### 8.5. Problems in the socialisation of deaf and hard-of-hearing children

The results of socialisation concerning the cognitive or social strategies of hard-of-hearing and deaf people are often the following: they are accustomed to deal with defective information and do not criticise this situation, as other groups of people would certainly do. Positively interpreted, they have to develop cognitive strategies to overcome the “information gaps”. Negatively interpreted, they accept many defective settings, e.g. in class, as “normal”. They do not even take into consideration that they could have full access to information or communication, according to their new rights.

### 8.6. Problems of the implementation of the rights of deaf and hard-of-hearing children

It seems that every single right which is formulated by the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities has to be eked out by using jurisdictional means. This puts an enormous individual strain on people with disabilities and makes progress slow and independent of the courage of individuals.

## 9. Methodological problems in research and the presentation of its results

### 9.1. How are hearing abilities presented?

Hearing abilities are tested by technical methods without hearing aids first. The judgement from these tests is given – according to the steps generally known – from mild hearing loss up to complete deafness. Having got this one result, the person – even if (s)he gets hearing aids – remains at this attribution of abilities. There is no obligatory, contrastive testing under the condition of wearing the hearing aids. As a consequence, we are always confronted with unclear statements in pedagogy or other sciences as well as in marketing for hearing aids; e.g. “the person has a [meaning: without hearing aids] severe hearing loss of 90dB but [meaning: with hearing aids] could easily understand and learn spoken language”. Such sentences are (manipulatively) stated by some authors as proofs for the general possibility of all people with a hearing loss of 90 dB to be educated by spoken language only. There are two improper steps in such statements: the first one is the conclusion from one subject to all. The second one is that we do not learn how the hearing has been improved by the hearing aids. My hypothesis is: if we had a second test result of all persons using any hearing aids, we could easily demystify sayings like the one quoted above. We could find out a presently hidden but very simple relation: For those persons whose test

results while using the hearing aids are much better than without, the accessibility of spoken language is improved so much that they do well with it. For those persons whose test results with hearing aids are not much better than without, we could explain why these persons don't have sufficient access to spoken language and therefore should be educated bilingually. Success in spoken language could be clearly related to the sufficient functioning of a hearing aid. This would correct the perspective: Nowadays, success in spoken language is often correlated to the "auditive-verbal" method. Two different test results (with and without hearing aids) set into contrast would correlate most of the success to the acoustic perception ability which was reached by the hearing aid. As a consequence, it would turn out that the sufficient accessibility of spoken language is crucial for being able to learn a spoken language autonomously. This would clear up most questions of the so-called "conflict of methods" and would bring us back to a more objective check of the hearing abilities of deaf or hard-of-hearing children under everyday conditions. A systematic cross-classification of hearing abilities without hearing aids against hearing abilities with these aids would produce much better furtherance conditions (we could concentrate on the question which advantages a certain set of hearing aids gives to an individual child) and research could improve the forecast for the individual as well as the evaluation of the different education methods. Naturally, all this should not be taken as an instrument which could replace the identity decision within the self-determined life of any person with a hearing impairment.

## 9.2. What do the terms "inclusion" and "barrier-free" mean for deaf and hard-of-hearing children?

I suppose that the verbal movement from the formerly used "integration" to "inclusion" is also seen as some change in attitude, meaning in its essence that the inclusion of people into an educational system is the task of the whole system or group which is responsible, not only the task of the included.

An intensive observation of inclusion processes sheds light on otherwise mainly ignored processes and behaviour in education: E.g. almost no teacher has had training which motivated her or him to carefully pay attention to every individual in class all the time. We are neither accustomed nor socialised enough to check whether every single child understands what is being taught. Besides that we are confronted with a "pressure of practice" in teaching: "Full service" for every individual child in a normal class would clearly overburden the single teacher. The consequence is that the teacher uses methods and a tempo which in her/his eyes guarantees a positive learning effect in the "average" pupil or student. As a result all pupils/students are on their own in an attempt to "survive" the school/education process with positive marks.

In inclusion, the situation changes: First the possible barriers for a complete inclusion have to be detected, analysed and removed. In the case of deaf or hard-of-

hearing children almost all barriers relate to language and communication. Consequently, the main goal is to install barrier-free communication and language-led participation in all educational settings. Therefore it has to be checked at the start of any educational measure whether the deaf or hard-of-hearing child receives all information/instruction intended or whether additional actions are necessary. The same has to be done within regular intervals in order not to produce a drop-out simply because the instruction is not barrier-free. The same is especially valid for basic strategies of learning when they are made explicit to the target group. In other words: in order to guarantee barrier-free access, inclusion requires a higher extent of attention than in other educational settings.

This situation makes us aware of the fact that we often do not care whether children follow the lesson or to which extent they are able to do so. Maybe we can learn from inclusion that we need more awareness towards the whole education process and its results in the single cognitive system of a person.

Is inclusion negative for children without special needs as well as for children with selected special needs like sensual impairments? This discussion is coming up in several contexts, especially with deaf or hard-of-hearing children. There is some truth in the statement that only specialised teachers know the needs of these children (only general knowledge on inclusion is not sufficient in order to work adequately in inclusion). But this knowledge can also be transferred to teachers in inclusion. Naturally, in order to perform e.g. sign language communication and to meet mates with the same orientation, it might be useful to have a more centralised inclusion which allows for more than one child with the same special needs in one class or school. Additionally, activities during the holidays, e.g. summer camps with deaf children, also turned out to be very fruitful for the children's' identity and language development.

Other pedagogical provisions have to be installed systematically in order to allow a smooth operation of inclusion of deaf or hard-of-hearing children: The requirements for entering a certain school have to be fulfilled before a child is included. Otherwise inclusion means always rushing after others and trying to follow the class from a lower level, which is very frustrating. If the requirements for entering a certain class are not fulfilled, some "bridge courses" should be offered in order to close the gap before entering the institution.

## 10. What a barrier-free early intervention, kindergarten or school has to look like

Barrier-free inclusion means that every child should be able to follow the processes in a kindergarten group or a class to the same extent as children without special needs. I.e. organisational means have to be provided in order to guarantee that

for deaf and hard-of-hearing children (cf. also Dotter 2009a), answering questions like:

- Are all processes in class accessible in terms of language and communication (i.e. is the whole class barrier-free)?
- Can included children participate in class like other pupils (i.e. is active co-operation with class-mates or teachers possible)?

If these questions cannot be answered affirmatively by external evaluators, the organisation of classes including their fine structure has to be changed until a positive answer can be obtained.

Problems arise from different factors in “normal” education: Teachers expect that, when hearing an instruction, understanding it and writing it down can be done in parallel. For children who use the visual channel only or prevalently, only one activity in this channel is completely perceivable: They first have to see the signed language, then change to writing the information down. Or they need some instruction before and follow an experiment afterwards (i.e. they must not get the experiment and its explanation simultaneously). To give another example: teachers are accustomed to speak, then turn to the blackboard, continuing speaking; by that they make lip-reading or better acoustic perception impossible for hard-of-hearing children.

Teachers and parents of hearing pupils or students sometimes complain about the “time loss” as a consequence of this rule of perception and other organisational provisions for inclusion. The answer is that this form of didactic behaviour is indispensable. If it is not obeyed, deaf or hard-of-hearing children are barred from access to the given information and discriminated. There are several means of using this form of organisation also as a tool for the whole class, but it is difficult, however.

Moreover, lessons do not consist of just acquiring information. Pupils need some time to think over the instruction, to write additional information down, to ask questions, and to process the teacher’s answer; they need phases of enforcement of the lesson, own work (either alone or in a group), etc. All these parts of class have to be made accessible for included deaf or hard-of-hearing children so that they can follow class without an overload or frustration.

Summing up, inclusion is a challenge for the financing and the organisation of intervention and education, for the training of people working there and their personal attitudes, for included children and their parents as well as for the children without special needs and their parents. From that it is very clear that a functioning school partnership, counselling and supervision are indispensable for effective inclusion.

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## Jak powinien wyglądać rozwój językowy dzieci niesłyszących i słabo słyszących?

### Streszczenie

W poprzednich dekadach istniał dość wyraźny podział na osoby niesłyszące (o głębokich uszkodzeniach słuchu i mniejszych szansach edukacyjnych) i słabosłyszące (z mniejszym ubytkiem słuchu i większymi możliwościami edukacyjnymi). Identyfikacja danej osoby z grupą niesłyszących mogła mieć charakter medyczny, oparty na testach audiometrycznych, lub też charakter społeczny, oparty na przynależności do wspólnoty posługującej się językiem migowym lub komunikującej się oralnie. Jedynie jednak dorośli mogą podjąć świadomie decyzję dotyczącą ich tożsamości – w stosunku do dzieci zakłada się zazwyczaj, że powinny one być wychowywane w duchu oralizmu. Obecnie kwestia tożsamości nie jest łatwa do określenia (nie opiera się tylko na danych audiometrycznych), ma to duży związek z nowymi osiągnięciami technologicznymi i stosowaniem implantów ślimakowych. W XX wieku obserwowaliśmy znaczące zmiany w paradygmacie niepełnosprawności: od segregacji i eksterminacji w okresie niemieckiego nacjonalizmu, po uznanie pełni praw osób z niepełnosprawnością (Konwencja ONZ, 2007). Zmiana ta wymagała także przemian w zakresie edukacji osób niesłyszących.

Aby dziecko (zarówno słyszące jak i niesłyszące) opanowało język, powinno mieć z nim żywy kontakt w pierwszych sześciu latach życia. Dzieci niesłyszące często nie mają takiej możliwości ani w odniesieniu do języka narodowego, ani też języka migowego, którego zaczynają uczyć się dopiero w szkole, w dodatku w ograniczonym zakresie. Rozwój językowy dzieci niesłyszących przebiega według tych samych etapów co rozwój dzieci słyszących. Aby język niesłyszącego dziecka rozwijał się poprawnie, powinno ono mieć zapewniony szeroki dostęp do pełnej, nie uproszonej wersji języka (dotyczy to także języka migowego, tak dzieje się np. w projekcie *Tiny Signers*). Pojawiające się u dzieci niesłyszących zaburzenia językowe są zazwyczaj efektem nie wady słuchu, ale zaniedbań w zakresie wczesnej interwencji, dlatego rozwój językowym małych dzieci powinien być dokładnie monitorowany. Dzieci niesłyszące powinny mieć możliwość rozwoju bilingwalnego – od wczesnego dzieciństwa powinny korzystać zarówno z języka narodowego jak i migowego.

W edukacji dzieci niesłyszących pojawiają się liczne problemy. Są one związane najczęściej z brakiem akceptacji głuchoty dziecka ze strony jego rodziców, niskimi oczekiwaniami w stosunku do dziecka ze strony lekarzy i profesjonalistów, stereotypami dotyczącymi możliwości intelektualnych niesłyszących, które obecne są nadal w programach



kształcenia surdopedagogów, ignorancją decydentów, brakiem rzetelnej dyskusji między zwolennikami różnych metod terapii (zwłaszcza zwolenników oralizmu i języka migowego) o ich przydatności dla konkretnych dzieci, stosowaniem rozwiązań totalnych, np. „obecność tłumacza języka migowego rozwiązuje wszystkie problemy”, brakiem ewaluacji metod i efektów pracy z uczniem niesłyszącym, niedocenianiem znaczenia relacji społecznych osób niesłyszących oraz nie respektowaniem praw osób niesłyszących.

Wobec tych trudności pojawia się potrzeba nowych rozwiązań. Przede wszystkim konieczna jest rzeczowa diagnoza realnych możliwości ucznia w zakresie korzystania z odbioru mowy (opieranie się nie tylko na audiometrycznej ocenie poziomu uszkodzenia słuchu, ale także na tym, w jakim zakresie dziecko odnosi korzyść z aparatów słuchowych). Następnie należy zrewidować możliwość edukacji integracyjnej (inkluzyjnej) dla dziecka niesłyszącego – czy rzeczywiście nauczyciel jest w stanie pomóc dziecku niesłyszącemu, czy raczej pracuje tylko z „przeciętnym” uczniem w klasie, ignorując indywidualne potrzeby dziecka niesłyszącego? Uczeń niesłyszący w klasie integracyjnej powinien mieć zapewnione takie same możliwości edukacyjne i możliwości rozwoju społecznego jak uczeń słyszący.

*streszczenie przygotowała Ewa Domagała-Zyśk*



# Narrating deafness: literary and autobiographical representations of the d/Deaf<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article examines literary representations of deafness from a double perspective: the hearing writers' and the Deaf writers'. Common stereotypes and metaphors associated to deafness will be examined and discussed against deaf authors' self-perception emerging from their narrative, here conceived as a reaction against dominant, sometimes misleading, views of deafness spread by mainstream literature. The theoretical tools of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies, particularly some observations by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, will be frequently used, as they offer a useful key to the reading of the deaf-hearing relationship; the significant differences existing between the deaf experience and the experiences lived by other minority groups, however, will be accurately pointed out whenever necessary.

**Keywords:** d/Deaf, literary constructions, representation, stereotypes, silence, sound

The institution of residential schools for the deaf in the United States and in European countries such as France and Italy, throughout the nineteenth century, besides favouring the access to a higher educational level than in the past, paved the way for a wider and more active participation of the deaf in the hearing society. As a result of this greater social visibility, deafness entered the literary realm; this is shown by the presence of deaf characters in some works by hearing authors, but most of all by the creation of works by deaf authors.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, the distinction between lowercase *deaf* (referring to the physical condition of deafness) and uppercase *Deaf* (referring to a linguistic and cultural minority), commonly used in the field of Deaf Studies, will be adopted.

The earliest publications on deafness coincided with the establishment of the first residential schools, where sign language was used and many deaf teachers were employed. These schools, real centres of cultural and social aggregation, gave birth to a fertile publishing activity, through the spread of school newspapers whose function was not only to inform, but also instrumental to strengthening a sense of community. In 1848, in the United States, the North Carolina School for the Deaf published the first school newspaper, *The Deaf Mute*; soon after other residential schools started to publish their own newspapers – such as *The Silent Worker* and *The Deaf Mutes' Journal*; this type of publication came to be known as “The Little Paper Family”. In England, *The British Deaf Mute* devoted each issue to the history of a specific school for the deaf, while in Italy *La Voce dei Sordomuti Italiani* (1896) was the first newspaper for the deaf, established and directed by Ferdinando A. Castagnotti.

Residential schools soon became the primary place of socialization and cultural transmission for deaf children; they concretely offered occasions for interaction, which was often limited or altogether lacking in the children's families, where negative experiences of isolation and alienation were therefore quite frequent. Furthermore, at these schools, they were usually trained for vocational professions, mainly connected with printing, as their visual accuracy was particularly appreciated in this sector. No longer isolated as in the past, the deaf started to appear as a cohesive group and to gradually leave signs of their presence in the literary realm as well.

In his remarkable work *Writing Deafness. The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-century American Literature* (2007), Christopher Krentz claims that the nineteenth-century American literary production containing more or less explicit references to what he calls the “hearing line” – “that invisible boundary separating deaf and hearing people” – in works by both hearing and deaf authors, reveals interesting, but still unexplored, aspects of American identity formation and literature at large. The expression “hearing line”, as Krentz himself explains, echoes the “color line” by W.E.B. Du Bois. Many parallels can be drawn between the history of the American deaf people and that of African Americans and other minorities, which makes it clear why he frequently uses theories about race and culture. Because of the marginal role played by the deaf in the past, it is not easy to find deaf characters in literature. Moreover, the works published so far mostly contain references to white American deaf people, which clearly shows how deafness can be easily intertwined with other significant issues, highly debated today, such as race and gender.

Although deafness can appear as a marginal theme, of exclusive interest to those who work with the deaf in various areas, it can offer a new approach to the way issues of wide interest – such as identity, gender and culture – are dealt with and conceptually constructed. As Homi Bhabha (1994) observes:

[...] a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement – that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.

There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality – as it emerges in non-canonical cultural forms – transforms our critical strategies. (246)

The method adopted by Krentz in his work, “a contrapuntal approach”, seems to move exactly along this axis; it draws inspiration from an observation by postcolonial critic Edward Said: “It is more rewarding – and more difficult – to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about ‘us.’” (Krentz, 2007: 3)

A crucial aspect to consider, when one discusses literature in Deaf Studies, is the necessary distinction to make between sign language literature and written literature; significant cultural implications are actually involved in the choice of either language. As to written literature – examined here – some basic factors should be considered: how authors label their identity (if they consider themselves d/Deaf, hard-of-hearing, Coda or “children of deaf adults”, CoHa or “children of hearing adults”, etc.), and if they see themselves as part of a specific Deaf community or not, which implies, in turn, the choice or the refusal of sign language not only as a privileged mode of communication, but also as an instrument of identity construction. Besides these reflections there is a further fundamental question to examine, that is the perspective from which deafness and the deaf person are portrayed.

Although using the written national language means, for some Deaf writers, employing an unusual communicative tool, different from their mother tongue (sign language), it nevertheless allows them to reach a wider audience, including both deaf and hearing people at the same time. This literary corpus offers even those who cannot sign the possibility to understand, through first-person narratives, the various ways in which the deaf individual can perceive the world and construct his/her own personality. Using the written national language has important ideological implications. As is true of various postcolonial writers, who use English conscious of employing the oppressor’s language, but willing to enact a process of “appropriation” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: 15-17) of that very language through their writing, for various deaf writers as well using the national language means employing the linguistic tool of those who, for a long time and through what many activists in the field of Deaf Studies call “hearing hegemony”, have acted as oppressors: the hearing people. The latter enacted a sort of linguistic oppression by imposing their language on signs, debased to mimicry, judged inferior to spoken language and ultimately prohibited.

Introducing *The Deaf Way Two Anthology* (2002), a literary collection of deaf and hard-of-hearing writers, Tonya M. Stremlau points out that, even today, for many deaf people resorting to writing does not represent a natural, spontaneous act: “Deaf writer’ still seems something of an oddity in the deaf community. Writing, after all, is produced in the language of schools of the oppressive hearing culture” (x). At the same time, Stremlau recalls the relevant editorial tradition in the history of the deaf, marked by the publication of various magazines contributed to by deaf people. However, this does not seem to have made the latter aware of the possibility to become

writers; thence the decision to publish a collection of the works presented by some deaf writers during the “Deaf Way II”, a festival of cultural arts that took place at Gallaudet University, Washington D.C., in 2002.

A few years before, G.Thomas Couser (1997), trying to understand the reasons for the scanty production of autobiographical works by deaf writers, had identified literacy as one of the main reasons for this lack. For a deaf-born signer it is particularly hard to learn English, both written and oral (but this is true of any spoken language). Other reasons contribute to hold back the flourishing of a “Deaf autobiography”. First of all, autobiography as a genre does not have the same significance among all cultures, it is not a universal human urge: “If emphasis on individualism is a cultural prerequisite for the flowering of autobiography, the form might be slow to emerge from Deaf culture, which places a higher premium on interdependence and cooperation than on individualism and autonomy” (227). Also socioeconomic factors can hinder the creation of suitable conditions for the development of this literary genre: “Because of patterns of language skills, occupational training, and job discrimination, Deaf people tend to be underemployed, clustered in the lower income brackets, not the population that typically indulges in autobiographical self-display.” (227) This explains why the deaf are likely to write autobiographical narratives when they cooperate with the hearing or when they are immersed in the hearing culture.

Couser problematizes the issue of autobiographical representation by intersecting it with the choice of the language adopted. If the native language of the Deaf community is sign language, which form can be more suited to the genre of Deaf autobiography? “It is quite possible for a Deaf individual who is literate in English to initiate and undertake an autobiographical project entirely on his or her own”, Couser observes, “but the textual medium would presumably not render Deaf experience without significant omission or distortion.” (228) While admitting the problems of legitimacy and accessibility involved in the use of a specific language modality – either written English or sign language – Couser still acknowledges the importance of autobiographical works on deafness “in the developing discourse, and counterdiscourse, of deafness” (221), independently on the writers’ auditory status.

As is true of American literature, Italian literature too provides just a meager number of works dealing with deafness. The presence of deaf characters in literary works by hearing authors is hardly found; some examples include *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucria* (1992) by Dacia Maraini, or, going back in time, the character of the “deaf-mute boy” in *Le mie prigioni* (1832) by Silvio Pellico or Masetto in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (1348-1351).

The specific aim of this chapter will be to compare the representation of deafness by deaf authors with its portrayal by hearing writers, while deconstructing, at the same time, common (hearing) stereotypes of deafness. While Krentz focuses on American literature and the socio-economic conditions of American deaf people, the works examined here include novels, autobiographical narratives, poems and

plays by d/Deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing authors published in the last decades.<sup>2</sup> The d/Deaf authors chosen are of different nationalities, so as to consider the human condition of deafness, rather than limiting it geographically and historically to a single nation (although it is true that a specific historical and geographical context can create special conditions) and to outline various ways of living it. Through the works analysed it will be shown how (rhetorical and literary) constructions of deafness mainly created by hearing perspectives have for long outlined the image of the deaf individual, often in paternalistic or negative terms, in the attempt to simplify or “normalize” diversity and control the *unheimlich*, in contrast with the multifaceted image of the experience of deafness surfacing from d/Deaf narratives.

The theoretical tools of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies, particularly some observations by theorists Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, who have passionately debated such issues as cultural identity and minority rights, will be frequently used, as they offer a useful key to the reading of the deaf-hearing relationship. Obviously there are significant differences between the deaf experience and the experiences lived by other minority groups; whenever necessary, such differences will be accurately pointed out.

This short introduction will probably already show how hard it is to intertwine literature and Deaf Studies. If it is hard, as well as limiting, to univocally define d/Deaf identity and the deaf individual, it is equally complicated to deal with these issues by transposing them to the literary realm. What makes things even more complex is the perspective from which the description of deafness is made.

## 1. A question of perspective

In the opening pages of *The Deaf Way Two Anthology*, Stremmlau claims:

The authenticity with which deaf writers portray the deaf experience makes reading them an ideal way for hearing people to develop a better understanding of what it is like to be deaf. Not that a hearing writer cannot create realistic, sympa-

<sup>2</sup> The works discussed here clearly represent just a small selection of the existing literature dealing with deafness; their double aim is keeping the discussion within certain limits and illustrating the points of this chapter. The d/Deaf literature includes *Le Cri de la mouette* (1993) by the French Emmanuelle Laborit; *Ascolta il mio silenzio* (1999), by the Italian Renato Pigliacampo; *Neither-Nor* (2007), by the Australian Paul Gordon Jacobs, while the works by hearing authors are *Mother Father Deaf: Living between Sound and Silence* (1994) by the American anthropologist Paul Preston, a child of deaf parents; *Deafening* (2003), the first novel by the Canadian writer Frances Itani and the plays *Children of a Lesser God* (1982) by Mark Medoff and *The Miracle Worker* (1956) by William Gibson.

thetic deaf characters. Hearing writers, though, can only imagine what it must be like not to hear, and they have to try and put aside their hearing biases. (xi)

Although the observations expressed by the authors examined here are closely connected with their condition of deaf individuals in specific contexts, they nevertheless describe some experiences common to many deaf people, such as feeling isolated in (hearing) family meetings and, as deaf writers, fighting against prejudices which see the deaf unable to write correctly. Epistemologically speaking, it could be argued that analyzing and exploring the experience of deafness are not exclusive to the deaf, as even the hearing can do the same on the basis of scientific data. Deaf culture, though, by placing a high premium on personal experience, invites us to reconsider this assumption.

A recent edition of the *American Annals of the Deaf* (2010) was devoted to the concept of *d/Deaf epistemology* – or, rather, *d/Deaf epistemologies* – examined by various authors and from different points of view. The use of the plural implies the willingness to go beyond the limit of a totalizing – and therefore inappropriate – description of Deaf culture, resulting from an essentialist and merely epistemological approach to Deaf Studies. “Deaf epistemology” represents the nature and the extent of the knowledge acquired by the deaf in a society basically founded on spoken interaction and hearing abilities. Deafness involves a different way of acquiring knowledge, focused on sight much more than for the hearing; this is why deaf people are often defined “people of the eye” – echoing an expression used by George Veditz (1861-1937), twice president of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and a passionate advocate of sign language – or “visually oriented people”. The hearing-deaf interaction shapes the way the deaf apprehend and construct their own identities; however, the hearing see the deaf from a completely different perspective.

As deafness can be lived in many different ways, even deaf people’s ways of “being-in-the-world” can be manifold. The authors included in this chapter define themselves in various terms: deaf, hard-of-hearing, “neither-nor”, Coda or, rejecting this definition, “hearing children of deaf parents”,<sup>3</sup> etc.; some of them feel part of a Deaf community, while others don’t; some use sign language as a preferred communication mode, while others prefer spoken language and lipreading. What is emphasized is the significance of the perspective from which the representation of deafness is made, and the crucial role of writing that, on a communication level, can act as a bridge between deaf and hearing, and, on a relational and social level, can offer the deaf a useful tool to assert their own identity and ‘agency’.

Referring to some works included in *No Walls of Stone. An Anthology of Literature by Deaf and Hard of Hearing Writers* (2002), Jill Jepson claims:

<sup>3</sup> The term “Coda” is an acronym for “Children of Deaf Adults” and refers both to the hearing children of deaf parents (lowercase) and to an association founded to support the specific needs of this category (uppercase). As such, the expression is quite controversial, as it implicitly refers to a sense of lack experienced during a childhood with ‘dysfunctional’ parents.



These works, among others, provide some sharp insights into the practical frustrations of hearing loss and the perceptual world deaf and hard of hearing inhabit. The majority of contributions to this anthology, however, deal with another issue: the profound impact of deafness on the individual's place in society. The overriding theme that emerges in much of this work is that the tragedy of deafness has little to do with the inability to hear and much to do with the marginal and stigmatized position of deaf people in an unaccommodating and aggressively hearing world. (6-7)

Fanon, a Martinican psychoanalyst, has accurately analyzed the psychological impact of colonial domination on colonized people during his professional activity in Algeria. His observations can help understand some dynamics in the relationship between dominant and subaltern groups. Obviously, as Krentz observes too, it is not possible to completely apply this paradigm to an analysis of the complex identity of the deaf, whose situation is different from that of colonized people and is even more closely tied to the 'dominant' group. First of all, differently from what happens with most ethnic and cultural minorities, the cultural and linguistic transmission for the deaf does not take place through the family, if one considers that most deaf children are born to hearing parents. This means that, except for the deaf children of deaf parents, it is outside their biological families, and among other deaf people, that the deaf individual can experience a sense of 'normality'. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (original title: *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, 1952), Fanon writes: "a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world"; in the case of the deaf person, instead, this sense of 'abnormality' is already experienced within the family environment, when it is made up of non-signing hearing members, which makes it particularly hard for the deaf family member to participate in family conversations, having to rely exclusively on the movement of the speakers' lips.

Moreover, as Krentz points out with reference to American deaf people, while for Fanon the Algerians' sense of inferiority was closely connected with the loss of their historical past and of the originality of their local culture as a direct consequence of colonial domination, deaf people's identity and past were initially closely associated with the hearing. Educated deaf individuals, in France and in the United States, acknowledged in the efforts by hearing people like the Abbé Sicard and Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet the origin of their sense of community and identity. Despite these differences, Fanon's observations are still useful to explain certain dynamics; for instance, a poor knowledge of the deaf and some superficial attitudes of hearing people in their interaction with the latter can profoundly – and at times negatively – affect deaf people's personality, significantly determining the type of relationship they establish with the outer world and with themselves.

In her autobiographical work *Le Cri de la mouette* (1993), Emmanuelle Laborit, a French writer and actress, recalls her personal experience as a deaf woman, since her early childhood, when she did not utter words, but just sharp screams; thence,

the nickname *mouette*, ‘gull’, that her parents had given her, and whose pronunciation, in French, is very close to that of the word *muette*, ‘a deaf woman’.

As she grows up, she becomes aware of her diversity, an awareness accompanied by her rebellion not against it, but against the hypocritical attitudes so widespread among the hearing, whose main efforts seem to be directed at eliminating a scary and disturbing diversity, in an attempt to bring it close to a more reassuring ‘normality’. The writer openly denounces the educational choices made by the hearing, especially the concept of ‘scholastic integration’:

I don't like the teachers of this so-called «integration» class, at school. They want me to resemble the hearing children. They don't allow me to sign, they force me to speak. With them, I feel it necessary to keep deafness hidden, to mime others like a small robot, when, instead, I don't understand more than half of what is said in class. (62, *my translation*)

During her adolescence, her rebellion against the way the hearing manage deaf people's lives increases: “I feel manipulated, they want to erase my deaf identity.” (95, *my translation*) When, despite her successful achievement at the admission test, the collège Molière refuses her application because of her profound deafness (a refusal experienced by the writer as “an act of racism”), she is forced to attend a speech-oriented school, where her classmates do not know French Sign Language (LSF, Langue des Signes Française). The school's prohibition to use it (in compliance with a law enforced in France until 1991, called by Laborit “law of silence”) leads the teachers to articulate their speech exaggeratedly so as to help students lipread. Laborit sees this prohibition as an attempt, by the hearing, to erase her diversity, to normalize it through a forced assimilation, while trying to eliminate at the same time, sign language, considered an inferior language. On the contrary, she considers this language – which the hearing do not even try to learn – ‘liberating’, as it allowed her to achieve a complete awareness, and acceptance, of her identity.

Her first contact with sign language takes place at the International Visual Theatre (IVT), founded at Vincennes by the deaf actor Alfredo Corrado, where she meets deaf children and adults. Her father, a doctor, had heard about it on the radio and for him, who did not have a special language to share with his daughter, differently from his wife, sign language represents a precious means of communication. This ‘discovery’ probably allows him, for the first time, to accept his child's deafness and reveals him the limits of his colleagues' views: according to them, Emmanuelle had to learn to speak if she did not want to spend her whole life in isolation.

The awareness of her deafness, the reflection on her own condition and the process of identity formation are finally made possible by sign language: “This is the first time I learn about the possibility of giving people a name. [...] And me, especially me, Emmanuelle. I finally realized I had an identity. ME: Emmanuelle.” (53, *my translation*) Until then, she had never felt she had an identity: “There was no «I». I was «she».” (53). While hearing people are used, since they are born, to hearing their

name uttered by their parents, and to unconsciously recognizing, in that name, their identity, it is not so for the deaf. Such a process of recognition and identification can only happen through sign language.

Using it, though, can create communication problems with the hearing, which the writer seems to solve by asserting her will to try and speak their language, as when studying a foreign language. Instead of pointing out a break between the hearing and deaf worlds, Laborit frequently stresses her wish to be integrated in both; what allows her to do so, and to connect the different cultures underlying these two worlds, is – once again – sign language. The oralist method and sign language, jointly, have allowed her to make significant progress; when she was exposed only to spoken language and lipreading, instead, it took her a much more time to get, at school, half the amount of information she could have much more easily received through signs. Before learning to sign, she did not understand either abstract concepts or temporal categories such as past and future; the absence of a language to communicate with is described as an obstacle: “Me, I wanted to say something, a lot of things, but there was this wall, so I was sad.” (27, *my translation*)

These words seem to echo what Oliver Sacks, a famous American neurologist, observes in *Seeing Voices* (1989), where he repeatedly states how important language acquisition is to the development of human intellectual faculties and as a means of expression. Deprived of the possibility to express their thoughts, some deaf people are doomed to a life of isolation and of cultural and spiritual poverty. This is the reason, Sacks remarks, why deaf-born people, the “deaf-and-dumb”, were considered idiots for a very long time and seen by the law as unable to inherit, get married, be educated, have a non-manual, non-repetitive profession and this also explains why fundamental human rights were denied to them. The importance of language in the process of personality formation is further confirmed by both linguistic anthropology and philosophy of language, which have clarified the close relationship existing between the communication tool adopted, the worldview and the construction of the self deriving from this relationship.

In Gibson’s famous play *The Miracle Worker* (1956), special emphasis is given to the crucial role of language as a means of expression of human thought and of relation with the outer world. The difficult relationship between Annie Sullivan and her deaf-and-blind student Helen Keller is the focus of the dramatic action. When Annie meets the six-year-old Helen, the child behaves in a violent, savage, nearly sub-human way, and she is treated as such by her family, who seem to compensate with an excessive slackness their incapacity to communicate with her. Annie realizes the child’s profound need of knowledge: her mind and her soul are just waiting to be freed from the darkness and the silence trapping them because of the lack of a means of communication.

The young teacher understands that the only way to rescue Helen from that state is to teach her language, to make her aware that everything has a name; from this, she will be able to construct her relation with the outer world. Annie therefore persuades

the Kellers to allow her to stay alone with their child for a fortnight, during which she makes great efforts to teach Helen not only how to behave, but especially the names of the things surrounding her, by fingerspelling words with the manual alphabet on the palm of the girl's hand.

After the two weeks, Annie brings Helen back to her parents, who organize a party to celebrate the event. Unfortunately, during that evening, the girl shows that she is still unruly, just as she has always been; when she spills some water from a pitcher, Annie forces her to fill it again, while fingerspelling the word "water" on her hand. Suddenly, feeling her hand getting wet with water, she emits a sound: it's the word "water", whose meaning she has finally understood.

*(And now the miracle happens. HELEN drops the pitcher on the slab under the spout, it shatters. ANNIE freezes on the pump handle: there is a change in the sun-down LIGHT, and with it a change in HELEN's face, some light coming into it we have never seen there, some struggle in the depths behind it; and her lips tremble, trying to remember something the muscles around them once knew, till at last it finds its way out, painfully, a baby sound buried under the debris of years of dumbness.)*

HELEN: Wah. Wah. *(And again, with great effort)*. Wah, wah. *(HELEN plunges her hand into the dwindling water, spells into her own palm. Then she gropes frantically, ANNIE reaches for her hand, and HELEN spells into ANNIE's hand.)* (92)

That single word is precious as it finally allows the girl to relate with the world; from that moment on, indeed, Helen, who has found a communication channel through the manual language Annie taught her, shows her eagerness to learn the names of each object she touches. Probably it is not coincidental that in the final scene, teacher and student leave the stage while holding hands, almost to signify the bond connecting them and the language they share.

In many autobiographical narratives the authors emphasize the importance, for the deaf child, to socialize with other deaf children, so as to understand they are not alone or different. Laborit too points out how significant it has been for her to meet some deaf adults; before then, she thought she was the only deaf child in the world. This is why, she claims, parents should give their deaf children the chance to meet and socialize with other deaf people; the interaction between the "world of sound" and the "world of silence" is fundamental, as it favours the deaf child's cognitive development.

The need to have a point of reference in the world of the deaf is also emphasized by Paul Gordon Jacobs in his autobiographical work *Neither-Nor. A Young Australian's Experience with Deafness* (2007). The author, who became deaf at the age of three, describes the long and complex process he went through in order to build up a sense of self-esteem. During his adolescence he deeply felt the need of a "role model", that is

a mentor who understood the experiences that are unique to a deafened child living in mainstream society. [...] Black people and women have been consid-

ered socially disadvantaged groups, but my situation was different. We could find no deaf role model. [...] Even if there were successful deaf people, dead or alive, famous or common, I didn't have access to them, and I needed them badly. (24)

Jacobs' observations show that deafness can be lived in a variety of ways. While Laborit firmly advocates sign language, stressing its importance for the cognitive development of the deaf individual, Jacobs states he has never felt at ease when signing. When he lost his hearing, he had already been exposed to spoken English, which he considers his mother tongue, differently from a "prelingual" deaf person, who prefers manual communication. Jacobs defines his deafness "postlingual", as he had lost his hearing after learning to speak, in contrast with "prelingual" deafness, which is congenital and thus makes it hard for the deaf child to learn spoken language and articulate words correctly. The terms "prelingual" and "postlingual", he nevertheless cautions, are highly debated among the Deaf as they derive from a hearing perspective; for them, indeed, the term "prelingual" is wrong as deaf children communicate through signs, which are a real language.

A further, crucial issue considered by Jacobs is that of identity. Referring to the difficulties met during his adolescence, in his attempt to "master" his deafness, the author admits the difference between his identity and that of a Deaf individual:

The issues I was dealing with were starkly different to that of a culturally Deaf person. I was a young adult with deafness, who grew up and lived among hearing peers. Technology had allowed me to pass as 'normal', but I wasn't your average man. Now, in 1994, I was coming to terms with being neither Deaf nor hearing – a neither/nor. I was a person with a social identity that had yet to be invented. (80-81)

Jacobs declares he is a product of his age and of Western civilization and states that his experience of deafness, as a young Australian, does not differ from that of an American, a British person, or anyone living in a country dominated by Western influence. Technology and multimedia devices available to the deaf today ("assistive hearing technology, mass use of electronic communications that require no hearing, captioned television programs and DVDs"), which did not exist twenty years ago, along with a different approach to diversity, allow him to be well integrated in society and "to function" as well as a hearing person.

Despite claiming to have a blurred identity – "I am neither-nor. I am neither hearing nor Deaf" – Jacobs admits his debt to the Deaf political activism. A particularly important result, achieved in many Western countries, is subtitling, that the author considers "the eternal spring of my language *and* social development." (35) His very identity, although indefinite, is the result of personal skills and favourable external conditions: "I am part of a social identity made possible by a combination of favourable environmental conditions and individual willpower." (212)

Jacobs does not believe – as many Deaf people do – that people like him are "culturally homeless" (an expression used by Harlan Lane) or "pretend deaf people" (as Anthony Hogan says); such statements are, according to him, discriminating,

comparable to sexism and racism. The author does not even share the inclination to victimism, and believes that deafness can even be positive if it acts on the individual as a stimulus for a deeper and more conscious personal growth: "Sure, deafness makes one prone to be stigmatized. Yet having a disability can act as a stimulus for greater personal growth, richer experiences, and more genuine relationships." (213) Thinking of his personal experience, Jacobs reflects on the possibility that the two key events of his life – the early loss of his mother, when he was just a baby, and his deafness, during his childhood – have made him face life from a different perspective. His condition of "neither-nor" forces him to continuously practice the difficult art of "speechreading" and of "speech articulation" and to face every day challenges that the others, "the able-bodied people", do not experience; when you are deaf, you constantly experience the threat of exclusion, you do not benefit from the privileges enjoyed by the hearing, that the author defines "privileges of normalcy". What becomes crucial, then, is finding strategies of resistance, necessary to handle and master these situations.

A need that Jacobs insists on is that of being accepted. Since his first days at school, when the problem of inclusion surfaces, the writer becomes aware that his deafness hinders not only communication with the others, but especially his being accepted by them. In many autobiographical narratives the need of acceptance emerges in school contexts, when the deaf and the hearing interact and when one's own diversity becomes evident, if compared to other people's 'normalcy'. In many cases, closely connected with acceptance by the hearing, is the sense of self-esteem created in the deaf individual.

## 2. Hybrid identities on the border between "hearingness" and "deafness"

If it is true that the expression 'Deaf culture' implies the reference to a specific linguistic and cultural minority – deaf people who use sign language and identify themselves in values, beliefs and habits peculiar to the Deaf community – it is also true that liminal experiences of deafness exist, on the border between hearing and deaf cultures, as Jacobs and the authors examined in this section show.

The theoretical reflections on cultural difference, perspective of representation, and identity developed in the postcolonial field along with the concepts of 'cultural hybridity', 'social liminality', 'subaltern agency', envisaged by Bhabha particularly in *The Location of Culture* (1994), will be used here as starting points and stimuli for reflection. The aim is to start a discourse about cultural difference within Deaf culture itself and about the issue of *agency* surfacing from the writing of 'ec-centric' literary works, that is, works produced by 'subaltern' subjects – in this case, deaf people.

Feeling the need to overcome unyielding binarisms and antagonistic oppositions in the cosmopolitan contemporary world, in favour of new critical attitudes based on political negotiation and hybridity, Bhabha shifts the issue of culture to the domain of “beyond”, meant as “an intervening space”, a new terrain of “cultural hybridity” and political intervention:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of ordinary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (2)

Although the cultural hybridity Bhabha refers to is the historical and cultural hybridity of the postcolonial world, this concept is useful when applied to a special type of cultural and linguistic minority like that of the Deaf. The Deaf community tends to leave out and reject what is somehow connected to hearing culture (cochlear implants, oralism, prosthesis), but by so doing it runs the risk of enacting a sort of further ghettoization in the name of an essentialist concept of Deaf culture, thus reiterating dangerous binarisms.

In *Deaf Subjects. Between Identities and Places* (2009), Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Professor of English and Disability Studies at the Ohio State University, intersecting deafness with concepts such as culture and identity, talks of prismatic identities and “betweenity”: “We do not know what is *inside* Deaf culture or deaf identity unless we also know what its borders and boundaries are. What is *between* matters.” (7) Brueggemann, who defines herself “hard-of-hearing”, explores not only the world of deafness, but the very nature of identity, and connects it with Deaf culture and language.

Bhabha too believes that national, communitarian and cultural intersubjective experiences are negotiated in the ‘interstices’; thence the need to understand how strategies of representation are articulated, avoiding to hastily read the representation of difference as a simple and immediate reflection of predetermined ethnic or cultural traits, defined through the stiff schemes of tradition.

Culture, Bhabha states, can be interpreted as *epistemology* and as *enunciation*; epistemology is the attempt to reflect its empiric referent or object, while enunciation is the attempt to rewrite and relocate the political claim of cultural and hierarchical priority. The critic prefers the latter interpretation of culture because of the possibilities it offers to open up other ‘times’ of cultural signification and other narrative spaces. Reading the concept of culture against the paradigm of the enunciative present, a process is enacted through which “objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience”.

These theoretical observations have been recently used in works by Afro-American and Afro-British writers in the field of Literary and Cultural Studies. In par-

particular, the concept of cultural difference as enunciation can be useful to understand the limits of the representation of deafness from a hearing perspective; moreover, such a concept makes the binary, and essentialist, hearing-deaf dichotomy rather problematic. As a matter of fact, the hearing-deaf relationship is far from being simply definable in terms of an opposition between two different cultures. If, on the one hand, the deaf have fought – and are often still fighting – to have their identity and their rights recognized in a hearing-oriented society, it is also true that thanks to the commitment of hearing educators – as the abbots Tommaso Silvestri in Italy, de l'Épée and Sicard in France, or reverend Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet in the USA – it has been possible for the deaf to cultivate and nourish a sense of communitarian identity. In addition to that, the distinction between the concepts of culture as epistemology and as enunciation can help understand the difference between the representation of deafness in literary works by hearing writers and deaf writers' enunciation of their personal experience of deafness from their "ec-centric" position.

The representation of the Other, according to Bhabha, is always ambivalent and dependent on interpretation; this ambivalence derives from its being created in a deferred space – "an in-between space between the self and the other" – that, as such, evokes an equally deferred presence and makes the process of identification ambiguous. This observation urges us to reflect on the complexity and the power of language in the process of representation of the Other and invites us to negotiate the value of marginal, subaltern positions. Bearing this in mind, one should consider the inherent limits of literary representations of deafness by hearing writers and approach the self-representations of the deaf with a fresh interest. In particular, such a reflection invites us to consider the value of the 'betweenity' addressed by Brueggemann, as it is expressed by hybrid identities inhabiting the liminal spaces between 'deafness' and 'hearingness', a term coined by Krentz (2007).

Examining the difficulties met by the deaf to obtain a public 'voice' in order to contrast the oppression and the exclusion endured for centuries because of their alleged inferiority, Krentz mentions the role of writing in achieving this aim and alludes to the ambivalence underlying hearing-deaf interactions, shown since the establishment of residential schools for the deaf. Considering the creation of a "deaf public voice" and of a national deaf community at the beginning of the XIX century, through the figures of three deaf writers whose works were first published in the United States – Laurent Clerc, James Nack e John Burnet – Krentz states:

These authors learned to write by reading works in their cultural moment and in the dominant Western literary tradition, which shaped their voices. Yet if, in writing in the language of the majority, they often replicate hearing forms and attitudes, they also occasionally appropriate English to give a sense of their own unique identities. [...] Like other minorities, they used writing to break the discursive silence that the majority sometimes cited as evidence of their inferiority. (25-26)



In her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Spivak examines the historical and ideological factors preventing colonized and ‘subaltern’<sup>4</sup> groups, placed in the margins of the capitalistic society, from being heard. Even admitting the efforts of the “Subaltern Studies Group”, a project coordinated by Ranajit Guha aimed at giving ‘voice’ and ‘agency’ to postcolonial India – highlighting the opposition of subaltern groups to the British colonial domination, erased from official history by dominant groups – Spivak also identifies its limits. Some of them are assuming the existence of a cohesive, heterogeneous group sharing cultural values and resorting to western intellectuals to ‘give voice’ to subaltern conditions rather than allowing subaltern groups to speak with their *own* voice. In fact, Spivak states, claiming a shared cultural identity means, to the subaltern, just to reiterate a subordinate social position and disclaiming their heterogeneous nature. Consequently the subaltern, as such, are silenced and cannot speak because of the lack of an autonomous, personal perspective, and of a self-centered discourse, positioned from the self.

Something quite similar happened in the history of the deaf. As Paddy Ladd (2003) reminds us, “virtually all discourses about Deaf people have been conceived, controlled and written by people who were not themselves Deaf. Consequently, as with other minority groups, the majority of legislation constructed from these discourses has maintained an ethnocentric bias.” (82-83) In their narrative portrayals of deafness, the hearing have generally described this condition in simplistic or totalizing terms. The deaf characters they created are often surrounded by an aura of mystery, immersed in a world of silence or just used as a narrative device to highlight the hearing characters’ qualities or simply to further the plot. In contrast, the different portrayal of deafness by deaf writers can be seen as an “empowering” cultural and textual strategy, expressing a specific agency.

In her article “Deafness Portrayed: Deaf people in Film and Fiction” (1991), Susan Gregory states that in the literature produced until the Nineties containing references to deaf characters, the protagonist is deafness itself, rather than deaf characters, who are nearly deprived of a real identity. Crucial issues to the Deaf community, as Deaf culture and sign language, are hardly taken into account in works written from a hearing point of view. The titles of the works mentioned by Gregory clearly show the reiteration of stereotypes about deafness, as the idea of the silence surrounding the deaf person: *In Silence* (1906), *A Silent Handicap* (1927), *David in Silence* (1965), *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn* (1977), *The Listening Silence* (1982), *The Rest is Silence* (1985). Therefore, “[s]tudying deaf characters in fiction tells us remarkably little about deafness itself, but does tell us something about misconceptions which may influence popular notions of deafness.” (294)

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘subaltern’ appears in Antonio Gramsci’s writings in reference to the groups socially subordinated to the power of hegemonic classes. Gramsci referred to proletarians, who were not able to oppose, with a class consciousness, those who dominated them, as they lacked both unity and organization.

What emerges from deaf writers' autobiographical narratives, though, is the inadequacy of the category of silence to describe the condition of deafness. In "A Silent Exile on This Earth. The Metaphorical Construction of Deafness in the Nineteenth Century" (2006), Douglas Baynton examines the changes of the meaning of deafness throughout the XIX century in the United States, along with the various metaphors connected to it. One of them is just that of silence, used both in the past and nowadays by hearing and deaf writers alike to describe the world of deafness.

However, the author warns, "silence" does not represent an immediate or unproblematic description of a deaf person's experience. First of all, the deaf people totally deprived of a residual hearing capacity are quite few; moreover, what could the world *silence* really mean to someone who does not hear? Obviously, except for those who were born hearing and later became deaf, this word is completely meaningless when used to describe the deaf experience:

Silence is experienced by the hearing as an absence of sound. For those who have never heard, deafness is not an absence. To be deaf is *not* to not hear for most profoundly deaf people, but a social relation – that is, a relation with other human beings, those called "hearing" and those called "deaf". What the deaf person sees in these other people is not the presence or absence of hearing, nor their soundfulness or their silence, but their mode of communication – they sign, or they move their lips. (39)

Whenever the metaphor of silence is used to describe the experience of deafness, that Baynton defines "a relationship, not a state", what is revealed is the hegemonic position of the hearing in that very relationship, one that constructs deafness as an absence, a void, and the hearing capacity as the norm. Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, two American Deaf Professors at the University of California, San Diego, in their first volume *Deaf in America. Voices from a Culture* (1988), describe two different ways of thinking of sound: as an acoustic event and as a series of meanings associated to it. The deaf are not unfamiliar with sound, but they are also aware that it belongs to the hearing and that they therefore need to understand its various meanings. This can just be achieved through control: self-control and control by others.

The image of the world of the deaf as a dimension dominated by silence is disclaimed also by Laborit, who rather emphasizes the sense of loneliness and exclusion experienced by deaf children of hearing parents who do not know sign language:

I think that hearing adults who deprive their children of sign language will never understand what happens inside a deaf child's mind. There is solitude, and resistance, the thirst for communication, and sometimes rage. The exclusion within the family, at home, where everyone speaks without caring about you. Because you always have to ask questions, to tug someone's sleeve or dress to find out a bit, just a little bit, of what is happening around you. Conversely, life is a silent film, without subtitles. (60-61, *my translation*)

Before learning to sign, Laborit repeatedly underlines, she lacked a real means of communication with the outer world and she felt excluded even within her own family. Her mother only could communicate with her, thanks to an intimate, “instinctive” language that just the two of them shared, made of mimicry and gestures.

Silence, from a deaf perspective, is seen as absence of communication rather than as absence of sound; deaf individuals cannot miss sound, as they have never experienced it. Laborit clearly explains this concept, together with her firm refusal of the label ‘handicapped’:

They often ask me if I suffer for not hearing my mother’s voice. And I answer: «You can’t suffer for what you don’t know. I don’t know the birds’ songs or the noise of waves.» [...] I don’t miss this. My eyes do the job. My imagination is certainly more vivid than other people’s, even if I am a child. Just a bit more confused. And the order arranged in my mind, when I started to attend middle school, already makes me strongly reject the label of handicapped. I’m not handicapped, I’m deaf. I have a language to communicate, some friends who speak it, my parents who speak it. (81)

A similar contrast between the importance of sound and vocalicity for the hearing and the different deaf approach to the outer world – basically a visual one – is also shown in the novel *Deafening* (2003) by the Canadian writer Frances Itani. The title is highly significant, as it has a double meaning intertwined with the world of deafness and the world of sound, both carefully portrayed in the pages of the novel: “deafening”, as the noise of weapons and explosions during World War I – the historical background of the novel – but also “becoming deaf”, a meaning more closely connected to the personal story of the protagonist, Grania O’Neill, who loses her hearing at age five after an attack of scarlet fever. As her parents are busy with their family hotel, her grandmother Mamo and her sister Tress, three years her senior, take care of her and try to make her new (deaf) life in a hearing family as ‘normal’ as possible during her childhood. Grania invents with Tress a sort of sign language, while Mamo is able to see her qualities and to realize that what has changed, after her deafness, is just her way to see the world.

The novel describes Grania’s life, from her first years in Deseronto, Canada, until her marriage to Jim Lloyd, a hearing boy, who becomes a stretcher-bearer in the British Ambulance Corps in World War I; through the protagonist, Itani intimately reveals a new world to the reader: the world of the deaf. Before writing *Deafening* she spent many months in close contact with this world, studying American Sign Language and volunteering at the Ottawa Deaf Centre, interviewing members of the local deaf community; in fact, her personal knowledge of deafness, through the figure of her deaf grandmother – Gertie Freeman, who lost her hearing at 18 months – was not enough to accomplish this task. Although hearing, Itani is careful not to describe Grania’s condition as a handicap and presents it as an intrinsic feature of her identity. The novel, however, also describes the negative reactions of some hearing characters,

partly reflecting the typical stereotypes associated to deafness by the hearing, especially in the past.

Itani presents most of the events from Grania's point of view; most of the time, the reader sees the outer world she interacts with through her eyes and learns, through her, some of the challenges faced by deaf people. The protagonist often points out things that hearing people should consider when communicating with a deaf person; for instance, when her father talks, she cannot always understand what he is saying because of his large moustache, and when it is too long it covers his mouth making it hard for her to lipread. Her mother, instead, blames herself for Grania's deafness, and wants her to lipread, to be as much like the hearing as possible; this is why she initially strongly objects to sending her daughter to a school for the "deaf and dumb" – the expression used at the time to refer to the deaf. However, at the local elementary school for the hearing Grania is isolated; her teacher is unable to cope with her needs as a deaf student, and she cannot lipread and follow the conversations of her hearing classmates, most of whom do not face her while speaking. "She is brimming with questions, but there is no one to ask"; consequently, she does not learn anything new, besides what her granny patiently teaches her at home.

Finally, she is sent away to board at the residential school for the deaf in Belleville, where she will receive a suitable education through "manual language", even if she will not be allowed to see her family for nine months. Here Grania learns sign language, that she tries to teach her family when she comes back home in summer; her mother, nevertheless, does not try to learn it and always hopes her daughter would hear again one day.

Grania's life in a hearing world is just a part of the novel. Through the character of Jim, who will become Grania's husband a few months after their first meeting, in 1915, another parallel story is told: life in the trenches during World War I. When Jim volunteers as a stretcher-bearer for the British Ambulance Corps, the narration shifts between Grania's point of view in Deseronto (disclosing what happens at the home front) and Jim's, who moves from one battle camp to another, until he arrives at Ypres, in Belgium. Through their different perspectives, the reader experiences the striking contrast between their lives. Jim's world, in the trenches, is dominated by sound: the shooting of guns, explosions, screams from wounded soldiers, panting breaths of men poisoned by gas. At the same time, however, his life with Grania has made him very sensitive to what he sees; because of his habit to carefully watch her signing, he now turns his eyes especially toward the hands of the dead and dying, which he finds particularly disturbing: "It was the hands that revealed the final argument: clenched in anger, relaxed in acquiescence, seized in a posture of surprise or forgiveness, or taken unawares. Clawing at a chest, or raised unnaturally in a pleading attitude." (204)

Grania's deafness is interpreted and constructed differently depending on those who observe her: Mamo points out her grand-daughter's qualities, her brightness, rather than what she lacks; her mother, instead, sees it as an impairment, and feels re-

sponsible for it. She strongly wishes her daughter could regain her hearing and wants her to be as integrated as possible among the hearing, lest these consider her “stupid”:

Mother’s lips make a straight line. She does not smile or laugh when she says that Grania must pay attention every second, every minute. If she doesn’t, people will think she’s stupid. She has to be ready all the time.

Ready? For what?

To break through the silence.

But the silence also protects. Grania knows. Being inside the silence is like being under water. Only when she wants to surface, only then does she come to the top.

(xiii-xiv)

While Grania considers silence even positively, as a kind of protection, it is perceived in negative terms by her mother, who does not accept her deafness: “Watch what I’m saying. It is dangerous not to hear,” Mother says. “Especially when you are outside, away from the house. You can be hurt. I want you to listen.” She cups a hand behind her right ear. *Listen*. (20)

Itani’s knowledge of deafness allows her to be sensitive to specific issues, like deaf people’s difficulty to articulate some sounds and to control their voice not to appear ‘disturbing’ to the hearing. In the following passage, Grania is reflecting with her deaf friend Fry on a recurrent question asked by hearing people, that is if the deaf miss music and sound:

“The hearing”, Fry said, “when they meet us, they always ask the same. Do you miss music? Do you miss the songs of the birds? As if nothing is worse”.

“Music and birds are important to the hearing.”

“When I’m in a bad mood I say, ‘How can I miss what I don’t know? So what if I can’t hear birds. I can see them’”. (123)

Fry’s reply seems to echo what Laborit observes in *Le Cri de la mouette* on the crucial role played by sight for the deaf and on their different way of perceiving the world: a visual modality. The meeting between Grania and Jim seems to confirm at the same time the possibility of an integration between hearing and deaf people, but also their profoundly different approaches to the world. Jim wants to know everything about Grania’s world; when he asks her to reveal to him something he cannot grasp by himself, she immediately answers: “The way I see the world”. . . . “The way I see is divided. Into things that move and things that don’t move.” (133) When it is Grania’s turn to ask him the same question, Jim refers once again to sound: “You’ll never know how I sing. Sometimes I wish you could hear me.” Grania explains she has a special way of hearing: “I watch your words. I see your fingers on the keys. I feel your song. I follow your body when we dance. That’s how I listen. I listen to your body.” (134) Laborit too faces this issue, when she refers to her own way of perceiving music: “And I believe I deeply perceived music; not through my ears: through my body.” (Laborit: 1993, 29) Jim wishes he could tell her something about sound, but

Grania has no question to ask, although she is aware that it is essential to him, as to all the hearing: "Sound was always more important to the hearing." (136)

In the play *Children of a Lesser God* (1980) by Mark Medoff, the hearing characters try to control and erase the auditory diversity of the deaf characters. Sarah Norman, the protagonist, is mentioned by Stremlau as one of the most famous examples of deaf characters in literature. Although she is strong and intelligent, Sarah is rescued from her initial state of inferiority only after meeting James Leeds, the hearing teacher who has just arrived at the deaf school where she works as a maid. Moreover, Stremlau points out, despite the various interpretations it can give rise to, the title seems to imply that the deaf are creatures of a lesser, inferior god; a deaf writer would hardly have chosen it for a work focusing on deafness.

Sarah is strong-willed and stubborn: she rebels to James's attempt to teach her to speak and when she states: "Nobody's going to speak for me anymore" (Medoff: 1982, 79) she claims her right to express herself with her *own* 'voice', that is her language, sign language – "a language that's just as good as yours" (15). Orin, another deaf character with residual hearing, points to the ambivalence of the hearing teacher's attitudes: "One of these days, Mr. Leeds, I'm going to change this system that sticks us with teachers who pretend to help but really want to glorify themselves!" (21). James's rehabilitation methods are also attacked by Sarah's mother, Mrs. Norman, who reproaches him for his useless persistence; being deaf, the girl is "retarded" too: "Teaching speech to a retarded child deaf from birth is impossible. Give up!" (27)

Sarah realizes the hearing people's attempt to erase her deaf identity and to assimilate her to their ways, thus objectifying her; her burst of rage is even stronger as it is willingly expressed through the Other's language: "Speech! Speech! Is that it? No! You want me to be your child! You want me to be like you. How do you like my voice? Am I beautiful? Am I what you want me to be? *What about me? What I want? What I want!*" (87). Sarah defends her identity as a deaf woman and claims her right to be respected as a person, firmly rejecting the continuous attempt of the hearing to shape her identity, to erase her choices and desires, thus provoking in her a profound sense of splitting:

SARAH: I feel split down the middle, caught between two worlds.

JAMES: You feel ... what?

SARAH: Deaf world here, hearing world here.

JAMES: Caught between the deaf and hearing worlds. (53)

Sarah feels trapped between two worlds – the deaf and the hearing – that she does not see in opposing terms, differently from the hearing: "Deafness isn't the opposite of hearing, as you think. It's a silence full of sound." (30) Sarah tells James, who cannot make sense out of these words, that no hearing person has ever entered her personal dimension, that "between" space of cultural hybridity, to thoroughly understand it. Even after her marriage to James, what is emphasized is the hearing people's overbearing attitude. In a letter she had personally written, Sarah expresses her dis-

appointment for having been treated, her whole life, as “the creation of other people” (84). The hearing had never tried to speak to her using *her* language, but they had always expected her to speak *their* language; moreover, they had made her feel inferior because of her inability to speak, seen as an evidence of her lack of intelligence:

[...] to be smart I had to be an imitation of the people who had from birth everything a person has to be good: ears that hear, mouth that speaks, eyes that read, brain that understands. Well, my brain understands a lot; and my eyes are my ears; and my hands are my voice; and my language, my speech, my ability to communicate is as great as yours. (84)

To Sarah, deafness is anything abnormal; she is proud of sign language and is not willing to give it up just to please the hearing who do not know it or are not interested in learning it: “They could never be bothered learning my language. No – that was too difficult. I was always expected to learn to speak. Well, I don’t speak! I don’t do things I can’t do well.” (29) As long as other people try to construct her image from without, in her place, she will never feel completely part of either world. The solution envisaged, at the end of the play, is the encounter and the mutual respect in a space *beyond* the hearing and the deaf worlds, “not in silence or in sound but somewhere else”. (90)

Jacobs too, stating the difficulty to clearly describe his identity and coining the term “neither-nor”, preferable to the labels available in the deafness-related lexicon, alludes to a hybrid identity not easily definable. To a friend, who asks what it means to him to be deaf, the writer replies:

I spend all my time in the hearing world. All my friends are hearing, but no matter how hard I try to be like them or to please them, somehow I always turn out to be different. My feelings are different, and I react differently. Many hearing people assume that I am just like them. I’m not. Others think that because I have hearing aids I therefore sign and belong to the Deaf world. I don’t. ... I find signing is unnatural, and the Deaf with their different way of communicating couldn’t be more unlike me. I don’t share their sense of belonging, their culture or identity. To the Deaf, I’m not one of them. I’m not Deaf, I’m neither-nor. (Jacobs: 2007, 90)

Examining the complexity of liminal identities, Leigh considers the case of Codas, who have a “deaf-hearing identity”. About 90% of children born to deaf parents are hearing; although they are exposed to Deaf culture since their birth, their auditory status as hearing makes it hard to consider them real heirs of that very culture. Some Codas can experience situations of marginalization and exclusion more or less hidden because of their hybrid identity, which prevents a complete affiliation to either the deaf community or to the hearing world. Their unique experience as hearing people in a deaf family and the different educational choices made by deaf parents for their hearing children, sometimes more openly directed toward the hearing world (at the expense of sign language), make the situation of Codas quite complex. As Leigh (2010) states

[...] Codas are multifaceted in terms of articulating their d/Deaf/hearing parts. Deaf, deaf, hearing and bicultural are filtered differently depending on their experience and context. While many will recognize the uniqueness of their culture and community, others will gravitate toward hearing culture affiliation and distance from, but not entirely lose, the d/Deaf part of themselves. (56)

The issue of the double cultural inheritance of hearing children of deaf parents is faced also by Paul Preston, an American anthropologist, in *Mother Father Deaf. Living Between Sound and Silence* (1994). This volume collects the interviews made by the author – himself “a hearing child of deaf parents” – to 150 adult hearing children of deaf parents, in various areas of the United States, belonging to different social and ethnic categories, and he examines the process of assimilation and cultural affiliation within a section of the population whose lives and identities reveal a paradox: being culturally deaf, but at the same time functionally hearing. Preston writes: “[T]he paradoxical identity of these informants – being deaf while being hearing – underscores the diversity and the contradictions possible among any group of individuals who are summarily viewed as a monolithic cultural whole.” (217)

Although this study examines a single variable – having deaf parents – the informants’ stories offer examples of the contact between hearing and deaf worlds. Their lives present unique traits as to issues like language, family and cultural transmission, while their stories, besides providing the basis for an ethnographic mapping of the hearing children of deaf parents, also present a framework within which their adult identity assumes a shape and a meaning.

The expression “Mother father deaf” is commonly used, within the deaf community, to refer to hearing children of deaf parents and is the equivalent, in English, of three signs that can be variously translated, for example as “My mother and father are deaf” or “Are her mother and father deaf?”, an expression usually accompanied by words clearly uttered or just silently mouthed. It is, at any case, a hybrid expression easily understood by either ASL signers or English speakers.

Hearing children of deaf parents, according to Preston, are entitled to a deaf identity too. Growing up between two cultures – one hearing and the other deaf – throughout their existence they try to achieve a balance between the world of sound and the world of ‘silence’. Preston’s aim, having personally shared this experience, is identifying the point where the two cultures and the two worlds intersect, creating conflicts deriving from often contrasting worldviews. He tries to explore to what extent deafness is limiting because of its interpretation as a hearing impairment or because it counters certain social and cultural norms.

Our identity, the author explains, evolves from similarities and differences from others; these aspects are revealed in specific historical, social and cultural contexts. Most interviewees have experienced an *identity paradox*: wishing to be, at the same time, as their parents and different from them. Such a switching between two different cultures implicitly shows the limits of binarisms and dichotomies:



Hearing children of deaf parents appear to be people without culture – straddling a land between the Deaf and the Hearing. Their family experiences include both the normalcy of deafness and the normalcy of hearing, the stigma of deafness and the tyranny of hearing. Yet their dilemma of identity also illustrates the fallacy of cultural dichotomization: you must be Deaf, or you must be Hearing. [...] The security of categorization, uniformity, and dichotomization characterizes both Hearing *and* Deaf cultures. (236)

Because it is not possible, Preston explains, to split Deaf and hearing cultures, as they exist in relation to each other, “[w]hat becomes important is not only an understanding of the characteristics and internal values of a particular culture, but multiple perspectives that consider what happens when cultures collide. In an increasingly complex and interactive world, these encounters have become the norm rather than the exception.” (9) Besides underlining the double cultural inheritance of hearing children of deaf parents, Preston also explains the differences with the children of other minority groups:

Although many of the issues and struggles of hearing children of deaf parents parallel those of children of other ethnic and racial groups, there is one important difference. Within the Deaf community, the critical measure of cultural identity is neither degree of language proficiency nor shade of skin color nor knowledge of customs. It ultimately depends on neither declarations of allegiance nor degree of interaction. Above all, to be deaf is to not be hearing. This paradigm underscores why the emphasis on parental linkage is so important. (201)

As the hearing children of deaf parents do not share either their parents’ hearing loss or, in many cases, their language, their main source of cultural identity and of access to the Deaf community is exactly their family bond: “mother father deaf”. Living in two different worlds, these people have experienced diverse perspectives connected with the cultural models available to them, for instance the importance of cooperation and the communitarian sense typical of Deaf culture in contrast with individualism and autonomy emphasized by the hearing. Even the metaphor of silence, a constant presence in their lives, has been experienced with the corollary of connotations and meanings related to both cultures:

Metaphors of silence reflect two cultural standards: a Hearing culture that reveres sound as the basis for communication, and a Deaf culture that sees sound as an inessential and often unnecessary ingredient of communication. Informants’ metaphors and experiences of silence draw from this dual heritage. (122)

Considering that deafness alone is not enough to define the concept of Deaf culture, the author wonders what characterizes it and, as an anthropologist, adopts an approach based on the notion of culture meant as a system of shared, distinctive, learned ideas and behaviours providing a model for personal and social interaction. “Being culturally Deaf”, Preston points out, “is interdependent on the individual’s

identification with the group and the group's evaluation and acceptance of the individual" (15). Although the use of ASL is generally seen by many as an integrating feature of Deaf culture, not all Deaf people are fluent in it. However, within the Deaf community there is no space for ambiguity: you are either deaf or hearing.

The polarization of deaf-hearing cultures is often amplified by the use of these two distinctive communication systems: spoken language and sign language. The different use and maintenance of ASL, in the work examined, suggest three answers to the issue of language and cultural identity: focusing on language often leads to ignoring non-linguistic forms of communication; equating language and cultural identity means assuming a homogeneous use and fluency among all the members of a cultural group; both deaf parents and hearing children have experienced attitudes of repression toward sign language. Therefore, Preston concludes, despite being a crucial element of Deaf culture, sign language cannot be the only criterion to determine cultural belonging. In the case of the informants interviewed in *Mother Father Deaf*, sign language, spoken language, sound and silence have all equally contributed to developing a sense of identity and cultural affiliation.

Renato Pigliacampo, an Italian deaf writer and sociologist, alludes to stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes common among the hearing in their interactions with the deaf in some poems of his collection *Ascolta il mio silenzio* (1999). The title is an invitation to hearing people to listen to the rich humanity surfacing from the passionate lines of the collection, interspersed with illustrations, in order to emphasize the close relationship existing between visuality and language in the deaf perception of the world. The language used is essential, dry, sometimes harsh, and reveals the hard, difficult existential journey of the poet toward a full achievement of his rights in an indifferent, at times unjust and shallow society. Similarly to many deaf authors, Pigliacampo as well denounces the failure of the so-called "scholastic integration" and celebrates sign language, its value and central role in the Deaf identity formation. Throughout the whole collection, the metaphor of silence is frequently evoked; in the "Postface", the poet reflects on its meanings and implications and invites the reader to participate in this reflection:

I've tried to understand my silence, "mine". Maybe I failed: and if I failed, how can I expect "others" to understand it?

But I sang, I exorcised this Silence (...) Therefore, reader, *listen to* this message. The last one? Maybe.

(...) Living in silence is not painful to some, but it becomes so when man, in the society he has created, becomes the master of his verbum, he turns it into a means of oppression.

I fight this "violence" to help intelligence and feeling win (or at least to try it).

*Ascolta il mio silenzio* aims at that. (121)

It is not a coincidence that the word 'silence' recurs in the titles of two other collections of poems by the same author, *Canti del mio Silenzio* (1973) and *Dal silenzio*

(1981), as well as in the title of his novel *Thulcandra. La città del silenzio* (1994). In fact, Pigliacampo states that poetry has been liberating to him, it has acted as an authentic “escape from Silence”. Poetry becomes a way to “communicate differently”, a means of narrating the daily, lonely lives of those who live “diversity”, thus spurring people to reflect.

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## Opowieść o głuchocie: literackie i autobiograficzne reprezentacje osób niesłyszących

### Streszczenie

Pojawienie się w XIX wieku szkół dla osób niesłyszących stworzyło możliwość bardziej wyraźnego niż uprzednio zaistnienia tej grupy społecznej w świadomości społecznej. Pojawiły się czasopisma tworzone przez środowisko niesłyszących (w USA- *The Deaf Mute*, *The Silent Worker* and *The Deaf Mutes' Journal*, w Wielkiej Brytanii – *The British Deaf Mute*, we Włoszech – *La Voce dei Sordomuti Italiani*). Zdaniem Krentza w publikacjach tych widoczna jest „linia słyszenia” – świadomość wyraźnej granicy oddzielającej słyszących od niesłyszących. Głuchota nie jest tematem marginalnym – to od grup dyskryminowanych możemy nauczyć się wiele o życiu (H. Bhabha). Jednocześnie w literaturze niewiele jest tekstów tworzonych przez osoby niesłyszące. Należy to tłumaczyć faktem, że teksty pisane osób niesłyszących nie powstają w ich własnym języku (języku migowym), zatem literatura tworzona przez niesłyszących jest przykładem literatury postkolonialnej. Szczególnie niewiele jest autobiografii, co wynika z trudnej sytuacji socjo-ekonomicznej niesłyszących, a także z faktu, że w kulturze osób niesłyszących (*Deaf Culture*) ważnymi wartościami są współpraca i współzależność, a nie eksponowanie indywidualizmu.

Celem artykułu jest charakterystyka głuchoty/osób niesłyszących dokonana w dziełach literackich ostatniego czasu, napisanych zarówno przez osoby niesłyszące jak i słyszące. W analizie wykorzystano narzędzia z zakresu studiów postkolonialnych, szczególnie poglądy Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha i Frantza Fanona. Do analizy wybrano następujące utwory: *Le Cri de la mouette* (1993) Emmanuella Laborit; *Ascolta il mio silenzio* (1999) Renato Pigliacampo; *Neither-Nor* (2007) Paula Gordona Jacobsa, *Mother Father Deaf: Living between Sound and Silence* (1994) Paula Preston, *Deafening* (2003) Francesca

Itani, sztukę *Children of a Lesser God* (1982) Marka Medoff i *The Miracle Worker* (1956) Williama Gibsona. Autorzy tych dzieł różnie określają samych siebie: jako G/głuchych, słabosłyszących, niesłyszące dzieci słyszących rodziców, słyszące dzieci niesłyszących rodziców, czasem nie utożsamiają się z żadnym z tych określeń. Jednocześnie, jak zauważa Stremlau, tylko osoba doświadczona głuchotą jest w stanie opowiedzieć, jak naprawdę wygląda jej życie. Jepson z kolei komentuje, że na podstawie prac osób niesłyszących wyraźnie jest widoczne, że ich problemem nie jest niesłyszenie, ale stygmatyzacja i marginalizacja, której doznają ze strony społeczeństwa. Niesłysząca autorka, Laborit pisze z kolei, że jej głównym problemem była konieczność ukrywania ograniczeń, niemożność porozumiewania się w języku migowym i żądania ze strony rodziny i szkoły, żeby jej zachowanie w jak największym stopniu przypominało zachowanie osób słyszących. Autorka poczuła się sobą dopiero po nawiązaniu relacji z osobami niesłyszącymi, które pomogły jej zrozumieć jej tożsamość. Laborit nie chce jednak należeć jedynie do świata niesłyszących: wie, że jej rozwój osobowy możliwy jest poprzez przynależność zarówno do świata niesłyszących, jak i słyszących. Problem tożsamości, ale także szanse i trudności w zakresie integracji z osobami słyszącymi są także treścią autobiografii Jacobs.

Niesłyszący autorzy dają w swoich pracach także wyraz przekonaniu, że osoby niesłyszące stanowią pewną grupę mniejszościową, analogiczną do mniejszości narodowych. Żyjąc jednocześnie wśród słyszących, charakteryzują się „tożsamością hybrydową”, która należy lokalizować *pomiędzy* tożsamością słyszenia i niesłyszenia (Krentz 2007).

Osoby niesłyszące są też bohaterami dzieł literackich stworzonych przez osoby słyszące, zazwyczaj jednak pojawiają się tam przedstawione w sposób stereotypowy i nieprawdziwy (*In Silence* (1906), *A Silent Handicap* (1927), *David in Silence* (1965), *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn* (1977), *The Listening Silence* (1982), *The Rest is Silence* (1985)). Prawdziwym problemem osób niesłyszących nie jest bowiem brak dźwięków, ale samotność, wykluczenie i niemożność nawiązania komunikacji z osobami słyszącymi. Ladd (2003) wyraża zatem przekonanie, że jedynie czytając teksty napisane przez osoby z wadą słuchu możemy poznać realny świat ich przeżyć, pozbawiony krzywdzących stereotypów.

Podwójna (hybrydowa) tożsamość może także być ciężarem, co wyraża bohaterka sztuki Marka Medoffa *Children of a Lesser God*. Czuje się rozdarta pomiędzy dwoma światami i nieakceptowana wśród słyszących, którzy chcieliby ją upodobnić do siebie i nauczyć mówić. Jednocześnie nie czuje się częścią społeczności niesłyszących, a język migowy nie jest językiem, w którym wyrażają swoje myśli i uczucia. Podobne dylematy opisują słyszące dzieci niesłyszących rodziców w wywiadach w książce Paula Prestona *Mother Father Deaf* i *Living Between Sound and Silence*. Preston argumentuje, że osoby te, pomimo że słyszą, należą do społeczności niesłyszących, ale często przeżywają także *paradoks tożsamości*, doświadczając jednocześnie *normalności głuchoty* i *normalności słyszenia*.

Osoby niesłyszące tworzą także poezję. Przykładem jest włoski poeta Renato Pigliacampo. W kolekcjach swoich wierszy postrzega on możliwość pisania jako szansę na wyjście z ciszy, opowiedzenie o swoim życiu i nawiązanie kontaktu ze światem słyszących.

streszczenie przygotowała Ewa Domagała-Zyśk



PART TWO  
FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN DEAF EDUCATION





# English for Specific Purposes and the Deaf professional: the SignMedia Project

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*Culture is the knowledge the members of a society need to participate competently in the situations and activities life puts their way.*

Philip Riley<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In our present day and age, with the steady growth of English as a global language, a working knowledge of English is becoming increasingly necessary for communication with foreign peers, whether it is for travelling or for professional advancement. This is not only true for hearing people but also for the d/Deaf. In most countries associated with Braj Kachru's 'expanding circle' (1985), where English is taught as a foreign language, school syllabuses aim to achieve at least an intermediate level of English. In contrast, in the so-called 'inner' and 'outer' circle countries, where English is acquired or learnt as either a native or a second language, the knowledge level is clearly higher thanks to greater contact with the language; however, Deaf people experience difficulties in reading and writing the language, especially in fields requiring specific terminology associated with technical and/or professional matters. Consequently they often find themselves marginalized in the workplace owing to limited language skills

Solutions are being sought for this problem in the form of face to face and online language courses but they often do not go further than the fledgling stages because of the relatively low number of prospective users and a lack of funds.

*SignMedia*, which is at present being developed as an EU Leonardo Lifelong Learning project, aims to address the intermediate English language needs of Deaf students/operators in the present-day multimedia multilingual community where English is used as a *lingua franca*. Through this online course Deaf learners can reinforce their intermediate English skills through linguistic input by actors using the local sign language. (260 words)

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Deaf professionals, Deaf education, EU Lifelong Learning Project, online learning

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<sup>1</sup> Riley 2002: 46

## 1. English for specialized or specific purposes or 'domain-specific' English<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is, first of all, to briefly clarify what is meant by the concept of ESP or English for Specific/Specialized Purposes and then to examine an ongoing instance of ESP as an enabling tool in the Deaf discourse community working in Multimedia and Cinema. According to the British Council<sup>3</sup>ESP (a term coined in the 1960s) is also referred to as "applied English Language Teaching (ELT)" since the contents and objectives of language courses are inevitably determined by the needs of a particular community of discourse or of practice. The subsequent division of ESP into EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) can then lead to a further segmentation into 'business English', 'professional English' and 'vocational English', to name but a few.

Dudley-Evans (2001) quotes the following "absolute characteristics" of ESP: it is designed to meet the specific needs of the learners, it makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline (e.g. the medical profession) it serves, and it is "centered not only on the language (grammar, lexis, register), but also the skills, discourses and genres appropriate to those activities". The so-called 'variable characteristics' are that ESP can be designed for or related to specific disciplines and that in the teaching/learning situation it is possible to use "a different methodology from that of General English" (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998: 4). Furthermore, the learners are either adolescents or adults who already have some basic language capacities, at least of an intermediate level.

According to Gotti (1991:vii) there are contrasting views among scholars about specialized languages: some<sup>4</sup>think that they are endowed with particular features and must therefore be seen as being separate from the everyday language. Others minimize distinctive characteristics and emphasize that the fundamental features of specialized languages have much in common with those of general English. Then there are those who criticize the excessive specificity of specialized languages. The fact that these varieties are viewed by the general public either as obscure and impenetrable, or as a variety to admire and even emulate reflects similar opposing attitudes.

Specialized languages are usually complex in their lexical, morphosyntactic and textual aspects. However, they should not be considered at different levels and as separate entities from general English; on the contrary, they are closely interrelated

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<sup>2</sup> Cortese and Riley (2002: 12) affirm that "today's student literacies can no longer be narrowly aimed at 'academic writing' but must be equally geared to the demand of the professions".

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/transform/teachers/specialist-areas/english-specific-purposes>

<sup>4</sup> For example Spillner, 1981.

with each other from the pragmatic, lexical, morphosyntactic and textual points of view, while reciprocally influencing each other.

As regards the obscurity and “degree of opacity” which languages for special purposes are often criticized for, Vasta(1994:18) points out that this is, in pragmatic terms, the effect of “a temporary/permanent breakdown in communication” between the expert and the layman. The purpose of such language is certainly not to exclude but to make communications of professional matters more precise. She also refutes the claim that specialized languages are distant from standard varieties, since, in her opinion, they possess a “common core”.

An important issue in English Language Teaching is the learner’s motivation for choosing a course in ESP in addition to one in general English. The answer is the “emphasis on practical outcomes” (Dudley-Evan and St. John, 1998: 122): the ESP course should be needs driven, i.e. the learner should feel stimulated by the necessity to learn not only a specific foreign language (English, in our case), but also, owing to the lack experienced by him/her in a particular professional field, the specialized language associated with his/her occupation.

ESP courses can have either a ‘narrow’ or a ‘wide’ focus: the former concentrates exclusively on specific subject area content, e.g. the language learnt/used by air controllers, while the latter aims to cover a larger range of language skills.

Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration in this brief overview of domain-specific English is the community that use that language, or will use it once they have reached a certain level of proficiency. In our case, at the University of Torino and in other parts of Italy, this study aims to examine a particular community, deaf students or professionals working in the domains of the cinema and multimedia. Riley (2002: 42-43), in a brief analysis of recent terminology, explains his reasons for preferring the terms “community of practice” or, even better, “epistemic community” to “speech community” or “discourse community”. In our case we are going to examine the “epistemic community” of d/Deaf Italian citizens, many of whom use LIS (or Italian Sign Language) as a first language and Italian as a second one. Moreover, their professions include activities related to the cinema or multimedia, fields in which d/Deaf adults, for fairly obvious reasons, can find positive expression for their abilities.

## 2. Sociolinguistic and sociocultural dimensions of the Deaf professional

The present situation of the d/Deaf linguistic, cultural and social community is such that some (i.e. the Deaf) identify with Deaf Culture, use a sign language for face-to-face communication and the national language only for reading and writing.

They have a Deaf identity, which means identifying with other Deaf people and “behav[ing] as a Deaf person” (Padden 1991: 42). In other words, they do not wish to communicatively accommodate to the rule of the mainstream culture by which they have so long been ostracised and belittled, but prefer to construct and share knowledge, to maintain their social network and cultivate a nexus of social practices through a medium which they feel is their own:

It is important to understand that ASL is the only thing that we have that belongs to Deaf people completely. It is the only thing that has grown out of the Deaf group. Maybe we are afraid to share our language with hearing people. Maybe our group identity will disappear once hearing people know ASL. Also, will hearing people dominate Deaf people more than before if they learn ASL?

(Kannapell, quoted in Brien 1991: 51)

On the other hand, in the case (which would be rather extreme today) of the deaf who have opted solely for the oral approach (which only seems possible for a deaf child who grew up with her/his hearing family and attended mainstream schools), the community they belong to is the local hearing community at large with whom, to a degree, they share the language, values and communication modes. Obviously communicative breakdowns occur, especially when there are more than two people – either hearing or deaf – conversing and where the hearing partner speaks fast, turns his/her face in a direction which hinders lip-reading or is partly in the dark or in the wrong light. Unless the other interlocutors are very sensitive to their deaf companion’s audiological condition, it is extremely difficult for a deaf person to realise when turn-taking or overlap occur in the conversation. Inevitably, the (natively and naturally) speaking participant is in a dominant situation as to interpreting conversational and contextual cues, and may not be aware of the need to accommodate her/his pace and rendering to the needs of a lip-reader for communicative convergence.

As for the d/Deaf community, there are few chances of a signer identifying with an oralist or an oralist identifying with a signer. If they only have the local language in common (which the Deaf use for writing purposes), they can only communicate in that medium.

In sum, the d/Deaf community seems traversed by this choice between two communicative spheres, two language ideologies and loyalties. There is certainly a stronger community bond among signers who, because of Deaf Clubs, sports activities, dramatic clubs, spare time activities and so on, make a point of meeting and bonding with other signers. Within these signing circles, socio-pragmatic repertoire allows for further identity marking according to the social role, status and position which one wishes to emphasise in the different situations and according to different identity-building factors: age, gender, interests, intellectual inclinations, sexual inclinations, social class, education (also in relation to location in the case of individuals brought up in deaf schools as we shall see) and jobs.

In the rare cases where oralists try to “penetrate” such circles, they usually find it very hard to be accepted and often give up trying. The very fact that they cannot communicate with other signers makes their position problematic, so they usually have to opt for a social and work life among their hearing fellow-countrymen. Thus within the d/Deaf community, the language choice is a boundary designing in-group/out-group positions, though in terms of construction of a Deaf identity, the sign language marks the centre, and the reliance on imitation of the spoken national language designates a periphery. In other words, the signers opt for interactional events, rituals, intensive networking patterns which configure them as a “speech community” and a “discursive community” of its own, where social action and the interpretation of acts and their social intentionalities are mediated nearly exclusively by a sign language. It should be noted, then, that the notion of community applied here is not only inclusive of a “speech” community defined by a certain linguistic repertoire, but also of a “discursive” community featuring its own repertoire of social and sociocognitive /sociopragmatic and interpretive competences, as well as of a “community of practice” featuring its own ‘glocal’ (i.e. global and local) specific social practices and an epistemic community as defined by Riley as “knowledge-based social groups or figurations” (Riley 2001: 57) with distinctive strategies for sharing and transmitting language competence, social knowledge and the identity claims attached to it.

The reason for my saying “nearly exclusively” is that the rift between the two groups is not so abysmal as it may sound. Although in my experience I have come across cases of parents insisting on only one way of communicating, i.e. speaking, and becoming irritated if their deaf children show an interest in the more visual sign language, the representation of two nearly incompatible communicative options is an oversimplification. Divisions in the daily construction of d/Deaf<sup>5</sup> reality are not so clearcut, and the d/Deaf often find themselves on a cline between the visual and oral mode of communication. Signers may *prefer* not to speak both for ideological and for personal reasons (e.g. because they want their own sign language to be considered in its rightful position and since they may not want others to hear their voices, which they cannot control through hearing), but most of them *did* receive some speech-training and oral tuition as small children and are often very good lip-readers, able to code-switch between the sign and verbal language quite easily.

Oralists, on the other hand, do not usually have the same opportunities to learn Sign unless they come across signers at Speech Therapy sessions or at school. Speech-therapists often encourage their d/Deaf pupils to be aware of each other and to accept each other’s mode of communication by arranging classes where signers

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<sup>5</sup> Conventionally, the literature distinguishes between lowercase and uppercase D in the word ‘deaf’: those with a hearing loss are referred to as ‘deaf’ while ‘Deaf’ indicates those deaf people who use a sign language as their first language and consider themselves both a linguistic and a cultural group.

and oralists can spend time together. In the classroom situation I observed, language games encouraged signers to practise some Italian and oralists to pick up some LIS, for example. Another stimulus for boundary-crossing I observed at Speech Therapy was end-of-term parties and theatrical presentations where the young actors were expected both to sign and speak.

In the daily routine, it seems thus as if signers have more opportunities for bilingualism than their oral counterparts. They indeed must read, and also use the written language of the country, and therefore their situation is a bimodal one. To bridge the gap, when unfamiliar concepts occur in the national language for which they do not know signs, they can revert to a supporting code like finger-spelling (Italian: *dattilologia*).

Attempts have also been made by educators to create hybrids between the local natural sign language and the written national language, to facilitate access by deaf children to the national language surrounding them. Among these examples of language mixing in the UK, Knight and Swanwick (1999) quote SSE (i.e. Sign Supported English, where sign and speech occur simultaneously); MCE (i.e. Manually Coded English, where, in addition to regular BSL signs, other signs are made up to represent grammatical information with no equivalent in BSL, such as articles, prefixes, etc.); CS (Cued Speech) where particular handshapes used in certain locations around the face together with spoken language convey all the 40 phonemes of the English language; Paget-Gorman (consisting of a contrived sign system which has not been drawn from BSL); Makaton (a specifically selected sign system for deaf and hearing children with complex needs) and the already-mentioned finger-spelling. The latter is, in my opinion, the only concession made by Sign purists to the local written language in regular face-to-face communication with other signers. It must be noted that finger-spelling (indicating by spelling how to write a particular word borrowed from the written language, i.e. demonstrating a sign for each letter of the alphabet used) is not internationally uniform: the British system is two-handed and the American and Italian systems one-handed. In BSL some signs actually represent the finger-spelled initials of an English word. This is particularly common for first names (e.g. J for John). Finally, though the list is far from complete, there is Total Communication – a random alternation of sign and speech depending on the circumstances – representing “the right of a deaf child to learn to use all communication modalities available to acquire linguistic competence” (Schwartz 1996: 210).

This situation suggests a multi-code repertoire and a great deal of border-shifting or border-crossing between the two main groups – although more so on the part of the signers, who, in fact, regard themselves as bilingual and bicultural members of the larger national society but especially as the legitimate members of an “own” Deaf community as users of its official language.

### 3. The Deaf professional

This study is concerned with a social group which is still largely approached in terms of handicap, impairment and disability, rather than with a full appreciation of its talents and its rich, variegated communicative and expressive practices. Little do most people know about the narrative and poetry performances in sign languages, and such languages are often considered in terms of mere gestures rather than complex organised codes. Without necessarily falling into “the grass is greener on the other side” clichés, one can say that Deaf graduates in Italy are still rare while the UK, the US or Sweden boast whole departments devoted to providing the tools with which deaf students can obtain their degrees. And when I hear remarks that connote a deaf student as uncomfortable or excessive in special demands, I cannot but think of that student being processed through an educational system aiming for integration and yet in actual fact giving little heed to the needs of special learners.

Thus, attitudes on the “we” side and on the “they” side tend to be culturally loaded, although, as we shall see, new evaluations and new perspectives have come to impinge on the way in which social configurations of deafness are constructed, both in the hearing mainstream and in deaf communities. Among the latter, a more pluralistic view of communication modes is increasingly replacing the traditional “oralist”/ “signers” dichotomy and the in/out-group conflicting membership, as the rich social networks developing in Deaf communities more and more involve code-switching, code-crossing – “use of non-ingroup varieties and styles for local effect”, as defined by Coupland (2001: 18) – and blended modes that do not fit an “either/or” choice of mode but rather tend to multimodal meaning-making with preferences for either end of the cline.

What, then, is the position of the present researcher, beyond the trite reflection that language is power and as such can work both as a source of empowerment and as a source of marginalization? Ever since I happened to become involved in teaching English to deaf adults, I realized that my task was in a sense a “liberating” one: not only in the common sense view that access to English means today an increase in geographical, social and intellectual mobility, but rather in the professional sense that teaching as negotiation across cultures involves a great deal of reflection, and reflexivity, hence a growth of the Self.

Admittedly the deaf are a minority group, one with a history of heavy marginalisation and exclusion. What is needed to tip the scales of justice between the classroom situation and the world outside is an intensive focus on meta-communication, to “liberate” the linguistic/sociolinguistic awareness and self-esteem of these multiple communicators. Work aiming to facilitate, in other words, the conceptualisation of language-learning as the struggle to acquire, produce and convey meaning, rather than concentrate on “erratic” details or the production of “correct” grammar in a social vacuum; and to focus on the cultural positivity of the *nonverbal* semiosis, cul-

tivating a language ideology which counters the negative connotations traditionally associated with gesticulation in the Western mainstream cultures.

The d/Deaf professional, in order to acquire the necessary skills enabling him/her to become a full member of the world of work must, in the first place and at a fairly early age, achieve adequate literacy in *a* language, whether it is a sign language or one of the major languages of his country, such as Italian in Italy, German in Austria, French in France. In the case of a sign language being the native language, the signer must then achieve the “bilingual/bicultural” status to be able to communicate, through at least reading and writing, with his hearing fellow countrymen. Only then can he consider the possibility of learning a third language, such as English. Unfortunately, often d/Deaf youngsters barely achieve literacy in the spoken/written language of their country<sup>6</sup> and this can have negative repercussions on their careers as well as on the learning of a foreign language. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a working knowledge of English is necessary for communication with foreign peers, travelling and professional advancement, also for the d/Deaf.

## 4. The SignMedia EU Project

### 4. 1. Background

Since d/Deaf graduates and professionals are attracted and increasingly offered employment opportunities by the world of Visual Arts (Cinema, Broadcasting, Graphics, Information Technology), they need to be proficient in their local spoken/written language, usually in the form of reading and writing. Moreover, the further need for English is felt by all – d/Deaf and hearing alike –, both in the UK and abroad.

Often creative and capable Deaf adults, both in English-speaking and ESL/EFL communities, find themselves marginalized in their work surroundings owing to their poor language skills, whether in their national spoken/written language or in the current ‘global language’, English. Solutions are being sought for the latter problem in the form not only of teaching in schools and universities, but also through *ad hoc* online language courses for beginners (e.g. SignOn and SignOnOne).<sup>7</sup> Owing to the relatively low number of prospective users and a lack of funds these online courses often do not go further than the fledgling stages.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Marschark 2002: 182 “[...]many deaf students graduating from high school today are still reading at levels comparable to hearing students who are five to nine years younger”.

<sup>7</sup> Both SignOn ([http://www.acm5.com/signon3/help\\_info.html](http://www.acm5.com/signon3/help_info.html)) and SignOnOne (<http://www.sign-on.eu>) were developed as projects of Socrates Lingua Education and Culture under the coordination of Klagenfurt University.



The SignMEDIA project<sup>8</sup> aims to address a further need, namely that of English language proficiency at an intermediate level for Deaf students/operators in the multimedia community. Its objective is to break down the barriers experienced by Signers in written English by the use of an interactive learning tool through which elements of written English are taught online in the Deaf learner's national sign language.

An interplay of video, animation and games creates a proactive learning environment, accompanied by grammar explanations and exercises.

All learning activities are designed around authentic media documentation taken from the production process, thus enabling deaf users to develop language skills that can be transferred directly to their work environment.

The coordination of this project is overseen by the University of Wolverhampton (UK), in partnership with the University of Klagenfurt (Austria) and the University of Turin (Italy). Quality control is guaranteed by Mutt & Jeff, an independent UK filming company, run by a very successful Deaf film director, Louis Neethling.

The online learning resource will be accessible for users of sign languages in the UK (BSL), Austria (ÖGS) and Italy (LIS) as of November 2012 (after its official launch in Brussels).

Each partner university works with a group of local Sign Language users who play an active part both in the prior research of suitable signs and in the actual acting during the filming process.

## 4.2. Product and Development

The product consists of at least seven online units, each dealing with a particular activity of film production, such as Risk Assessment, Treatment, Casting Call, Call Sheet and Script. Each unit in turn is based on an authentic document, e.g. a risk assessment form, containing examples of particular language functions like the active and passive voice, relative clauses, use of articles and so on. Learners are made aware of these language uses by a fictitious Mentor, whose task it is to explain the structure in the sign language of the country (namely LIS in Italy, ÖGS in Austria and BSL in the UK) and give guidance when the learner encounters difficulties in doing the exercises.

During the shooting of individual units the actors' tasks include the portrayal of staff members in a filming company (the Production Assistant, Executive Producer and the Producer) and presenting a glossary of English terms with their LIS, BSL or ÖGS translations.

From the very start the learner is considered an active member of the team. Here his/her task is explained in sign language in the Introduction to the course:

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<sup>8</sup> [www.signmedia.eu](http://www.signmedia.eu) (project website) and [www.signmedia.tv](http://www.signmedia.tv) (learning tool).

*You (i.e. the learner) are a media professional and it's your first week working at Sunrise Media Productions (i.e. the filming company) on our TV soap called Beautiful Days. And what will you be doing? You will be given a lot of documents to write in English. Each document is related to a specific area of grammar. You will be set a number of tasks to do. If you call me (i.e. the Mentor), I can explain the grammar rules you need to complete the tasks. Life is never dull and unexpected things can happen on production! So it's time to get cracking: press the buzzer to enter the office.*

An engaging storyline captures the interest of the learner who is supposed to 'help' his/her co-workers solve several problems during the pre-production, production and post-production processes of filming.

At first the learner is addressed by the Production Assistant:

*So glad you're here, there's been a bit of a crisis – production manager's resigned – I'm rushed off my feet and there's tons of paper work you've got to do. If you want any help ask Mark, the producer, he's on location and he's happy to help – see you later. Oh by the way, the boss wants to see you in his office, like now!*

Then comes the Producer's turn:

*Ah great, there you are. Right. That swine of a production manager has quit on me, defected to a rival Soap. I want you to do his job, because Mark the producer speaks very highly of you. The paperwork needs to be completed and you may have to write it a few times until it's correct! Because we all know that errors in the production paperwork can lead to problems on the set. There's also a rumour going round that the commissioners want to axe a soap and it WILL NOT BE 'Beautiful Days', so I need your help to keep the viewing figures high and together you, me and the team will win Best Soap at the Soap Awards!*

After this lively presentation of the narrative, the learner is invited to tackle the exercises:

*Some of the verbs are wrong in these sentences, can you be a darling and change the verb in blue from the present tense into the past participle? You'd better get cracking! Mark the Producer is happy to help – call him. Ciao!*

A satisfactory result can receive the following praise:

'Excellent! I knew you could do it! Move on to the next job.'

However, less satisfactory work can result in:

'Nearly there. Try again. Remember you can call the producer for help.'

Or, worse still:

'Try again. Call the producer for help.'

One might rightly wonder about the appropriateness of the colloquial language used in the above dialogues. However, these are signed dialogues whose sole purpose it is to tell a lively story. When it comes to the actual language exercises, the learner is faced with explanations (in sign language) like:

*These are all active sentences that show who is doing the action. Because it's a Risk Assessment you need to change the active sentences into passive sentences, because you don't want to write who will be responsible for the actions – you just want to make sure the job gets done!*

*Your first job is to underline/highlight the focus in these 'active' sentences.*

And examples like:

*'The production manager must check the fire extinguishers every day.'* vs

*'The fire extinguishers must be checked every day by the production manager.'*

Learners can repeat each unit or part thereof as many times as they need to. The results they obtain in a given exercise help them to understand if they have achieved sufficient mastery of that exercise.

Nowadays, in this period of rather meagre resources in the field of research, especially as far as the Humanities are concerned, academics rely increasingly on the availability of funds from national or international public bodies such as the European Union. In the case of the latter funding is awarded in the form of grants requiring the implementation of projects or activities in relation to EU policies. Fields of research and application are as varied as education, health, humanitarian aid and so on.

Here we focus on one of the branches of EU contracting, the so-called Leonardo Da Vinci Lifelong Learning Programme under the auspices of the EU's Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The policy of the Lifelong Learning Programme is to enable organisations in educational sectors to work with a number of partners from across Europe with the purpose not only of making vocational education "more attractive to young people" but also of helping them acquire "new skills, knowledge or qualifications"<sup>9</sup>.

In the field of language teaching the Leonardo Da Vinci Lifelong Learning Programme aims at raising awareness of the importance of linguistic skills while boosting access to language learning resources and developing teaching materials. Projects to develop new materials may include online courses, instruments for testing, the promotion of language awareness and access to language learning resources.

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<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/ldv\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/ldv_en.htm)

## 5. Some considerations

The SignMedia multimedial English language course is presented in a lively manner in the learner's mother 'tongue', namely the local sign language. Thus some of the learning takes place without his/her being aware of it because he/she is paying more attention to the story and dialogue contents.

The grammar presentations have been kept as simple and as least 'technical' as possible. 'Labels' can be confusing if the learner is not familiar with grammar terms associated with either his own sign language or his first written language, as in the case of Italian and Austrian sign language users.

The exercises capture the learner's interest thanks to their simplicity, immediacy and variety. Prompt correction of answers helps to keep the learner on the right track since he can apply notions gleaned from the online correction and apply them to future exercises.

There may be some doubt about the fact that Austrian and Italian Sign Language users are facing an EFL situation whereas their British counterparts find themselves learning English as a Second language. This means that British sign language users have had many more opportunities to learn English in their everyday lives than Italians and Austrians who have learnt most of their English in the language classroom.

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### EU projects and grants

[http://ec.europa.eu/grants/introduction\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/grants/introduction_en.htm)

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/leonardo-da-vinci/what\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/leonardo-da-vinci/what_en.htm)

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/ldv\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/ldv_en.htm)

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/languages\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/languages_en.htm)

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/who-we-are/our-mission\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/who-we-are/our-mission_en.htm)

### Teaching English to the Deaf

<http://www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/pages/understanding-and-awareness/deaf-students-and-written-english.php>

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/disability/practice/pdf/deaf.pdf>

<http://www.englishforums.com/English/TeachingEnglishDeafIndividual/cqqxj/post.htm>

<http://www.acm1.no/signonone/index.html>

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/project\\_reports/documents/grundtvig/multilateral\\_projects\\_2008/grundtvig\\_gmp\\_141761\\_signonone.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/project_reports/documents/grundtvig/multilateral_projects_2008/grundtvig_gmp_141761_signonone.pdf) or [www.sign-on.eu](http://www.sign-on.eu)

### English for Specific Purposes

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/transform/teachers/specialist-areas/english-specific-purposes>

[http://www.esp-world.info/Articles\\_24/An%20account%20of%20ESP.pdf](http://www.esp-world.info/Articles_24/An%20account%20of%20ESP.pdf)

## Specjalistyczne kursy języka angielskiego a niesłyszący profesjonaliści: projekt SignMedia

### Streszczenie

Współcześnie obserwujemy stały wzrost znaczenia języka angielskiego jako języka komunikacji globalnej. Znajomość języka angielskiego staje się coraz bardziej potrzebna w komunikacji z rówieśnikami z zagranicy, w czasie podróży, ale także w rozwoju zawodowym. Są to stwierdzenia oczywiste nie tylko w odniesieniu do osób słyszących, ale także niesłyszących. W wielu krajach celem nauczania języka angielskiego jest osiągnięcie co najmniej poziomu średni-zaawansowanego, który umożliwi swobodną komunikację. Poziom znajomości języka angielskiego jest oczywiście wyższy w krajach, w których ma on status języka narodowego lub drugiego języka.

Specjalistyczne kursy języka obcego tworzone są dla określonych grup uczniów, a ich celem jest nie tylko wyposażenie studenta w ogólne kompetencje językowe, ale także w umiejętność posługiwania się specjalistycznym słownictwem i umiejętnością prowadzenia dyskursu w zakresie określonej tematyki.

Sytuacja osób niesłyszących nie jest dzisiaj jednoznaczna. Pewne grupy osób niesłyszących identyfikują się w silnym stopniu z kulturą tworzoną przez osoby niesłyszące (*Deaf Culture*), posługują się w komunikacji wyłącznie językiem migowym, zaś w języku narodowym czytają i piszą. Zazwyczaj między tymi osobami tworzą się silne więzi społeczne, a członkowie tych grup udzielają sobie nawzajem wsparcia. Inni niesłyszący posługują się w komunikacji mową, czytają i piszą w języku narodowym, ale nie mają okazji poznania języka migowego i nawiązania relacji z niesłyszącymi rówieśnikami komunikującymi się w języku migowym. Te osoby rzadziej mają szansę stać się bilingwalne. Społeczność osób niesłyszących zdaje się być rozdarta między te dwie opcje, dwa języki i dwie tożsamości, choć znane też są sposoby zmniejszania tego dystansu, np. poprzez stosowanie systemów językowo-migowych czy też systemów takich jak Cued Speech, Paget-Gorman lub Ma-

katon. W kontekście tych dychotomii nauczanie języka angielskiego może być postrzegane jako szansa na *wyzwolenie*: nauka negocjacji pomiędzy kulturami i językami, zachęta do refleksji a tym samym osobistego wzrostu.

Osoby niesłyszące doświadczają poważnych trudności w zakresie uczenia się języka obcego, np. języka angielskiego jako obcego, zarówno w czytaniu, jak i w pisaniu, ale zwłaszcza w sytuacjach, w których muszą używać języka angielskiego wymagającego specjalistycznej terminologii. Na skutek braku płynnej znajomości języka angielskiego są oni marginalizowani w miejscu pracy.

Rozwiązaniem tych trudności mogą być kursy dla niesłyszących prowadzone w formie nauczani indywidualnego lub też nauczania z wykorzystaniem technologii informacyjnych i komunikacyjnych. Niestety, często takie kursy odbywają się jedynie na poziomie początkowym i przestają być organizowane ze względu na brak funduszy.

Projekt *SignMedia* jest realizowany obecnie w ramach europejskiego program uczenia się przez całe życie Leonardo (EU Leonardo Lifelong Learning). Jego celem jest wyposażenie niesłyszących studentów i profesjonalistów w kompetencje w zakresie posługiwania się językiem angielskim na poziomie średni-zaawansowanym. Jest to konieczne, ponieważ żyjemy współcześnie w multimedialnym i wielojęzycznym społeczeństwie, w którym język angielski jest *lingua franca*. Projekt *SignMedia* jest kursem dostępnym on-line, który pomaga niesłyszącym w nabyciu umiejętności posługiwania się językiem angielskim na poziomie średniozaawansowanym; w nauczaniu wykorzystywany jest język migowy danego kraju.

W projekt zaangażowane są następujące uniwersytety: University of Wolverhampton (UK), University of Klagenfurt (Austria) University of Turin (Włochy), partnerem projektu jest też brytyjska firma filmowa Mutt&Jeff. W projekcie wykorzystywane są jako języki instrukcji języki migowe używane w Wielkiej Brytanii, Austrii i we Włoszech, które autorzy koncepcji projektu uznają za „języki ojczyste” niesłyszących użytkowników kursu. Materiały będą dostępne on-line w listopadzie 2012 roku. Końcowy produkt składa się z siedmiu części, pokazujących różne sytuacje zawodowe które mogą zdarzyć się w czasie pracy nad filmem. W czasie kursu uczestnik zapoznaje się z dokumentami firmowymi w języku angielskim, poznaje specjalistyczne słownictwo, bierze udział w rozwiązywaniu różnych problemów w firmie, przyjmując rolę nowozatrudnionego pracownika. Wartość akcja kursu, liczne objaśnienia i możliwości szybkiego sprawdzenia poprawności wykonanych ćwiczeń są dodatkowymi atutami tego kursu, który z pewnością powinien zainteresować niesłyszących profesjonalistów, którzy chcą pogłębić swoje umiejętności w zakresie posługiwania się językiem angielskim.

*streszczenie przygotowała Ewa Domagała-Zyśk*





# Language learning against the odds: retrospective accounts by Deaf adults

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## Abstract

This paper introduces the manifold struggles of Deaf<sup>1</sup> foreign language learners. Not only do they have to overcome the difficulties of cracking the code of a foreign language just like any other student, but Deaf learners also have to face further hurdles that are put in their way by an unfavorable educational environment: the lack of support of administrators, the inefficient implementation of accommodations, the unavailability of appropriate teaching materials and well-informed teachers. Data for this qualitative study was gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews with members of the Deaf community in Budapest. The retrospective reports of young adults reveal that although the situation has improved on paper in the past few years, in reality the same difficulties prevail. The research participants argued for the implementation of barrier-free education, the use of their national sign language across the curriculum including foreign language teaching, the need for educators who can sign, and also for the provision of Deaf teachers. It is hoped that the experiences of the participants will be found informative by foreign language specialists and teacher educators working in similar contexts.

**Keywords:** Deaf education; Sign language use; foreign language learning

## 1. Introduction

The context of the research presented in this chapter is Hungary, one of the several countries where the oralist approach has dominated Deaf education for more

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<sup>1</sup> I follow the growing practice of capitalizing Deaf to designate those who are members of the Deaf community /linguistic and cultural minority.

than a century now and has exerted a long-lasting impact on the life of Deaf people. Due to the self advocacy of the Hungarian Deaf community supported by international initiatives, EU recommendations and policy documents, changes are on the way which can lead to improved access to education at all levels and the enhancement of foreign language (FL) learning possibilities for Deaf Hungarians as well. Although there has not been much written about the FL learning of Deaf individuals, based on the available literature we can be assured that the case of Hungary parallels the situation in several countries in Europe and beyond.

Access to information in various fields of knowledge is the unquestionable right of every citizen in a society that calls itself democratic; yet until quite recently, little attention had been paid to whether these rights were granted to people with disabilities or learning differences in practice. The Salamanca Statement of 1994 (UNESCO, 1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities of 2007 (United Nations, 2007) were instrumental in focusing the attention of societies and lawmakers worldwide on the rights of the disabled and disadvantaged in all spheres of life, including education. Yet, claiming equal rights for the Deaf as a group of *people with disabilities* is a controversial issue, since they constitute a very special community. While the world tends to look at them as people with a severe disability – the lack of hearing –, they consider themselves a cultural and linguistic minority bonded by the use of their national sign language (Lane et al., 1996).

The above distinction plays a major role in education. Those considering deafness a medical condition – an impairment that needs to be mitigated or eliminated – would argue that the goal of education is to help students function like hearing individuals would, that is to access information and to communicate via the spoken language of the majority society. On the other hand, the anthropological view of Deafness – labeled by Ladd (2003) as *Deafhood* for the sake of making a clear distinction – acknowledges the cultural and linguistic minority status of the Deaf community, and argues for the provision of rights on a par with ethnic minorities. This involves the right to education across the curriculum in the minority language, which is the national sign language.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that in the case of ethnic minorities the language and the culture of the group is passed on from generation to generation, but in the case of the Deaf community this is only possible if the Deaf child is born to Deaf parents. Since hearing loss is inherited in no more than 5-10 % of the cases, children who lose their hearing at birth or in infancy grow up in hearing families without access to sign language or Deaf culture until they reach kindergarten or school age. In fact, they grow up without language and enter school with a command of neither the spoken language of the majority, which is not accessible to them, nor sign language, which they do not encounter (Lane et al, 1996; Muzsnai, 1999; Vasák, 1996, 2005). This leads to debates about what should be considered the mother tongue of the child, in what language education should take place, and whether the use of sign language should be taught and promoted or banned from

school and home. The core of the problem is thus a case of linguistic human rights, or rather the violation thereof (Bartha, 2005; Grosjean, 1999; Skuttnabb-Kangas, 2000; 2008).

## 2. Foreign language teaching to the Deaf internationally

Considering the magnitude of the impact of the choice made between these alternative approaches, it is not surprising that the foreign language education of the Deaf has not been one of the major concerns of educators and educational policy makers. This, however, needs to be changed if Deaf citizens are to be granted their right to barrier free information flow and if they are to take part in EU mobility like anybody else (Cole, 2008; Fleming, 2008).

The literature on the FL learning of the Deaf is still relatively scarce and covers mainly the learning of English in English speaking countries. Studies about Deaf learners of spoken languages different from the language of the majority society do not abound. The volume of studies edited by Kellett Bidoli and Ochse (2008) and the practical guide by Mole, McColl and Vale (2005) can be considered groundbreaking. Especially hard to come by are studies based on personal accounts which allow the reader to get an insider's perspective of Deaf FL learners' motivation, aptitude, beliefs and strategies in learning a FL (cf. McColl, 2000:5-10). In this study I will attempt to show through individual cases that in spite of the unfavorable circumstances there has been interest among Deaf students for learning foreign languages, and by throwing light on the difficulties these adult research participants had to face I would like to raise awareness of Deaf foreign language learners' needs.

## 3. Deaf education in Hungary

In Hungary the oralist tradition prevails in Deaf education. Vasák, a former president of the Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the author of books on the history of the Hungarian Deaf community, laments that as a result of the Milan congress on Deaf education in 1880 Deaf education underwent a sharp and painful decline in Hungary: the use of sign language was banned and Deaf teachers were dismissed from schools, the publication of Deaf newspapers ceased, clubs closed, and the overall status of Deaf people sank in society (Vasák, 1996, 2005). Vasák argues that it is their deprivation of sign language that makes the Deaf "disabled people" (1996:5). The current official curriculum for Deaf schools consistently

refers to spoken Hungarian as *the mother tongue* of the students, and introduces sign language only as an elective subject in grade 7, that is to say, at the age of about 15, for the purpose of *social interaction* but not as a means of information transfer or as the language of education. There is no early furtherance of sign language for Deaf children of hearing parents. They usually pick up Hungarian Sign Language (HSL) from their peers in kindergarten or at school. When they enter primary school they go through two years of preparatory training during which lip reading and speech production in spoken Hungarian are taught. Following that, primary school education starts via spoken Hungarian. Teachers working at schools for the hearing impaired are not required to know sign language, and only a few of them do. Foreign languages were introduced in the curriculum in the mid 1990s; however, it is left to the school to decide whether they provide FL classes to hearing impaired students. Currently five out of the seven schools for the Deaf in the country list the availability of foreign languages on their website. This is usually English or German.

Hungary was among the first to sign and ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (United Nations, 2007), which constitutes a complete paradigm shift in Deaf education. It calls for the facilitation of full and equal participation in education and fosters the teaching of the national sign language. It promotes education delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the hearing impaired, and the employment of teachers who are qualified in SL, including Deaf teachers.

The fact that the Hungarian government adopted the provisions of the Convention wholeheartedly re-energized the Deaf community in their fight for the recognition of HSL and the Deaf as a linguistic and cultural minority. Act 125 on Hungarian Sign Language and Hungarian Sign Language Use was passed by the Hungarian Parliament on November 9, 2009. This law acknowledges HSL as the language of the Deaf and declares that the Hungarian Deaf constitute a linguistic and cultural minority. It guarantees the right of Deaf children to be taught HSL at school and to be educated bilingually, that is, in HSL and spoken Hungarian. Ensuring barrier-free education at all levels is of great significance since according to census data from 2001 (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, n.d.), the ratio of Deaf adults with a higher education degree is merely 2.1%, way below the average of degree holders in other disability groups. Since changes cannot take place overnight, the law sets 2017 as the deadline for a full implementation of the necessary changes across all levels of schooling.

### 3.1 A nationwide survey

Inspired by national and international initiatives, a research team at the Department of English Applied Linguistics of Eötvös Loránd University launched a project (“Equal opportunities in language learning for students with special educational needs”<sup>2</sup>) to in-

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<sup>2</sup> Project sponsored by the National Institute of Research and Technology NKTH B2 2006-0010.

investigate the situation of foreign language education among the Deaf population (Kontráné Hegybíró et al. 2008, 2009; Csizér et al., 2008). As a supplement to the journal of the Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing a questionnaire was sent out to approximately 3000 subscribers all over the country. The sample was non-representative, since due to data protection an address list of all Deaf persons in the country could not be obtained. Owing to faulty completion 20 of the 351 returned questionnaires had to be disregarded. Finally 331 adult research participants were included in the sample, 200 of whom identified themselves as hard of hearing (HoH) and 131 as Deaf. The 69-item Likert-scale questionnaire was designed by our team to tap into the educational background of the respondents, their language learning history, their use of HSL in and out of school, as well as their motivation and their beliefs about the need to learn a foreign language.

The analysis of the obtained data showed that 91.6% of the Deaf subsample were active sign language users, out of whom only 10.8% had learned to sign from their parents, with the majority picking up HSL from their peers. There were 156 respondents in the total sample who had not taken part in foreign language learning at school: 70 HoH and 86 Deaf. The most frequently mentioned reason for that was the lack of foreign language teaching at school: 102 respondents gave this response, many more of them Deaf (63) than HoH (39). Another frequently mentioned reason for not learning a FL was exemption. This again was more frequently mentioned by Deaf (23) than by HoH respondents (14). For an overview see Table 1.

Table 1 Reported reasons for staying out of foreign language learning during primary, secondary and tertiary education

	Hard of hearing % (n=200)	Deaf % (n=131)	Total (N=331)
Did not learn a FL at school	70	86	156
<i>Reasons:</i>			
No FL provided at school	39	63	102
Exempted from FLs	14	23	37

There were several respondents who mentioned that they had taken part in foreign language learning outside the school. Some of them were taught by their parents, some had private tutors, others tried joining courses for adults in language schools, but quite frequently they tried to teach themselves.

From the analysis of questionnaire items tapping into various aspects of FL learning, Csizér et al. (2008) could conclude that those who responded to the ques-

tionnaire were aware of the importance of FLs in life and demonstrated a medium level of motivation for learning FLs irrespective of the degree of their hearing impairment. The Deaf adults in the sample were mainly interested in learning the written modality as opposed to lip reading and speaking in the foreign language. Their motivation was predominantly instrumental: they were aware that knowing foreign languages, especially English, is necessary for getting information from Internet sources, for keeping in touch with foreign Deaf organizations via email, and also for travelling abroad. It was also found that for all hearing impaired participants the methods of teaching and a supportive milieu are the most important factors in shaping motivated learning behavior. Cluster analysis of the data revealed that the more motivated participants are to learn foreign languages, the stronger preference they show for the Deaf using sign language at school and in real life as well (Kontra & Csizér, in press).

#### 4. Individual interviews with Deaf and hard of hearing adult language learners

Data obtained from wider groups of people are suitable for providing an overall picture but can never lead to a deep understanding of the issue from the participants' perspective. A series of interviews were therefore also conducted with a sample of Deaf adults in Budapest, who spoke about their general experiences at school and in higher education, described their hardships in trying to learn a foreign language and emphasized the need for barrier-free education. Data collected in these interviews constitute the basis for this study.

##### 4.1. Method

A group of 18 Deaf and 5 HoH adults who had some foreign language learning experience were contacted via snowball sampling. Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted in HSL via sign language interpretation. The 55-60 minute interviews were audio and video recorded and transcribed. Qualitative data analysis was performed by using the MAX.QDA 2007 data analysis software. The overall results of the research were published in Hungarian (Kontráné Hegybíró, 2010). The present study focuses on a part of the data which gives an insight into the difficulties participants had to face as language learners and how they managed to be successful against the odds. The four interviewees introduced in this chapter have been selected as the ones whose cases are particularly rich in events and in lessons to be learnt.

## Participants

The selected participants whose cases I would like to introduce here are young adults in their late 20s and early 30s, three men and one woman, who will be referred to by the pseudonyms of Botond, Bence, Máté and Csilla. Botond, Máté and Csilla were born to hearing parents, Bence, however, is a third generation Deaf on his father's side, and his mother is also Deaf. Each of the four participants is a prelingually Deaf sign language user. Each of them is well-educated: Botond is an electrical engineer, Máté a graphic designer, Csilla studied IT in a post secondary training program, and Bence is a college student. They achieved various levels of success in different languages and encountered a range of obstacles along the way. The most successful from among them is Csilla, who took an internationally acknowledged proficiency exam in English in writing and passed with a high enough score to apply to a university in the USA, where she would have liked to study had she received a grant. Botond managed to take a basic level exam in English in writing and has been keen on continuing his studies ever since. Máté was successful in taking the Matura exam in English at high school. Bence has experimented with several languages and achieved success as a self-taught student. He took an intermediate level proficiency exam in German in writing and currently he is about to graduate in Latin and Classical Philology. In the following pages the obstacles they had to face on their way to success in FLs will be presented.

## 5. Results

The first obstacle these participants – just like all of our other Deaf interviewees – had to overcome was presented by the type of school they attended. Whether FL instruction was made available for Deaf students and what choice of languages was offered depended on what school they were enrolled in. Another hurdle was waivers, imposed when not needed and not granted when necessary. The teachers' attitude to integration as well as their readiness to adapt their methods to the needs of the special needs (SN) student was a further important factor.

### 5.1 Choice of school

It is common knowledge among the Deaf in Hungary that the educational level at Deaf schools is unfortunately low; therefore, if a child shows good abilities, he or she is transferred to a school for the HoH or to one for hearing children. The school for the HoH has three definite advantages: 1) the teachers there are more aware of the needs of the hearing impaired than at schools for the hearing, 2) many of the HoH

students can sign and are willing to act as interpreters between the teacher and the Deaf students, 3) FL teaching is provided.

As a young boy, Máté experienced several changes of school. He started out in the Deaf school and because he was smart, after 5 years he was transferred to a school for HoH children where he first learnt Russian, then German. Following that, since there is no high school specifically for the Deaf in the country at all, he took part in integrated secondary education with hearing peers. This is how he relates his school experience:

EHK: How did you manage to understand the teacher if she was not able to use HSL and there was no support staff?

M: via speech reading ... we got used to it ... I attended high school with hearers ... the first two or three months were very difficult ... I got tired of having to always read lips ... what is more, at the school for the HoH they had spoken relatively slowly, they had paid attention to us, but the teachers at the hearing school were unable to do that ... yes ... then, after two or three months I got used to the situation, and I managed (Máté, 2/10<sup>3</sup>)

When asked how communication worked out in the English class, he reflected on less positive experiences. Lip reading in the FL was obviously not taught, and although he tried, he did not succeed. He also attempted speaking in English but did not manage to pronounce the words properly and was often ridiculed by his classmates. He thought that in an all-Deaf group with a patient teacher it could have worked but as the only Deaf student in an integrated setting he felt embarrassed and gave up: “In the first year of high-school I decided that I cannot learn spoken language and pronunciation,” he said and he stuck to his decision (Máté, 6/19).

Csilla was also considered a talented student and was therefore transferred from the Deaf school to a school for the HoH in the upper primary where there was compulsory Russian taught at the time. She learnt Russian from grades 5 to 7, when the teacher left, and no new teacher came. For high school she attended an institution that enrolled hearing students mainly but also admitted HoH and Deaf boys and girls in non-integrated classes. There she had a chance to take up English in a mixed group of Deaf and HoH students. This started out well; however, after some time this teacher also left the school, so Csilla had to find a private tutor. She also experimented with different fee-paying courses at language schools until she could continue learning English as part of the program in post secondary education.

Botond also started his education in the school for the Deaf where there was no FL provided at the time. In high school he wanted to take up English but was not allowed to. The school principal insisted that learning a FL would be too difficult for him and issued a waiver against his and his parents' wishes. Botond mentioned

<sup>3</sup> Quotes are presented in the author's translation. The numbers indicate the location of the quote in the transcript.



resentfully in the interview that the HoH students had access to languages: “In the HoH school, they had a chance to learn English or German. We got nothing,” he said (Botond, 2/37).

Due to his coming from a Deaf family, Bence has a very strong Deaf identity, and this played a decisive role in his education. His good abilities were noticed at school early on, so his teachers recommended that he should transfer from the Deaf school to the school for the HoH, but he decided to stay with his signing peers even though he and his classmates could only use HSL when no teacher was present. When asked about FL learning possibilities at his school, this is what he said: “No. It did not even occur to the teachers that it might be possible to teach foreign languages to the Deaf although sign language is also a *foreign language*” (Bence, 2/22). This is the reason why he first took part in organized FL education only in high school where he learnt German in a group of eight students, two Deaf, five HoH, and one hearing.

## 5.2. Language choice

At schools for the hearing impaired the choice of language is determined by the school and this was received with resentment by our participants. The first language Máté and Csilla experienced was Russian, a compulsory FL before 1990. Csilla’s only memory of Russian is her dislike of it. Máté, however, also recalls positive experiences of learning Russian: he found the language interesting and appreciated the consistent spelling, the close sound-symbol correspondence, as well as the relative ease with which he could use his lip reading skills in the lessons.

Three of the four participants were exposed to German at one time or another. For Máté it was a compulsory language after Russian had been removed from the curriculum. He disliked German partly because it was compulsory but also because of the difficulties of German grammar. However, he found that later, when he had a chance to start English in high school, he could build on his basic knowledge of German and cope with English more easily. German was the first FL Botond encountered. Since FLs were not part of the curriculum in the Deaf school he attended, when he was 10, his father decided to teach him some German at home. This went on for a year. Bence also got involved with German owing to family influence. Like most young people, he too was interested in English at high school but the teachers thought English “would be impossible for a Deaf person to learn” (Bence, 2/43). Thinking with an oralist mind, the school management decided that German was an easier language for their students, and offered only German to the hearing impaired, creating instant demotivation and resentment. However, one of Bence’s grandfathers was of German origin, and he persuaded his grandchild to learn German more willingly. At first Bence found the lessons boring and the language very difficult, but after two years he got the hang of it and started to become better and better:

... in the summer, there were two weeks when my family was gone and I was alone at home ... I took my German books, first just leafed through my vocabulary notebook trying to recall "What was it?" "How was it?" ... compared Hungarian grammar to German grammar, did a little matching, tried to find my way in the dark with rising curiosity and then I said to myself, "Wow, how interesting, really!" ... and in that summer I revised the whole material of the first two years ... following that, in the third year [of high school] I managed to keep up with the rest of my class and I got to like German." (Bence, 3/16)

At the end of his high school studies, Bence took the Matura exam in German completing both the oral and the written component.

The preferred modern FL for each of our participants is English. Máté was the luckiest of the four because he had a chance to learn some English in his high school for hearers. Although his learning was limited to the written modality, he made progress and managed to take the Matura in English in writing. Csilla also had access to English in her mixed Deaf and HoH class at high school, and all went very well at first. However, she was making progress faster than her peers and got bored after a while. After her teacher had left, she joined another group of HoH students at her school but found their progress much too slow, so she quit the course and had to look for learning opportunities outside the school. Bence would also have preferred to study English, but he was not given a free choice.

Botond's case is the most discriminatory since access to English or any other FL was denied to him completely at his high school. He was told bluntly that English would be too difficult for him. Both he and his parents protested; they requested that Botond should at least be given a chance to try, but they were turned down. Botond was very motivated to learn English due to his interest in computer programming, and since he was not given a chance at his school, his parents finally decided to look for a private tutor, which was no easy thing to do for a Deaf boy. Finally, his father found someone in a far away city, so for a year the 15-year-old Botond spent his Saturdays getting on the train, travelling to his teacher for his English classes and then taking the train back. This was a sacrifice on both his and his father's part: "I travelled, he paid," Botond said (Botond, 3/2). After a year of private tutoring he went back to the school principal:

I told him I had a private tutor and I could do it ... Can I join the class? ... "No," he said, I would be given a waiver (Botond, 2/17)

### 5.3 Language learning opportunities in higher education

Article 62 of the Hungarian Higher Education Act (Ministry of Education, 2005) requires that those graduating from college should have at least an intermediate level language proficiency exam certificate. Máté, Botond, Bence and Csilla each had difficulties with fulfilling the foreign language requirement since the circumstances for

a Deaf student trying to learn a FL in tertiary education are even less favorable than at lower level institutions.

Máté, who studied IT, felt the need for knowing English. Not only was he motivated to continue learning the language, but he had also developed survival strategies at the high school he had attended. He was quite confident that deafness itself was no obstacle to learning languages in the written modality, at least not at an intermediate level, providing someone had a strong will and was patient enough. However, Máté's special needs were not taken much notice of in the FL class for freshmen:

the first time I went to class, I entered, everybody was talking, they were doing some situational conversation, there was nothing [for me], so eventually I said 'No, I am not doing this, this is not my style,' so I packed up and left. (Máté, 8/6)

Following that, Máté requested a waiver but the Dean said the law did not allow for exemptions. What is more, he was told that his college would not be able to issue his diploma if he did not obtain a language certificate. Máté had to wait four years for lawmakers to amend the law, and then he could finally obtain his degree.

Botond, after having learnt English with a private tutor during his high school years decided to continue taking English at the Technical University as well. As a freshman, he took the placement test together with all the hearing students and was rather disappointed to be placed in the beginner's group:

the course started ... it was difficult ... the teacher was just talking and talking ... I could not follow ... I was given extra writing tasks to do [...] there was a lot of talking and there were listening tasks, but I was given extra written exercises ... it was difficult ... I completed the course with a grade 3 [on a scale of 1-5] ... in my sophomore year I wanted to continue but there was a different teacher... he was very impatient, he would not deal with me extra ... I went to see the Dean about it, and the Dean told me that on account of my Deafness I could be given a waiver ... I accepted it (Botond, 5/14)

After high school, Csilla first enrolled in a one-year training course in software management where, as part of the program, she had to take part in a very intensive English course. She said she suffered greatly because the group consisted of all hearing students who were progressing in the material very fast and she could not keep up with them no matter how hard she tried. She felt quite distressed. Eventually she got help from a young girl who was an English major student at the university and was learning sign language at the same time. Csilla practiced HSL with her and in exchange the girl helped her with English, explaining to her the grammar points she could not understand in class and answering her questions. This worked out very well: Csilla managed to stay in her intensive English class and she did not have to pay for the tutoring.

Bence decided to study history after high school. In Hungary, history students are required to learn Latin, which was one of Bence's favorite languages. As a 12-year-old

boy, while looking around in a bookshop one day, he found a coursebook on Latin and asked his parents to buy it for him. Following that, he also asked for a dictionary, and he started learning Latin on his own and found real pleasure in it. At college, he was lucky because due to his previous self-study he already knew a lot, in fact a lot more than the others in his class. It also helped that the Latin teacher spoke with good articulation, so Bence felt he was making good progress. At the college it was also recommended that he should learn some English but the scenario was very similar to what Máté and Botond had experienced. Bence, however, being a bit younger than the other research participants, started college under somewhat more favorable circumstances. He was offered an interpreter to accompany him to class, and since he did anticipate difficulties, he accepted the offer:

... the problem was that the course was taught by a hearing teacher, and among 100<sup>4</sup> of them I was the only Deaf ... there was one HoH girl, so the whole class consisted of hearing students ... they had no idea about the Deaf, so all the time there was just listening to the tape, and the interpreter, well, he could not speak English himself, so he could not interpret ... "Wait, wait!", he kept saying ... he tried to look things up in the dictionary ... it felt like he was doing the studying for us ... so this was not a fortunate situation and we gave up (Bence, 8/50)

At the time of the interview Bence was convinced that the best solution for him was self- study, and he started self-studying English.

#### 5.4. Teachers and teaching methods

Throughout their careers the four participants encountered a variety of teachers, teacher attitudes and teaching methods. It needs to be emphasized that they all attended either oralist schools or schools for the hearing, so the use of sign language was only possible in private tutoring. How much their teachers insisted on using speech in class or teaching through the written modality varied from one teacher to the other. Máté was satisfied with his Russian teacher's method at the school for the HoH because he presented the material in small steps and wrote everything on the blackboard. At high school, although he studied English in an all hearing group, the teacher knew she had to write everything on the board:

in the first and the second year [of high school] she always wrote on the blackboard ... she started at the basics ... in the first year we often only communicated in writing ... in the second year it was more half speaking half writing ... but I always received the tasks in writing, the others orally ... question-answer ... the others did everything in speech, I in writing [...] I had to write letters, some kind of composition, or describe a picture ... she talked and talked, I did not know what they were

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<sup>4</sup> Bence exaggerates here, even big foreign language classes usually do not have more than 20 students.

saying ... so she discussed [the tasks] with them, she checked them, and then also with me ... or I wrote something, she took it and returned it the next class (Máté, 5/21)

It was also lucky for Máté that after the second year the class was divided into two: one group continued with an oral, the other with a written focus. Máté chose the group where they did a lot of writing and translations and his teacher also gave individual consultations. This is how he managed to take the Matura in writing, and this is the kind of accommodation he would have expected to get at the university as well.

Botond's private tutor was unable to sign but had a Deaf relative and therefore he was prepared for communication difficulties. Teaching took place via the written modality. Botond wrote his questions and the teacher explained the grammar in writing as well. "The sheets of paper just piled up," he recalled (Botond, 4/23). Learning through the written modality was less successful for him when it was not accompanied by individual attention. When Botond took up English at college, he found it difficult to study English in the hearing group because he had to adjust to their pace, and all the individual attention he got was extra writing tasks that the teacher corrected. His ultimate problem was caused by the change of teachers. When a different teacher who did not support his learning visually took over the group, he had to give up. Instead of making the new teacher cater for the needs of the Deaf student, the school found it more convenient to issue a waiver.

In Csilla's case the need for individual attention and one-to-one teaching is characteristic. At school she found her first English teacher's methods acceptable:

at the high school it was easy at first ... there were Deaf and HoH students in my class ... the teacher tried to explain things ... he was a good teacher ... he knew how to deal with Deaf and HoH students [...] he progressed slowly in the material (Csilla, 2/37)

Csilla also recalled that although this teacher basically used the oralist approach, he could sign and sometimes he used sign language, though not often. Csilla's problem was the too slow pace of the lessons. However, when she experimented with language schools she could not find a suitable group among hearing adults either. Her story reveals that all the time she was the one who had to adjust to the group. In the intensive English course of the software management program her presence was tolerated by the teacher and the group but her needs were not taken into account: she was left to her own resources. It was outside help, the individual tutoring she received from an English major student, that prevented her from dropping out.

Bence was very dissatisfied with the way German was taught at his secondary school. The teacher seemed very demotivated; if the students could not answer his questions, he answered them himself and moved on while the students were having a conversation with one another in their mother tongue. When things got out of control, the teacher also switched into sign language to cool the students down, but following that, he continued teaching orally. He never checked if the students had

done their homework, so they never did. Bence thought that with the help of sign language teaching would have been more effective:

I missed it [i.e., sign language] very much ... I think if they had taught via sign, what is more, if they had taught us in the Deaf way, I am sure that they could have completed the whole syllabus with the Deaf students (Bence, 5/9).

Bence's college experience exemplifies how the provision of sign language interpretation cannot substitute the teacher's use of sign language in class. Interpreters are trained to translate between spoken Hungarian and HSL, mainly in everyday, practical situations where specialized vocabulary is not needed even in Hungarian. They are definitely not trained to do the job in a class where much of the conversation takes place in a foreign language they do not speak or have only very limited competence in. Bence thinks that it is necessary for the teacher to be able to use sign language so that they can give the meaning of words and can explain grammar in sign. If a teacher knows HSL, he can draw parallels between the grammar of a spoken and a sign language, and that also helps. However, Bence suggests that the best scenario would be to have Deaf FL teachers because they would be familiar with the way of thinking of the Deaf.

### 5.5. Ways to success

Although none of the four selected interview subjects had an easy way, they all achieved some success with the selected FLs. Despite the fact that Máté was unable to continue learning a language after taking the Matura exam, he has not given up on English. As a graphic designer he spends his working hours on the computer and has to read English language websites. He tries to understand the texts by using a dictionary and he does his best to keep up his knowledge this way. What he finds very difficult to do on his own is to choose the right word from the alternative translations in the dictionary. When asked what would be an ideal way for a Deaf person to learn English, he recommends individual or small group tutoring and a signing teacher:

in explanations for example ... when explaining grammar ... if he uses sign language that is good for us ... why? he speaks and he transfers the information in sign ... this would be important for the Deaf [...] then the Deaf could follow him ... the Deaf prefer sign language to lip reading (Máté, 12/41)

Máté knows that such a teacher would only be available to him in one-to-one tutoring which he cannot afford to pay for.

Botond managed to join a course at least for a while where the teacher learned to sign and used HSL in class:

we heard through a friend that there was a teacher who could sign and we enrolled ... it was very good ... she spoke slowly, she signed, she knew how to teach ... she was the best English teacher in my life (Botond, 5/24)

Unfortunately, when the grant money that made this course possible ran out, the courses stopped since the Deaf participants could not afford to pay the tuition fee on their own. He is still seeking out opportunities for learning English so that he can reach at least an intermediate level. Botond has a very clear idea about who should teach English to the Deaf:

good question ... one thing is important, that they should know sign language ... a Deaf teacher is also good, if he knows English and sign language, then he is suitable ... for a hearing teacher it is important to know sign and to know how to teach the Deaf because a plain hearing teacher speaks fast and is not suitable ... these two things ... a Deaf one is suitable (Botond, 10/31)

The road to ultimate success was through sign language for Csilla as well: first through HSL and then American Sign Language (ASL). While she was still doing her software management course she started babysitting for the three children of an American Deaf family. There she picked up not only ASL, but with the help of ASL she also made real progress in English:

it was then that I began to understand how to think in English, and after that when I learned something new, it was a lot easier [...] they could explain to me [...] teaching is a lot easier via sign language ... I personally don't like when they teach me English via HSL ... the two get mixed up ... it is not good for me ... English and ASL are linked (Csilla, 5/6)

Csilla is convinced that the most important characteristics of a good teacher for the Deaf are the ability to think visually, to have an insight into Deaf thinking, and to know what is difficult for them and why. If the teacher can use HSL, he can explain the grammar, she said, but she is a firm believer in teaching English via ASL. This definitely is an approach worth experimenting with as suggested also by Pinar et al. (2008) who taught Spanish to Deaf American students via Costa Rican Sign Language.

Although Bence is a self-taught language learner, he also is in favor of language teachers who can sign. He explained that when he was trying to learn something from the book but could not understand it, once he was given a little explanation in sign he could get the meaning immediately. He also emphasized the importance of the teacher being able to think in the Deaf way as this is the only way to explain the structure of a spoken language to Deaf learners so that they can see the important connections.

## Conclusion

The stories of the four Deaf language learners have several shared elements: they overcame difficulties with their very strong will power, determination and self confi-

dence. They managed to achieve goals they set themselves and each feels able to continue learning a FL. The solution they describe is making FL teaching barrier-free by using sign language as the medium of education and providing teachers who can not only sign but also understand the visual way of thinking of the Deaf. This ideal scenario presupposes that there are only sign language users in the FL group. Inclusive education might work in several school subjects but in learning FLs the Deaf learner's primary linguistic system is sign language: this is what they can build on and contrast the FL with. This also presupposes that the Deaf learner has a strong first language base, and that his knowledge of the majority spoken language is built on the firm foundations of sign language. Writing about how the visual perception of the world leads to a different way of thinking by the Deaf Ó Riagáin and Lüdi (2003:25) argue that "it is necessary as a rule to aim at establishing firmly a high proficiency in L1 before moving entirely to L2." If the provisions of the Hungarian Sign Language Law are to be implemented, it is necessary to teach HSL in Deaf schools as a subject throughout the curriculum, as well as train teachers who are familiar with HSL and can use it in their teaching. For Deaf adults who were left out of free FL learning opportunities during their school years, affordable adult courses should be provided so that they too can catch up and take a fair share of the benefits of European mobility just like their hearing peers.

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## Uczenie się języka wbrew przeciwnościom: doświadczenia czworga dorosłych niesłyszących

### Streszczenie

Osoby niesłyszące (Głuche) doświadczają wiele przeciwności w trakcie uczenia się języka obcego. Muszą nie tylko złamać kod nowego języka, tak jak każdy, kto się go uczy, ale muszą także pokonać przeszkody, które pojawiają się na tej drodze na skutek niesprzyjającego im otoczenia edukacyjnego: brak wsparcia administracyjnego, nieskuteczne próby dostosowania warunków uczenia się do ich potrzeb, niedostępność odpowiednich dla nich materiałów do uczenia się, brak wykwalifikowanych nauczycieli.

W edukacji osób niesłyszących na Węgrzech przez ponad sto lat, od kongresu w Mediolanie w 1880 dominowała metoda oralna. Zabronione było używanie języka migowego w edukacji, zamknięto czasopisma, kluby i organizacje osób niesłyszących. Język węgierski uznawano za język ojczysty osób niesłyszących, zaś język migowy wprowadzany był jako przedmiot fakultatywny w 8 klasie. Języki obce wprowadzono w edukacji niesłyszących w połowie lat dziewięćdziesiątych i obecnie są one nauczane w 5 z 7 szkół dla niesłyszących na terenie Węgier.

Decyzje co do kształtu edukacji pozostają obecnie pod silnym wpływem Deklaracji z Salamanki (1994) i Konwencji ONZ o prawach osób z niepełnosprawnością (2007), jednak pojawia się poważna wątpliwość, czy edukacja osób niesłyszących mieści się o obrębie edukacji osób z niepełnosprawnością, ponieważ wiele osób niesłyszących uznaje się nie za osoby niepełnosprawne, ale mniejszość językową i kulturową. Społeczność osób niesłyszących na Węgrzech w ostatnich latach stała się bardzo aktywna w walce o swoje prawa. W efekcie ich starań na Węgrzech wprowadzono w 2009 roku ustawę o języku migowym, która przyznaje osobom niesłyszących status językowej grupy mniejszościowej i zapewnia możliwość edukacji w języku migowym. Celem działań jest obecnie podniesienie poziomu edukacji niesłyszących, ponieważ na Węgrzech jedynie 2.1% osób niesłyszących posiada wykształcenie wyższe.

Węgry są jednym z niewielu krajów w którym podjęto próbę określenia zakresu nauczania języka obcego w populacji uczniów niesłyszących. W badaniach w grupie 331 osób dorosłych stwierdzono, że 65% niesłyszących i 35% słabosłyszących respondentów nigdy nie uczyło się języka obcego. Osoby uczące się języka obcego preferowały nabywanie go w piśmie i wyrażały przekonanie, że znajomość języka potrzebna jest im przede wszystkim w celach użytkowych.

Dane zebrane w tym artykule pochodzą od czworga dorosłych osób reprezentujących społeczności niesłyszących w Budapeszcie. Dane zostały zebrane w formie wywiadów i mają charakter retrospektywny. Zebrane dane ukazują, że badani musieli pokonać liczne przeszkody w czasie uczenia się języka obcego a sukces osiągnęli dzięki swojej silnej woli, determinacji i pewności siebie. Pokonanie trudności utwierdziło ich w tym, że chcą kontynuować uczenie się języka obcego. Jako elementy wspierające ten proces uznają za konieczne, aby nauczyciele języka obcego posługiwali się językiem migowym, a także starali się zrozumieć wizualny sposób odbioru świata, którym posługują się niesłyszący. Ze względu na specyfikę doświadczeń językowych badane osoby nie widzą możliwości wspól-

nego uczenia się języków obcych przez użytkowników język migowego i osób niesłyszących nie znających języka migowego lub osób słyszących.

Konkludując, pomimo zmian w zakresie formalnej organizacji nauczania języków obcych uczniów niesłyszących, nadal proces ten zdominowany jest przez liczne trudności. Uczestnicy badań wyrażają przekonanie, że konieczne jest zniesienie istniejących barier w edukacji niesłyszących oraz zapewnienie uczniom niesłyszącym możliwości uczenia się z nauczycielami znającymi język migowy. Nauczycielami powinni być także sami niesłyszący, po zdobyciu odpowiedniego wykształcenia. Ze względu na specyfikę sytuacji dorosłych osób niesłyszących, które pozbawione były możliwości uczenia się języka obcego, badani postulują konieczność zorganizowania kursów uzupełniających, które pozwoliłyby im na skorzystanie z możliwości uczenia się języka obcego, której byli pozbawieni w przeszłości.

*streszczenie przygotowała Ewa Domagała-Zyśk*



# Teaching of English to Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing pupils in Norway

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## Abstract

In Norway, since 1997, English is an obligatory subject in the National Curriculum for Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing pupils. The curriculum's content and goals are the same as for hearing pupils. However, Deaf pupils are given a choice of oral language – spoken English, BSL (British Sign Language), ASL (American Sign Language) or written English used in conjunction with ICT i.e. “chatting”. The curriculum also includes subject matter about Deaf culture in the English-speaking world. Pupils are expected to take national examinations based on the curriculum for the Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing, which lead to higher education.

This article includes information about the history of deaf education in Norway, the English curriculum and examinations for Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing, theory of teaching a foreign language, examples of teaching methods in different areas of the subject and a description of a research study into Deaf pupils' acquisition of British Sign Language in the classroom. Results of the study showed that despite many teachers' lack of BSL skills, those pupils given access to BSL texts acquired some of the language.

**Keywords:** English teaching as a foreign language (TEFL), Deaf, Sign Language

## Introduction

Both hearing and Deaf people in Norway need skills in English to participate in and cope with the demands of our modern multicultural, technological society. English has become a “world language”, used more often by non-native speakers than native-speakers. Pupils also need English to enable them take part in the trans-na-

tional Deaf community. One thing is definite: Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing pupils can learn English; the question is how? The number one challenge is making English accessible to each pupil based on individual language modality preferences and functional hearing.

## The History of Deaf Education in Norway

The Deaf population in Norway is small: approximately 4,000 people. As in most European countries during the last century, Deaf children received an oral education in schools for the Deaf. But after extensive campaigning by the Deaf community, a school reform in 1997 introduced a new National Curriculum (L97) including the following subjects specifically for Deaf children: Norwegian Sign Language (NSL), Norwegian for Deaf Pupils, English for Deaf Pupils and Drama & Rhythms, which replaced the subject of music. The L97 curriculum was based on Sign Bilingualism and a socio-cultural approach. Although we have little empirical data to show the effect of Sign Bilingualism in Norway, we do know that in 1970, when some schools began to show an interest in using NSL, there were three Deaf academics in the country. Giving pupils access to the curriculum via Sign Language has resulted in a huge increase in the number of Deaf students in higher education. By 2005 there were over 300 Deaf people who had attained or were attaining college and university qualifications (Schrøder, 2005). Deaf children were given a legal right to education in and about NSL in the 1998 *Law for Primary and Secondary Education* §2-6. The inclusion of pupils in their local school was one of the basic philosophies of the 1997 reform, but nevertheless, Deaf pupils retained the right to attend Schools for the Deaf either full-time or for short-term stays of up to 12 weeks per year to give them access to a Sign Language environment. In addition, the Norwegian State offers parents of Deaf children 40 weeks NSL education free of charge, from the time the child is diagnosed until their sixteenth birthday. This measure is set in place to try and ensure that the child's language is well developed and age appropriate by the time the child enters school.

A new national curriculum (L06) was implemented in 2006. It has maintained the rights of Deaf pupils, but changed the focus of the curriculum from describing specific methods and activities to stating learning goals. The curriculum's target group was extended to include not only the Deaf, but also the severely hard-of-hearing. Schools choose methods and activities appropriate to the needs of the individual child based on assessment. The L06 curriculum highlighted the need for assessment tools suitable for evaluating Deaf pupils' development and needs. Such tools have subsequently been developed; however we have no data on how widely they are used.

Today over 90% of Deaf children have cochlear implants (CI) and the majority attend their local school. This is leading to the closure of all but one of the state-run schools for the Deaf as part of a re-organisation of state-run initiatives. Local Authorities in the largest towns run units attached to local schools, while short term stays will still be offered by the state. These changes have caused a great deal of discussion about teaching methods. Although some parents choose oral education, many choose a Sign Bilingual approach. Sign Bilingualism is the use of Sign Language and a spoken/written language, each having an equally important function in the pupil's life. The aim of Sign Bilingualism is to assure pupils full access to the curriculum and choice in relation to education placement, culture and social life. The question is how to ensure Sign Bilingual pupils in local schools access to a Sign Language environment. To address this problem, long-distance learning using ICT is under development.

## 1. The Curriculum and the Teaching of English in Norway

The English curriculum for Deaf pupils contains the same learning goals and standards as the curriculum for hearing pupils. Education in English starts in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The curricula cover written and oral skills in English and cultural knowledge and understanding. The curriculum for the Deaf differs in that it also includes knowledge of Deaf culture from English-speaking countries.

Another very important difference between the curriculum for hearing and Deaf pupils is the definition of "oral English". Experienced teachers will verify that Deaf pupils' functional hearing and speaking skills vary enormously, often bearing no relationship to audiogram measurements. In this situation, expecting one teaching approach to suit all is not reasonable or successful. Therefore the curriculum must provide for this large variation in the population. "Oral English" is defined as BSL<sup>1</sup>, ASL<sup>2</sup>, spoken English, "chatting" using ICT and written English or combinations of these languages and strategies. Choosing the "oral" language which is accessible to the individual pupil is crucial: whichever is appropriate to the pupil's needs and the situation; not what the adults wish could be possible, or what the school can offer. Language is acquired through pupils' active use of language in social interaction. In light of this perspective, the learning environment must be adapted so that the pupil's hearing loss is not a hindrance for reaching learning goals (Zahl, 2000). The ultimate aim is for pupils to be able to communicate in English independently in real-life situations.

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<sup>1</sup> BSL – British Sign Language

<sup>2</sup> ASL – American Sign Language

In 1997 British Sign Language (BSL) was introduced as a compulsory part of the syllabus for Primary School Deaf pupils in the L97 reform as a first step in foreign language learning (FLL). Using BSL in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade provided a means of introducing pupils with little residual hearing to the idea that foreign languages exist, aided the development of metalinguistic and language learning skills and was intended as a means of constructing a bridge to English written and spoken language. However, today with the advent of cochlear implants (CI), which gives varying degrees of access to spoken language, methods used in teaching English must vary according to the child's hearing status. This is reflected in the present L06 curriculum and the choices given in relation to "oral English".

Both the old L97 syllabus and the present L06 syllabus require knowledge of English literature and culture and also the Deaf Cultures of English-speaking countries. In this way, respect is shown for Sign Language and Deaf culture. Stone (2000) refers to Bienvenu (1992) who comments that Deaf pupils must be taught about their own culture and other cultures similar to their own. Bienvenu argues that this will give pupils the opportunity to develop pride and a strong cultural identity, which is important if Deaf pupils are to reach their full potential in the hearing world.

### 1.1 Examinations

Deaf pupils are expected to pass secondary school examinations in English for the Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing. The written examinations are based on the same examination as hearing pupils. Adaptions are made to explain slang which cannot be found in a dictionary. Sign Language interpreters can translate Norwegian text in dictionaries. Complex sentences can be adapted and some tasks are supplemented so that the exam includes Deaf Culture. The examinations assess Deaf pupils' English language in their own right and in accordance with the goals of the curriculum. Pupils can be randomly selected for oral examinations which take place locally using the modality the pupil has chosen earlier and with an external censor. Passing the exam gives admission to higher education. (82% passed the recent examination at secondary level).

## 2. Foreign Language Learning (FLL)

Brumfit (1984) argues that learning a foreign language involves many factors and variables: social, psychological, pedagogical and linguistic, so that teaching a foreign language must consist of more than just learning vocabulary and rules of grammar. Social interaction and active usage should be seen as an important element. Teaching cannot alter the route by which the foreign language is learnt, but using an effective



method can accelerate the rate of language acquisition by ensuring that “input” becomes “intake” (Ellis, 1996).

Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition (SLA) is included here because his theories and hypotheses have been the basis for much SLA research and the development of later theories and teaching methods based on input and interaction. Krashen’s theories have also been at the heart of much curriculum development. Krashen has a psycholinguistic approach (Gass & Selinker, 2001) and his main hypotheses (Ellis, 1996), are as follows:

### 2.1 The acquisition-learning hypothesis

Krashen divides SLA into two different processes: learning and acquisition. Krashen defines learning as a conscious process of developing metalinguistic knowledge through formal study which demands a large degree of maturity (Ellis, 1996). Acquisition is a process that resembles that of a child learning its mother tongue. This process gives a more intuitive knowledge of the target language (Krashen, 1983). Krashen rejects the idea that drill contributes to the acquisition process; Drill only helps the pupil to outperform his competence. The language used in drill, does not become part of the learner’s own creative rule system.

### 2.2 The monitor hypothesis

This hypothesis is connected to the learning process as defined by Krashen. Krashen states that conscious learning of the rules of grammar can only be of use as a monitor for checking production in situations where the pupil has time to focus on formal structure. During spontaneous production such formal knowledge is of little use. *“In general, utterances are initiated by the acquired system – our fluency in production is based on what we have “picked up” through active communication. Our “formal” knowledge of the second language, our conscious learning, may be used to alter the output of the acquired system, sometimes before and sometimes after the utterance is produced. We make these changes to improve accuracy, and the use of the Monitor often has this effect.”* (Krashen, 1983. pp. 2).

For the monitor to function the pupil must of course know the rule he needs, but even so performance may not be perfect. Krashen predicts that pupils who over-use the monitor may be hindered in their language production for fear of making mistakes. Optimally, the monitor should be used when the situation is appropriate, without it hindering spontaneous language performance.

### 2.3 The input hypothesis

This hypothesis is connected to the acquisition process as defined by Krashen. The hypothesis describes how acquisition takes place and how the pupil moves from

his present competence level ( $i$ ) to the next ( $i + 1$ ). Given the correct kind of input, which contains elements marginally above the pupil's present competence level ( $i + 1$ ), acquisition happens automatically (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

The input hypothesis stipulates that the pupil must understand the general content of the input. The pupil does not have to understand every word and the input may also contain unknown grammatical structures – so-called “roughly-tuned input”; even so, the learner will understand by using not only his language competence but also his background knowledge. Krashen says that learners must experience large amounts of varied, authentic texts, which are chosen for their content rather than their form, because they are interesting and relevant to the pupil (Krashen, 1983). Krashen's input hypothesis also says that performance should not be forced, and predicts that it will develop naturally when the learner has enough experience. The learner's first attempts will probably not be correct but will improve over time.

#### 2.4 The affective filter hypothesis

This hypothesis refers to the emotional aspects concerned with SLA. The learner's feelings (the affective filter) can affect how much input he exposes himself to and how much of it he learns as intake. Feelings and attitude will affect motivation, self-confidence and anxiety levels. The affective filter will affect how quickly the pupil learns but will not change the stages of development he must go through (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). Krashen predicts that the end result will depend amongst other things on the pupil's aptitude and attitude. Finally it must be said that Krashen's theory is criticised because many think that it is unfalsifiable or immeasurable (Brumfit, 1984).

### 3. Using British Sign Language (BSL) in the Classroom

With Krashen's theories in mind, here follows a description of how BSL can be used in the classroom to teach English as a foreign language for Deaf pupils and the severely hard-of-hearing (TEfDP).

#### 3.2 Why BSL?

The contrast between BSL and Norwegian Sign Language (NSL) is marked, although there are similarities in some iconic signs and grammar. BSL texts, materials and language courses are readily available on the Internet so that pupils can experience the language and find texts that are age appropriate and relevant. Ultimately, pupils and schools can take part in Comenius projects funded by the EU involving

language courses and exchanges for both teachers and pupils. On exchange visits pupils get to actively use all their language skills, in English and BSL.

The oral components of BSL provide a bridge to English spoken language. All in all, this presents Sign Bilingual pupils with a task they can master and that is motivating (Pritchard, 2004). Amongst other things, introducing BSL enables pupils, teachers and other conversation partners using ICT, to actively communicate in the classroom.

### 3.3 Starting off

Paradoxically as it may seem, the teaching of English can begin by introducing Deaf pupils to a foreign language other than English: BSL. Through this experience, Sign Bilingual pupils develop an awareness of foreign language and strategies for foreign language learning (FLL). BSL's easy accessibility places pupils in a situation where they can succeed, thereby increasing their motivation and self-esteem, as seen in the results of a study carried out in 2004 (Pritchard, 2004). BSL is the language of people that pupils can identify with; making them more conscious of their own identity, language and culture. The introduction of BSL also provides pupils with the opportunity to compare two Sign Languages, thereby developing metalinguistic skills that can be useful in the construction of language and FLL. Experience shows that English lessons are rarely completed without lively discussion about some aspect of language. Ultimately, by including BSL in the English syllabus, Deaf pupils are given access to and awareness of a complete language system that pupils can actually use in various real-life situations: this is highly motivating.

In the TEfDP<sup>3</sup>classroom, the primary school teacher's role is that of a guide and organizer, not necessarily a language-model. Language models can be readily found on the internet or on DVD. As a preparatory activity, pupils are given key signs and some background information about the text they are to see. They are encouraged to activate their background knowledge of the topic through discussion. This creates expectations as to the content of the BSL text. Together, the pupils and teacher explore the text and pupils are invited to actively participate in unravelling the meaning of the BSL text, discovering new signs and expressions along the way. This process resembles natural language acquisition and challenges pupils cognitively. Pupils can quickly begin to learn English by associating BSL signs, BSL graphics and pictures to the written and spoken word.

The teacher is "the gatekeeper" who creates situations where pupils can experience and use BSL. Pupils are encouraged to develop various learning strategies and to work both top-down and bottom-up i.e. look for both the language's meaning and its form. These techniques will obviously be useful in later language learning situations. Oral components or mouthings used with BSL nouns often mirror English

<sup>3</sup> TEfDP is an abbreviation for Teaching English for Deaf Pupils

articulation and form a basis for introducing English spoken and written language. It is important for teachers therefore, not to get carried away with the signs and forget mouth patterns.

The next step is to give pupils experience of English articulation patterns using all the senses, and the security of knowing which are similar to Norwegian and which are peculiar to English. These are an important part not only of spoken English, but also of the non-manual components of BSL. In relation to Norwegian, special attention has to be paid to the short vowel sounds, the consonants represented by the letters j, w, r, y, z and blends th, ch, sh and qu.

## 4. Teaching English Skills

### 4.1 Spoken English

To learn a foreign language we need plenty of experience of the target language and opportunities to practise using it. Pupils need an environment where there is a feeling of security, where they can experiment, practise, make mistakes without ridicule and see their skills increasing and expanding.

Generally it is assumed that spoken English forms the basis for reading English. Deaf pupils' access to spoken English varies considerably, also among pupils who have CI. There is no guarantee that pupils using CI will automatically have full access to spoken language or be able to fully utilise the input they receive via the auditory canal. This obviously affects the ability to acquire English based solely on spoken input. It is vital that on-going assessment of each pupil is carried out to assess progress and assure that chosen teaching methods are appropriate and successful. It is never acceptable to blame the child and the hearing loss for lack of progress without assessing the environment, teaching methods and materials.

Spoken English can be reinforced and compensated by the addition of visual, kinaesthetic and tactile elements: speech reading, Signed English, use of the signed BSL alphabet, articulation of English phonemes that give tactile feedback in the mouth, visual phonics etc. Sometimes however, it can be necessary to turn everything upside-down, and base spoken language development on reading.

One key factor is effective teaching that is meaningful and profitable for the child. In language subjects we are often in danger of neglecting the child's need to accumulate knowledge, in favour of speech. Again we are back to assessing our methods and the child's progress. How fruitful is it to use a school year to learn to pronounce a set number of English words clearly, compared to being able to communicate with English speakers by other more effective means and in addition have literacy skills and cultural knowledge?

## 4.2 Reading English

Reading skills are generally thought to be based on spoken language skills and therefore it is common practise, unfortunately, to have low expectations in relation to Deaf pupils who generally score badly on reading tests. Therefore Deaf pupils are often given short, “easy to read” texts, starving pupils of language experiences and opportunities to develop a range of reading strategies: resulting in: “Those who have little receive even less.” It is interesting to note that in a study of LaSasso & Mobleys (1997), quoted in Marschark et al (2002), 90% of teachers of the deaf thought that simplified texts with controlled vocabulary and grammar were the most effective. Marschark et al. refer also to a study of Stassman (1997) that showed that simplified texts can make a text’s structure uncomplicated, but harder to understand for deaf pupils than authentic texts.

We can approach the reading of English in different ways and with different goals. But first we need to understand the nature of reading English. Solely trying to remember what words look like is not a good reading strategy alone. Pupils need to learn about English phonetics which is a basic, necessary strategy. English is comprised of 44 sounds, but there are only 26 letters to represent them. Some of the English sounds resemble sounds in the mother tongue, some do not. Knowledge of which sounds are similar and which are specifically “English sounds” is valuable. In addition, how these 44 sounds are represented on the page in writing is basic knowledge that gives a feeling of confidence. Fortunately there is some degree of similarity between written Norwegian and English, so that knowledge of one language can be transferred and be useful in reading and understanding the other.

How Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing pupils experience and utilize sound will vary, but we can compensate and reinforce this process by means of the visual and tactile senses. What does the sound look like on the face, how does it feel in the mouth, throat, nose or chest? How is the sound expressed in the manual alphabet or visual phonics and how is it written?

Although written English is not wholly phonetic, there is a great deal to be gained by working with different spelling patterns and associating them with a “sound” or mouthing using auditory, visual and tactile sensations. We begin by reading words with short vowels (as in sat, bed, bin, dog, rug.) and progress to words with the basic long vowels which often have to be represented by more than one letter (as in snail, green, night, float, tube.) In this way we progress and expand pupils’ repertoire to include other long vowels. There are plenty of high quality phonetic reading texts with good illustrations available on the market. Such texts give pupils the opportunity to master English basic phonetic reading techniques systematically.

There are also 25 small words that make up a large part of the texts that we read. Not all are phonetic, and need to be learned and understood. To be able to recognise these words automatically is extremely valuable.

the, of, and, a, to, in, is (was), you, that, it, he, for, on, are, as, with, his, they, at, be, this, from, I, or, but, have.
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The same can be said of the twenty most commonly used verbs. The majority of them are not regular, and need to be learned and automatically recognised. Lists of these verbs can be found easily on the Internet.

It is common to see English presented as lists of words that pupils are expected to memorise. Experience shows that words presented in this way are often quickly forgotten. The most effective way of learning language is by experiencing it using all the senses and actively using the language to achieve a purpose. Using all the senses we can explore: what a word looks like, how it feels in the mouth when it is pronounced, what it sounds like, how it feels being spelt with the signed alphabet. Is there a BSL/ASL sign it can be translated into that can be seen and felt? Also and importantly, what does the word or phrase mean? Only by the active usage of words, phrases and whole sentences within an understandable, predictable context, like games and role play, will new vocabulary be learnt. By actively using vocabulary, pupils make it their own.

Attacking and reading a text can be daunting if we believe that we must understand every word. Sometimes the goal is to read and understand every detail in a text, sometimes the need is to understand only the gist and sometimes the goal is somewhere in between. According to the situation, pupils can use different reading strategies - if they know about them: using their background knowledge and creating expectations as to what the text will be about, using information from pictures and titles, scanning the text for familiar words, understanding the meaning of words from the context, using dictionaries to check understanding, looking for similarities between English words and the mother tongue etc.

Maintaining pupils' motivation can be a challenge. Pupils must want to create meaning from a text and to communicate. It is clear that the more pupils read, the more language they acquire. Variation is often key. Texts can be presented in many ways, not always in book form. ICT provides us with numerous alternatives that can enhance understanding and prove motivating: presenting a text signed first (BSL/ASL) and then as a written text or as a sub-titled film etc.

### 4.3 Writing English

Giving pupils the confidence to start writing their own English texts is the mark of a good teacher. High expectations and encouragement are key words. Selective marking and the way we give corrections and guidance on how to improve are vital teaching skills to maintain pupil motivation. Pupils need ample opportunity to be creative and to write texts that have a purpose. Progressing from copying, writing a text together as a group, to completing sentences, to writing a sentence, to using a writing frame, and finally planning and writing a text are all steps along the way. All our pupils are on a journey, and they are on their way!

#### 4.4 Grammar

Teachers often complain that pupils rarely generalize, and transfer the rules of grammar to their own written work. This is often a skill that children are not mature enough to develop until they reach secondary school. Repetition of rules is therefore not an effective use of lesson time in the early years. The goal is rather for pupils to experience English, create meaning and communicate; new vocabulary can be introduced using concrete objects, mime and role-play. If we use English in its various modalities throughout lessons in meaningful activities, pupils can experience language as a whole. Communication and the expansion of the vocabulary is emphasised over grammar, which is taught inductively through experiencing language as a whole.

Comparative teaching of grammar and syntax can be shown visually using colour coding in written texts. We can contrast English with NTS and Norwegian. To take part in metalinguistic discussion of this kind, pupils need to have a good grasp of their mother tongue (NSL). Here is a rough example comparing syntax of a sentence structure that is often difficult for Deaf Norwegian pupils:

In NSL we sign:	<b>TODAY WE DRIVE-TO SCHOOL.</b>
in English we write:	<b>Today we are driving to school.</b>
In Norwegian we write:	<b>Today driving we to school the.</b> (I dag kjører vi til skolen.)

We see straight away that one sentence structure that is difficult to get right in Norwegian is not so complicated when we compare English and NTS syntax and see the similarities.

### 5. A Study of Deaf Pupils' Acquisition of BSL

Here is a presentation of a study into Norwegian Deaf pupils' acquisition of BSL. The study was carried out in 2003-2004 by the author of this article and is published at [http://gordon.acm.no/kompendier/pat\\_pritchard.pdf](http://gordon.acm.no/kompendier/pat_pritchard.pdf). Factors are described that appear to be important in pupils' acquisition of BSL revealed by test results.

In view of the lack of literature on Deaf pupils' foreign language acquisition, this study was carried out as a first step in evaluating the impact of the L97 curriculum English for the Deaf. The study looked at Norwegian Deaf pupils' BSL receptive skills in grade 4 and attempted to ascertain which factors affected pupils' acquisition of these skills.

The aim of the study was to discover how Norwegian Deaf pupils had reacted to one small part of the curriculum i.e. exposure to BSL and their understanding of it. The study also attempted to give a picture of the learning environments of the Deaf

pupils in the sample, and to try to pin point some factors that may have played a part in producing the test results.

## 5.1 Methods

First it was necessary to find out something about pupils' NSL skills – skills that could be utilised in the acquisition of BSL. At that time there were no test materials available for assessing NSL development. Today we do have such materials, but for this study teachers were simply asked to evaluate their pupils' NSL development as part of a questionnaire.

Three areas of BSL skills were investigated: vocabulary, grammar and story comprehension. Test materials from *Assessing BSL Development Receptive Skills Test* (City University, London) were adapted for assessing BSL vocabulary and grammar. This test was originally developed to assess British Deaf pupils' BSL development and identify pupils with specific language developmental problems. The items focused upon in the test are those considered important in BSL development, based on research by Woll (Hjelmervik, 2000). The test controls the language input by using video. The test of BSL grammar is standardised, making it possible to compare the results of Norwegian Deaf pupils (non-native speakers) to the results of British Deaf children of the same age.

The third sub test, BSL Story Test, was developed for the study, as no other suitable material was available at the time. This test assessed pupils' understanding of a continuous BSL text i.e. a story. The text contained few chance cognates<sup>4</sup> and demanded a greater understanding of BSL than the two previous tests, which after analysis were shown to contain numerous chance cognates, enabling pupils to transfer and use their knowledge of NSL. For further details of the tests, see Appendix 1.

The tests used were a practical means of gathering information uniformly and effectively and providing a preliminary impression that could be supplemented by individual, dynamic observation and assessment if necessary. For this study it was an advantage to have access to a standardised test. Comparing Norwegian pupils, as foreign language learners to native speakers, gives a more realistic picture of their actual receptive skills in BSL.

One reason for not assessing BSL production is an argument put forward by Wong Fillmore (1986), referred to by Engen & Kulbrandstad (1998), that individuals often understand the foreign language better than they are able to use it in expressing themselves. This fact can cause teachers to underestimate their pupils' ability. Another reason is that comprehension is the first "rung on the ladder" of Second Language Acquisition (SLA): "*Comprehension can range from "an inferential process based on the perception of cues" (Rost, 1990, pp.33) to a detailed structural analysis... ..Some*

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<sup>4</sup> A chance cognate is a sign that has the same form and meaning in two unrelated Sign Languages.



*sort of comprehension must take place before we can begin to talk about intake and acquisition.*" (Gass & Selinker, 2001. pp. 316).

## 5.2 Research Procedure

The tests were carried out at Schools for the Deaf during the short-term stays of pupils from local schools, during the autumn term 2003. All Norwegian Deaf pupils without additional handicaps and who used the curriculum for Deaf pupils were tested (n=15). Control groups of Swedish Deaf pupils (n=8) with no knowledge of BSL and hearing children (n=6) were also tested in a similar way.

The data was analysed descriptively using the SPSS data program. Cohen's D or Effect Size (ES) analysis was used to show differences between various groups of pupils. Differences are described as small, medium or large.

Second language acquisition is a very complex process and there are many aspects of Deaf Norwegian pupils' language development and skills that we know little about. There will inevitably be some variables in the test situation that are impossible to control and some that could not be measured.

## 5.3 The pupils

The sample was very small (n=15) and the data will accordingly lack richness. As a consequence, the test results must be seen as simplifications and imprecise, but nevertheless they may be able to give an outline of an area that has not been investigated earlier.

The children in this study, ten girls and five boys, as in the general population of the hearing-impaired, were not a homogeneous group. There were variations in pupils' hearing status, and how they utilize any residual hearing, their skills in Norwegian, their NSL skills, their general ability, their preferred language, learning environments and the resources of, and choices made by their families. Table 1 shows school placement and degree of hearing loss.

Table 1. School placement and degree of hearing loss calculated as an average over four frequencies (500, 1000, 2000 and 4000Hz) in the best ear. (n = 15)

School placement	Pupils' hearing losses		
	56 – 70dB moderate (n = 2)	71 – 90dB severe (n = 7)	>90dB profound (n = 6)
Local school	1	5	3
School for the Deaf	1	2	3

Because of the systematic training provided for most parents in NSL, it is probable that the pupils have had access to some form of NSL quite early in their lives. Herman, Holmes & Woll (1999) state that the number of years of access to and the quality of the Sign Language input will influence Sign Language development. Teachers believed that Sign Supported Norwegian was used in the majority of homes (10). In the teachers' assessment of pupils' social and communicative skills, all were able to adjust their mode of communication to suit their conversation partner: a basic and very necessary communicative strategy. These findings corroborate Ohna et al's findings (2003) that Deaf pupils can switch, easily and elegantly, from one language code to another.

Remarkably, **all** the teachers reported that their pupil(s) was/were interested in BSL regardless of their degree of hearing loss, school placement or preferred mode of communication (NSL or Sign Supported Norwegian (SSN)). This confirms anecdotes collected earlier where teachers told of pupils' positive responses to BSL. This can perhaps be interpreted as an internal motivating factor in the acquisition of BSL. Teachers reported that none of the pupils were passive in lessons or easily forgot BSL signs or confused BSL with NSL. Pupils were not reportedly afraid of using BSL for fear of making mistakes; which is perhaps evidence of an absence of emotional blocks that are otherwise difficult to measure.

#### 5.4 The teachers

The eleven teachers in the study were fully qualified and experienced but **none** had formal qualifications in teaching English for Deaf pupils (30 credits). Nevertheless, teachers were asked to give their opinion of the suitability of certain TEFL activities and thereby teaching methods. The categories and definitions of TEFL methods used in this study are as described by Larsen-Freeman (2000). The teachers' attitudes to child-centred methods where language acquisition can take place through interaction were positive. Paradoxically, however, Deaf pupils were seldom given such tasks. Teacher-dominated activities were commonly used in all school settings, for example: "pupils answer teacher's question with a drilled answer." Creative activities using BSL, pupils' independent investigation of BSL texts and spontaneous conversations in BSL occurred rarely.

Teachers working in Deaf Schools had slightly higher goals and expectations of pupils than teachers in local schools. Teachers in local schools showed a greater tendency to accentuate the need for skills in spoken English. A variety of languages and mixed codes were used with comparatively little active use of the target language, BSL. This is corroborated in qualitative observations of TEfDP by Ohna et al: "*Communication varied greatly, teachers used partly NSL. In some cases the teacher used English words with speech, simultaneously with BSL (polite phrases in BSL + English speech).*" (Ohna et al., 2003. pp.256).

## 5.5 Results

The results presented give a short descriptive analysis of the pupils, their teachers and their learning environments. Next, there is a descriptive analysis of the results of Norwegian Deaf pupils on the three BSL receptive tests: vocabulary, grammar and story. An attempt is made to put these test results in a wider context by comparing them to the control groups. Finally the study's research question "*Do Norwegian Deaf pupils in class 4 (2003–2004) understand BSL?*" will be answered. For further details and discussion of the findings see Pritchard (2004).

The study could not measure the quality of the BSL input pupils received. However, the majority of teachers reported that they "often or always" used BSL filmed texts. However, 20% of pupils seldom experienced BSL videos and their average scores on the three BSL tests were below average.

Table 2 shows the Deaf pupils' test results on the Vocabulary, Grammar and Story Tests (n=15). The results of the three tests were converted to percentages, to make them readily comparable.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of the BSL Test Results of the Deaf Norwegian pupils (n = 15)

		Vocabulary Test scores	Grammar Test scores	Standardized scores	BSL Story Test scores	Total Mean
		%	%	Grammar Test	%	scores %
N	Valid	15	15	15	15	15
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		88,00	73,00	98,93	71,00	76,00
Std. Deviation		5,60	7,20	9,721	18,00	9,3
Range		18,18	20,00	27,00	55,00	31,3
Minimum		77,27	62,50	85,00	45,00	59,6
Maximum		95,45	82,50	112,00	100,00	90,98

On the standardized Grammar Test 46,6% of the Norwegian pupils performed above the scores of the English Deaf children of the same age. (The standardized score for each age group is 100.) Table 3 shows that on the Grammar Test, the profoundly Deaf pupils out-performed pupils with severe and moderate hearing losses.

This may suggest that the profoundly Deaf have a better grasp of NSL grammar, which they make use of in some way.

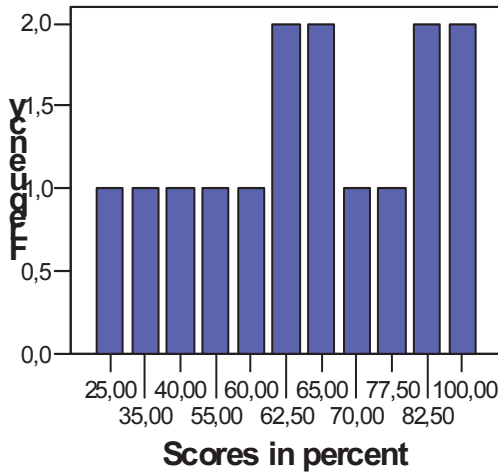
Table 3. The standardized scores on the Grammar Test of Norwegian pupils with severe and moderate hearing losses

Hearing Status	N	Mean	Std dev	Range	Min	Max
Profoundly Deaf	6	107,5	5,32	14	98	112
Severe & moderately h-o-h	9	93,22	7,48	20	85	105

Missing = 0

The BSL Story Test results in Fig.1 show the largest range in scores of all the three tests. The test of story comprehension appears to have been demanding. (Total mean score = 76 %.) Nevertheless, two pupils scored the maximum score of 100%.

Fig. 1. The distribution of the pupils' BSL Story Test scores in percent



The results of the Deaf Swedish and Norwegian pupils were compared and showed a large difference in favour of the Norwegians. (Total mean scores:  $d = 0,91$ .)

In particular, the Deaf Norwegian pupils scored higher than both the two control groups on the Story Test. (Table 4). This can indicate that their classroom experiences with BSL probably have had a positive effect on their BSL receptive skills.

Table 4. Descriptive analysis of the BSL Story Test results in percent, of the three groups.

	N	Mean score in %	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Std. deviation
Deaf Norwegians	15	71,00	25	100	75,00	21,55
Deaf Swedish pupils	8	52,19	6,25	85	78,75	24,93
Hearing Norwegians	6	42,71	20	58,75	38,75	13,99

The use of teaching aids was also analysed. ES analysis showed that there was a large difference in the test scores in favour of pupils who had used teaching aids specially designed for TEfDP ( $d = 1,52$ ).

## 5.6 Answering the research question

“After the implementation of L97 English for Deaf pupils, do Norwegian Deaf pupils in grade 4 understand any BSL?”

Yes they do, but it would be too bombastic to conclude that Norwegian Deaf pupils fully understand BSL. There will be need for more research to find out how pupils advance over and above a simple understanding of content and how pupils perform in communicative situations.

## 5.7 The Study’s Conclusion

Results showed that all the pupils were interested in BSL regardless of hearing status, school setting etc. Pupils’ hearing status alone appeared to dictate teachers’ choice of setting and content, which again influenced the pupil’s quantity and quality of access to BSL and consequently the test results. If pupils were given adequate BSL input, their experiences with the language in the classroom seem to have had a positive effect on their receptive skills. Teachers have not been language models, but nevertheless pupils have naturally acquired BSL if they have been presented with texts in a way that has made it possible for them to grasp and understand the language.

It is probable that Deaf pupils feel an affinity with other Deaf people and their languages. A foreign Sign Language is therefore a highly motivating starting point

for FLL as the study showed. Learning BSL does not seem to be an overwhelming task for Deaf pupils and the motivation and interest they display should be put to good use. Since we know so little about Deaf pupils' foreign language acquisition, it is important that pupils are allowed to develop their own unique language learning strategies and in this way inform teachers how best to adapt their teaching of English. It is to be expected that Deaf pupils may follow a different route to reach the same learning goals as hearing pupils.

Given that Deaf pupils can acquire a degree of understanding of BSL and experience of foreign language learning, the next question is how can this be utilised in learning English?

## 6. Finally...

Relating the learning of English to the life, interests and needs of the individual Deaf pupil will provide an intrinsic motivation. The classroom today is no longer confined within four walls. With the internet, pupils have access to many different language experiences and communication partners. It is possible to provide pupils with a wide-range of experiences of the language, spoken and signed, and ultimately skills in written language. The choice of an "oral" English language should ultimately be based on the pupil's hearing function and preferences: however, for teachers to be allowed to do so, requires acceptance of Signed Languages throughout the education system and society.

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### Websites for learning BSL and finding BSL texts

[www.signedstories.com](http://www.signedstories.com)

<http://www.signworldlearn.com/>

[www.signs2go.eu](http://www.signs2go.eu)

[www.signstation.org](http://www.signstation.org)

<http://www.videojug.com/tag/british-sign-language>

<http://www.britishsignlanguage.com/>

<http://www.Deafbooks.co.uk/>

## BSL graphics

Sign and Write Resources. Cath Smith. [cath@deafsign.com](mailto:cath@deafsign.com)

## Primary Reading Books

Songbirds. Oxford University Press

Oxford Reading Tree. Oxford University Press

Project X. Oxford University Press

## Dictionaries

Let's Sign Dictionary. Everyday BSL For Learners. Cath Smith

## Appendix 1. The Tests and how they were used in the study

**BSL Vocabulary Test** - the test was used as a means of measuring the pupils' BSL vocabulary. A video was used to present the twenty-two BSL vocabulary items to each test candidate, to ensure that the signs were delivered in the same manner. Pupils responded by pointing to a picture from a selection of ten. Of the twenty-two BSL signs in the Vocabulary Test, twelve are chance cognates of NSL (54,5%). The manual components of the BSL and NSL signs are the same, but obviously they have different mouthings. This is a high percentage of chance cognates, but to be expected because of the basic nature of the vocabulary and the iconicity of signed languages. Chance cognates give the Norwegian pupils with good skills in NSL an advantage and opportunity to transfer knowledge of NSL to the understanding of the foreign language, BSL. This experience was intended as a positive and motivating start to the test for the Norwegian pupils.

**BSL Grammar Test** - The Grammar Test and the test video were produced by City University and used as prescribed with no alterations. The test focuses upon the pupil's development in understanding BSL grammar and uses vocabulary from the previous sub test. The choice of sentences for the test, was based on research into BSL acquisition by Deaf children of Deaf parents, performed by Woll (1998) and Galvan (1989). The research showed that certain BSL morphology is more difficult for Deaf child to acquire when they begin to learn the language comparatively late in life (Herman et al., 1999). It is presumed that this could also apply to Deaf pupils acquiring BSL as a foreign language. The Grammar Test contains forty sentences that assess linguistic features of BSL including spatial verb morphology, number and distribution, negation, size and shape specifiers, noun and verb distinctions and handling classifiers.

**BSL Story Test** - the final sub test was developed especially for this study. The aim was to measure Norwegian pupils' understanding of an authentic BSL text, which they had not seen before, but that contained vocabulary and themes found in BSL material used in classroom teaching, and that did not contain substantial numbers of chance cognates. To understand the content of the story fully, the pupil would need some



knowledge of BSL. A similar testing procedure was chosen as in the previous tests. Pupils were instructed to look at a picture first which was intended to provide background information about the setting for the story. Individually, pupils watched the whole story. Afterwards the pupil re-constructed the story non-verbally by choosing pictures from sets of four from ten selections provided. The pictures chosen were laid side-by-side to create a cartoon that retold the story, as the pupil had perceived it.

## Nauczanie języka angielskiego uczniów niesłyszących i słabosłyszących w Norwegii

### Streszczenie

Populacja osób niesłyszących w Norwegii nie jest duża i liczy około 4000 osób. Podobnie jak w większości krajów europejskich, prawie przez cały XX wiek w edukacji niesłyszących dominowało podejście oralne. Przeprowadzona w 1997 roku reforma edukacyjna zagwarantowała uczniom niesłyszącym nowe możliwości: uczenia się Norweskiego Języka Migowego, specjalistycznych kursów języka norweskiego dla niesłyszących, języka angielskiego dla niesłyszących oraz zajęć rytmicznych zastępujących lekcje muzyki. Reforma oparta jest na zasadzie bilingwizmu i społeczno-kulturowym rozumieniu głuchoty. Od 2006 roku powyższe regulacje dotyczą nie tylko uczniów niesłyszących, ale także słabosłyszących. Uczniowie niesłyszący uczą się w Norwegii głównie w szkołach ogólnodostępnych, jednak mają prawo do corocznego trzymiesięcznego pobytu w ośrodkach dla niesłyszących, w celu doskonalenia umiejętności komunikacji w języku migowym. Rodzice niesłyszących dzieci mają zapewnioną możliwość korzystania z 40 tygodni bezpłatnych kursów języka migowego, które mogą być wykorzystane w okresie od momentu postawienia diagnozy do 16 roku życia dziecka. Obecnie w Norwegii ponad 90% uczniów ma wszczepione implanty ślimakowe, co w istotny sposób wpływa na ich sytuację edukacyjną.

Począwszy od roku 1997, język angielski jest przedmiotem obowiązkowym w narodowym programie nauczania dla uczniów niesłyszących i słabosłyszących. W jego nauczaniu można przyjąć cztery hipotezy. Pierwsza z nich mówi, że język obcy nabywany jest spontanicznie (*acquired*), tak jak dziecko uczy się swojego języka narodowego. Tylko język przyswojony w taki sposób jest przez ucznia zinternalizowany i poznawany, nie jest natomiast możliwe nabycie języka poprzez świadome działania metajęzykowe. Druga hipoteza zakłada, że w uczeniu się języka ważna jest spontaniczna produkcja językowa, natomiast element kontroli czy też samokontroli poprawności można stosować tylko w niektórych sytuacjach. Stałe stosowanie monitoringu i kontroli niszczy aktywność językową, a uczeń przyjmuje postawę unikania porażki, a nie uczenia się języka i używania go. Trzecia z hipotez zakłada, że uczniowi należy stawiać wymagania na miarę strefy najbliższego rozwoju. Stawianie zadań zbyt łatwych nie prowokuje do działania, natomiast zadania zbyt trudne demotywują i powodują pojawianie się reakcji ucieczkowych. Ostatnia z hipotez zakłada,

że w uczeniu konieczne należy wziąć pod uwagę komponent emocjonalny, ponieważ jedynie przeżyte przez ucznia emocjonalnie wiadomości zostaną przez niego zapamiętane.

Cele nauczania i zawartość treściowa programu są takie same jak dla osób słyszących, jednak osoby niesłyszące mają pozostawioną możliwość wyboru: mogą uczyć się mówić w języku angielskim, albo uczyć się porozumiewania się w Brytyjskim Języku Migowym (BSL) lub Amerykańskim Języku Migowym (ASL), mogą także wybrać uczenie się tylko pisanej formy języka angielskiego. Szkoła średnia kończy się zdaniem egzaminu z języka obcego, który jednocześnie daje możliwość podjęcia studiów wyższych.

Narodowy program nauczania języka angielskiego dla uczniów niesłyszących zakłada, że lekcje języka angielskiego rozpoczynają się w klasie pierwszej. W ramach zajęć uczeń nie tylko poznaje struktury języka, ale także kulturę krajów anglojęzycznych, z uwzględnieniem Kultury Głuchych. Celem nauczania jest wyposażenie ucznia w kompetencje pozwalające mu na samodzielną komunikację w realnych sytuacjach. W zależności od możliwości ucznia, komunikacja ta może dokonywać się w mowie, piśmie, BSL lub ASL, a także z użyciem środków elektronicznych – np. w formie czatu. Problemem jest pozyskanie do pracy nauczycieli, którzy nie tylko byłiby nauczycielami języka, ale i surdopedagogami. Referując ogólnonarodowe badania z 2003 roku autorka podaje, że żaden z badanych nauczycieli języka angielskiego nie miał pełnych kwalifikacji do nauczania osób niesłyszących. Zbadane zostały także wyniki uczenia się języka obcego uczniów niesłyszących. W zakresie gramatyki 46% uczniów słyszących osiągnęło wyniki lepsze niż dzieci niesłyszące.

Artykuł referuje także badania nad możliwością wykorzystanie Brytyjskiego Języka Migowego na zajęciach z zakresu języka obcego wśród dzieci niesłyszących. Wyniki doświadczeń w tym zakresie pokazują, że niezależnie od poziomu uszkodzenia słuchu, uczniowie niesłyszący byli zainteresowani uczeniem się BSL. Wynika to z faktu, że osoby niesłyszące w naturalny sposób czują bliskość z osobami niesłyszącym w innych krajach. Rozpoczęcie nauki języka obcego od poznania języka migowego danego kraju stanowi istotny czynnik motywujący. Ponieważ brak jest badań nad zagadnieniem uczenia się języka obcego przez uczniów niesłyszących, tym bardziej wskazane jest, aby obserwować uczniów i od nich uczyć się, jakie są skuteczne strategie uczenia się języka obcego. Uczenie się języków obcych coraz rzadziej odbywa się jedynie w zamkniętej przestrzeni klasy szkolnej. Uczniowie muszą mieć partnerów do ćwiczenia kompetencji komunikacyjnej i możliwość doświadczania realnej komunikacji w języku, którego się uczą, przy czym forma tej komunikacji może być ustna, migowa lub pisemna.

Streszczenie przygotowała Ewa Domagała-Zyśk

# Reading strategy instruction for deaf learners of English: definitions, contexts and implications

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## Abstract

The paper focuses on methods of teaching reading skills in a foreign language class and the implications these different methods have for teaching foreign languages to the deaf. It discusses the significance of reading strategies (such as cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies) for acquiring reading skills in both L1 and L2, and attempts to apply the research findings in this area to the linguistic situation of the deaf, with special regard to foreign language learning of the deaf. While there are many studies showing that explicit teaching of reading strategies in L2 enhances the students' reading skills in both L2 and L1, there is a need of further research on the relevance of these findings to foreign language learning of the deaf especially in the European setting and even more importantly of their application to the educational reality.

**Key words:** literacy, reading comprehension, reading strategy instruction, English for the deaf

## 1 Introduction

The authors of this paper are teachers of English for the hearing impaired in the Support Centre for Students with Special Needs at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. The situation there is very good: deaf and hard of hearing students do not have to struggle with the foreign language obligation in regular classes, but have the opportunity to do language courses adapted to their needs and in small groups (max. 4 people) at the Centre. Students attend 90-minute classes twice a week and can take up to three semesters for each course. Teachers and students can make

use of technologies in the classes (computers, projectors, etc.) and of the university e-learning system in the moodle environment. In this system, teachers and students can use e-courses that serve them as course syllabi, teaching and study materials and as a large database of grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension exercises, as well as writing assignments. Sign language interpreters are available as well.

Therefore, the conditions seem to be well suited to hearing impaired students. Yet the results of English instruction do not always correspond with this: many students have difficulties learning a foreign language and progress is often very slow. This situation makes us aware of the need to innovate teaching methods. However, to do so, we need to use the findings of research into learning processes of the deaf. For the time being, we are concentrating on the essential skill of reading comprehension. As Block (1986: 463-464) puts it, "Knowledge about the process, not just the product of reading, is needed if we are to move from head-scratching to designing the programs which truly meet the needs of our students." This idea expresses the motivation present behind this paper.

Reading comprehension is a critical factor not only in academic success, but also generally in success in contemporary society. Furthermore, this does not apply only to reading in one's mother tongue, but also in foreign languages, particularly in English as the lingua franca of today. Reading comprehension is useful to everybody, but even more so to university students. It is then especially pertinent to the deaf, even though reading is seen as one of the challenging areas and a frequent cause of academic and career failure of the deaf.

The present paper deals with the possibilities of developing reading comprehension within a foreign language (in particular English) class with the help of reading strategy instruction. First, important terms are defined and the way they are usually perceived by specialists are described. The next part focuses on existing research into reading comprehension, with special regard to reading strategy instruction, summing up existing research findings in both the first language (L1) and a foreign language (L2). Finally, the paper explores the topic of reading strategy instruction to the deaf and discusses different approaches to reading strategy instruction in general.

## 2 Definitions

### 2.1 Literacy

The perception of reading and its significance has been developing throughout history and these changes have also influenced approaches to teaching. When discussing reading, in particular its objectives and development, one should take into consideration the term *literacy*.

This term originally denoted the ability to read in Latin and only later did it come to include reading and writing in any language. According to Fehring (2005: 95-97), literacy can nowadays no longer be viewed as a unified concept: it should be replaced by the notion of *literacies* that consist of different areas (apart from reading literacy, there are mathematical, computer, cultural, critical, medial and other types of literacies). Furthermore, literacy is seen as an interaction between the individual's competencies on the one hand and the requirements of the society on the other hand; the resulting competence of this interaction is called functional literacy. Verhoven (2011: 661) defines functional literacy as an ability to read and write together with the ability to cope with everyday life literacy situations, which involves interconnecting the knowledge of (literary, cultural, social) conventions (e.g. the knowledge of different types of documents and their use) and cultural knowledge.

A broader term is information literacy which designates the ability to acquire, understand, transform and transfer information (Fehring, 2005: 95). Information literacy is one of the significant criteria for assessing the individual's readiness to deal with everyday situations and constantly changing work demands, which are characterized by an increasing need for modern technologies and a flexible labour force capable of navigating successfully through the world of information. Apart from spoken and graphic forms, the information mostly comes in the written form; according to Freeboy and Freiberg (2011: 432), people in the contemporary society "conduct much of their daily business via text – not only much of their information exchange and training but also much of their governance, organization, and ethical and moral acculturation." The key component of information literacy is therefore the ability to work with texts, designated by the term reading literacy.

As with other terms, the definition of reading literacy has also been developing in relation to the changes in the society. This is so because one cannot reduce the meaning of reading to decoding and understanding the written text: it has to be seen as a tool one employs to reach further goals. This view of literacy presupposes the ability to understand different types of texts related to a wide range of situations, to think about their meaning and to be able to explicate them. For the purposes of international research into education results, the international organization OECD defines reading literacy as "understanding, using, and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society" (PISA, OECD Programme for International Student Assessment). This definition makes it clear that reading literacy amounts to much more than being able to make sense of the letters on the page.

For this reason, the development of reading literacy is nowadays one of the priorities of the education policies in all developed countries. For example, the European Commission states that a "good level of literacy is the basis for the acquisition of key competences and for lifelong learning thus needs to be ensured from the earliest age [...] Inadequate literacy levels, are a serious obstacle to [students'] prospects for jobs and well-being" (p. 4).

Seen from the point of view of a teacher, it is necessary to look for specific ways to reach the general and theoretical objectives of education policies. For the development of reading literacy, the effective way is the development of reading skills. These priorities apply to the deaf as well: a low level of reading and functional literacy is considered one of the main causes of deaf people's career failure and of their problems integrating into the society (Hrubý, 1999; Paul, 2005; Spencer & Marschark, 2010).

## 2.2 Reading skills

The above-mentioned issues can obviously be related to any written language; this paper concentrates mainly on foreign language learning, with special regard to English language teaching (ELT). Reading is a part of language skills that need to be developed in order to reach the aim of foreign language learning, i.e. communicative skills and the ability to employ them, hence communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) or communicative language ability (Bachman, 1990). Harmer (1991: 17) differentiates between receptive (reading and listening) and productive (speaking and writing) skills. Reading is often considered the most important language skill in general, and it is clearly crucial in teaching foreign languages to hearing impaired learners.

The skill of reading can be further classified into individual subskills or microskills. For example, Munby (1978) distinguishes minutely nineteen skills, such as deducing the meaning of and using unknown components of the text, understanding the communicative value of sentences, and recognizing indicators in the discourse. However, we think that for teaching practice, a less detailed classification is sufficient, such as Harmer's (1991: 18) categories of reading for main ideas (skimming), for specific information (scanning), for detailed understanding and for information transfer. These subskills are especially important for foreign language learning.

As the usage of these subskills differs depending on the objective of reading, it is essential in foreign language instruction to make it clear what the aim of the reading assignment is, so that real-life situations are simulated. Current theories of ELT recognize the need to set meaningful targets for classroom activities including reading; the target should be connected with real needs of the students. It is thus common to base activities in reading skills instruction on goals known from everyday life, such as finding a specific piece of information, satisfying one's curiosity about a topic, understanding and following instructions, relaxation, entertainment, keeping in touch with friends and acquiring information about current events in the world (Hedge, 2000: 195).

## 2.3 The process of reading

What is common to all classifications of subskills of reading is that they work with differences between various types of texts and particularly various aims of read-

ing that guide the use of different strategies and lead to different reading processes. At present, reading is mostly seen as an interactive process (Carrell *et al.*, 1988) between the reader and the text and possibly between the reader and the author. This “complex psycholinguistic process” (Goodman, 1988:15) involves two basic techniques that readers employ in order to comprehend the text: bottom-up and top-down processing. Top-down processing entails “the application of prior knowledge to the working on the meaning of a text,” while the bottom-up technique consists in “the decoding of the letters, words, and other language features in the text” (Hedge, 2000: 189). However, these two processes are not linear, chronological or independent of each other, but they are in constant interaction: they blend and complement each other. The reader consciously or unconsciously decides when and how to use each of them; these preferences are guided by the specific text, the reader’s competencies in the given language, the level of his/her reading skills, and, above all, by the specific reading target.

The ability to decode language elements that form a text (i.e. through bottom-up processing) requires a linguistic or systemic knowledge; the meaning of the text is then construed based on the meaning of the individual elements of the text (phonemes, words and sentences).

The previous knowledge the reader uses to construct the meaning through top-down processing concerns various areas; Hedge (2000: 189) sums them up as general knowledge about the world, sociocultural knowledge, knowledge about the topic and knowledge about the genre. A vital prerequisite for conveying the meaning is shared assumptions of the author and the reader. All this knowledge and experience, their arrangement and interconnections form a mental structure in the mind of the reader; this structure is the subject of the schemata theory. Rummelhart (1980: 33) defines schemata as “building blocks of cognition” that are “the fundamental elements upon which all information processing depends.” The construction of the meaning of a text is thus based on the reader’s general idea about the text, assumptions and deductions, which are subsequently confirmed or rejected (Nuttall, 2005: 16-17).

The process of reading remains to a large extent unknown and is still subject to research, especially by researchers in the fields of psychology and neurology. Still, some findings allow us to form hypotheses about how reading works and how reading skills can be developed. It is nevertheless necessary to bear in mind that reading is a complex process influenced by both inner and outer factors, some of which (especially the functioning of the brain, cognitive process and memory) have not been fully researched and are at the root of some big differences between groups (such as hearing/deaf populations) as well as individuals.

## 2.4 The skill of reading in ELT

Current theories of ELT accentuate the need to support learners on both levels of the reading process, as reading a foreign language text obviously differs from

reading texts written in one's first language (or, more generally, a language, in which the reader is proficient). Harmer (1991: 25) argues that teaching reading skills in a foreign language class actually involves a transfer of the learner's language skills to another language; learners are not learning to read, but to read in a foreign language. Consequently, the teaching objective is not introducing new reading skills, but helping students apply skills they already use in their first language, though often unconsciously. What is new is hence the realization that we read differently in different contexts (depending mainly on the reading target and type of text), using different subskills, and the discovery that it is not necessary to always read in detail, even with a foreign language text.

Talking about a transfer of pre-existing skills, it is nevertheless important to note that some students may not be proficient at all skills in their own language. Then the teacher's role comprises two tasks: "to give students confidence in English (or another foreign language) and to equip them with hitherto unknown skills in either their first language or English" (Harmer, 1991: 25). This situation commonly occurs in teaching foreign languages to the deaf, as deaf students' reading comprehension achievement often falls behind.

Even though the existing knowledge on deaf reading is far from complex, it is clear that deaf readers differ from the hearing; for example, the cognitive processes of the deaf differ from those of hearing people as a result of early cognitive development. On the other hand, the basics of the reading process, e.g. the interaction between bottom-up and top-down processes, remain the same for both groups. To sum up, in foreign language instruction of the deaf one has to bear in mind that both systemic and schematic knowledge of the learners might be on a lower level than is the case with hearing learners. Harmer stresses the need to support the acquisition and use of skills in the first language, but in the case of the deaf it remains an open question whether the positive effect will be achieved by providing support in sign language (which many deaf people consider their first language or mother tongue), in which it is not possible to develop the skill of reading, or whether it is efficient to develop the skill in the written national language.

Clearly, the issue of the first language or mother tongue cannot be avoided when talking about foreign language instruction for the deaf. The first point in this discussion is the complex question of which language can be regarded as the mother tongue of the deaf and which language the particular deaf individual considers as his/her mother tongue (these two points of view can differ). Is it the national sign language or the spoken language of the majority society? Cummins (1979) postulates the linguistic interdependence hypothesis according to which a high level achieved in one language influences learning other languages. However, this theory is disputable with regard to the deaf because of their problems in mastering the written national language (see e.g. Macurová, 2005, 2011; Spencer & Marschark, 2010).

The influence of sign languages on learning written languages is still the subject of research. However, findings of Mayer and Wells (1996) suggest that Cummins' lin-



guistic interdependence theory cannot be applied to the relation between a sign and a spoken language since these two languages' different modality (i.e. visual-spatial and audio-oral) prevents sign language from facilitating the acquisition of a written language. This means that a high level achieved in sign language does not guarantee success in further linguistic development. The situation is even more difficult because the competence achieved in sign language by the deaf who consider it as their first language is often limited, in particular as regards metalinguistic knowledge. This is caused in part by the fact that about 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents and therefore lack adequate adult role models at the time of early but also later language development. Another reason is that sign language is not taught at schools but is mostly acquired in peer interaction.

There is another aspect to reading from the perspective of ELT: reading comprehension plays a different role in real life and in a foreign language class. In real life the main aim of reading is almost always comprehension, while, when reading for the purpose of learning a foreign language, the reader attends to the form as well. Accordingly, the objective of reading exercises used in foreign language teaching is not only to develop the learners' reading skills, but also to improve their communication skills: the text then represents language input. For the latter purpose, understanding the text's language is as important as understanding the meaning conveyed. As Nassaji (2011:173-174) aptly puts it, "L2 reading is not simply a literacy skill to be learned for comprehension purposes but also a necessary tool for developing linguistic competence. Thus, a critical point of departure addresses how to make use of reading opportunities for the purpose of both comprehension and language acquisition." This argument further underscores the vital importance of reading comprehension in foreign language teaching.

The significance of comprehensible language input is emphasized by S.D. Krashen (1982) in his theory of second language acquisition. He makes a distinction between "learning" and "acquisition" of a language. The first term designates conscious learning, getting familiar with the rules and being able to discuss them. The term "acquisition" denotes an unconscious process in which the knowledge about the structure of the language is acquired during meaningful conversations; this process is similar to children's acquisition of their mother tongue. Krashen regards acquisition as an effective way of familiarizing oneself with a language. A condition that has to be fulfilled in order for acquisition to take place is the learner's exposure to a great amount of comprehensible language input, which is language on a slightly higher level than the learner's current competence. This process is expressed by the schema  $i+1$ , where  $i$  is the current competence. Krashen postulates a condition of the progress from level  $i$  to level  $i+1$ : this progress only occurs if the student understands the input  $i+1$  not with regard to the form (which is partly unknown), but content. Even though its level exceeds the current linguistic competence of the learner, the input is comprehensible thanks to contextual information and the learner's knowledge about the world and other extra-linguistic information.

The development of the form of a language (its vocabulary, grammar, etc.) also requires sufficient time and regularity. For this reason, Krashen (2004) regards reading as one of the most effective ways of acquiring language skills. As he points out, “Language acquisition comes from input, not output; from comprehension, not production” (Krashen, 2004: 136). Yet this input should not only be comprehensible, but also meaningful and interesting. According to Krashen the optimal situation is what he refers to as “compelling input,” which enables the reader to reach the state of “flow” (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). “In flow, the concerns of everyday life and even the sense of self disappear – our sense of time is altered and nothing but the activity itself seems to matter.” (Krashen, *The Compelling (not just interesting) Input Hypothesis*). Compelling input appears to eliminate the need for motivation, a conscious desire to improve. As a result one improves even without consciously aiming for it.

However, in the case of deaf students it is questionable to what extent acquisition can occur as defined, as the students’ exposure to comprehensible input is considerably restricted by the fact that the auditive channel is closed. The written form thus amounts to the only source of language input, which makes learning a kind of a vicious circle. The written text is a source of input but this input is not comprehensible because the learner does not have sufficient support in his/her background knowledge, or other facilitating circumstances. In addition, good reading skills are not available to help the learner understand the text.

The restrictions inherent in reading as a source of linguistic input for the deaf are described by Bochner and Bochner (2009). They conclude that a printed text is not an adequate source of input for the purpose of language acquisition if the student does not or cannot use phonological information for processing the text. In this context, it is important to realize that the ability to create phonological representations differs from the ability to perceive and produce speech. In the early stages of its development, understanding associations between sounds and symbols constitutes the basis of the reading process. Nonetheless, it remains of foremost importance even in the advanced stages. Research findings in processing printed text reveal that apart from manual- and visual-coding schemata, the main scheme used is the speech-coding scheme: “Speech-based coding (i.e. decoding into a phonological or articulatory representation) is strongly associated with the most efficient processing” (Bochner and Bochner, 2009: 147). These issues must be taken into consideration when applying theories of acquisition and language input to the situation of deaf learners and when planning the content of foreign language instruction.

## 2.5 Reading comprehension

If the condition of comprehensible input is fulfilled, text plays a crucial and positive role in second language acquisition in two areas: language input and comprehension. As already mentioned in chapter 2.4, the best results in acquisition are attained when the learner concentrates on the content, i.e. comprehension. Understanding

the meaning of text is the main objective of reading both in real life and in EFL classes.

In general terms, reading comprehension is a decoding of a text leading to grasping its meaning. The following definition of reading comprehension, formulated in the international research project RAND Reading Study Group (qtd. in Rueda, 2011: 91-92), emphasizes besides the role of the reader also the interaction of other factors. According to this definition, reading comprehension is:

The process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Comprehension has these three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity, or purpose for reading. [...]

The reader brings to the act of reading his or her cognitive capacities (attention, memory, critical analytic ability, inferencing, and visualization), motivation (a purpose for reading, an interest in the content, self efficacy as a reader), knowledge (vocabulary, domain, and topic knowledge, linguistic and discourse knowledge, knowledge of comprehension strategies, and experiences).

Reading comprehension can thus be affected by many factors. As regards the text itself, it is for instance the degree of difficulty, cohesion and coherence (Nuttall, 2005: 25). In relation to the reader, Reuda (2001: 92) lists the following areas in which comprehension can be reduced or broken: attention, encoding, strategic processing and self-regulation, background knowledge and motivation. In her summary of existing research findings, Najvarová (2008: 66) identifies four main areas of reader-related causes of comprehension failure. Firstly, the reader's metacognitive strategies, especially monitoring strategies, may be insufficiently developed. Secondly, the reader, failing to understand the text, does not look for an explanation in the text itself but in his/her own experience, which may lead to incorrect or confusing results. The third area is the level of text decoding: the reader has to dedicate too much effort to decoding and is then not able to compare and integrate the new information. The fourth problem appears on the level of overall processing of the text: the reader is not able to draw coherent conclusions from what s/he has read. Our experience of teachers of English for the hearing impaired confirms that these four problem areas are frequent sources of deaf students' difficulties in understanding texts in English.

## 2.6 Reading strategies

As mentioned above, one of the basic aims of education is the development of functional literacy, the main component and simultaneously prerequisite of which is reading literacy. In accordance with this aim, it is essential to enhance reading comprehension in students and it is thus necessary to focus on the challenging parts of this process, which were surveyed in the previous chapter. Importantly, comprehension can be improved by using reading strategies leading to understanding (Goldenberg, 2011: 697). A strategy is a conscious method of solving a problem and reaching a set goal. Reading strategies are then consciously applied techniques of text

processing, meant to result in understanding and processing the text in connection with the current reading aim. The difference between reading strategies and reading skills lies in the degree of conscious usage (cf. Barnett, 1989; Hedge, 2000; Nuttall 2005). In other words, reading strategies are intentionally employed methods for controlled comprehension, while skills are automated activities used fluently without being aware of them (Afflerbach *et al.* 2007). The relation between strategies and skills is influenced by the level of difficulty of the text: as Najvarová (2008: 69) points out, “If the level of difficulty gets higher and reading skills fail at reading comprehension, the reader goes back to employing reading strategies and tries to find a way to understand the text.” Therefore, the reader may use both reading skills and reading strategies to process one text.

The classification of reading strategies is based on various criteria: according to the kind of reading, phase of reading process, or approaches to learning from texts (for more details, see Najvarová, 2008: 70–75). Brown (1985, qtd. in Palincsar & Schutz, 2011: 89) has created a list of strategies that, based on her assumptions, guarantee success in reading: clarifying goals for reading, focusing on the main content and not details, continuous monitoring of activities in process for repeated verification of comprehension.

For the purposes of her research on reading strategies in English employed by native speakers and English learners, Block (1986: 465) divides strategies into two basic types: cognitive strategies, which help the reader construct a kind of model of or frame for text comprehension, and metacognitive strategies, which are used for monitoring of comprehension and when comprehension is disrupted. Cognitive strategies are then further categorized according to their use in different phases of bottom-up and top-down processes. The same classification is used by Carell (1989) in her research focusing on L2. Cognitive bottom-up strategies comprise focusing on words and sentences, reformulation and translating; top-down strategies include predictions and their confirmation or modification, deduction, pre-existing knowledge, the question-evaluation-commentary process, scanning/skimming, visualization and summary. Among metacognitive strategies are planning, monitoring, testing, assessment and correction.

### 3 Relevant research

#### 3.1 L1

Generally speaking, existing research in the field of teaching strategies, especially in the form of experiment and intervention, is still highly insufficient. Nassaji (2001: 175) observes that current knowledge about the way the process of reading works mostly stems from psychological research focusing on the participants’ first language,

and that most researches concentrating on L2 also draw on research available in the field of L1. Yet Nassaji does not see this as a problem because despite some substantial differences between reading in L1 and L2, basic cognitive processes function in a similar manner in all languages, which means that findings of research dealing with L1 can often be extended to L2. The situation is similar with regard to reading in hearing and deaf populations, which also differs in some points but is comparable in the basics of the process. Research into reading of the deaf is thus often inspired or draws directly on research conducted with hearing participants; moreover, the results of the deaf are often compared to those of intact population. This, together with the limited number of researches into reading strategies of the deaf, makes it clear that it is necessary to take into account both researches examining L1 and L2 with hearing participants and researches with deaf participants reading national written language.

Research findings demonstrate that successful hearing as well as deaf readers in both L1 and L2 employ reading strategies and that reading strategy instruction leads to an enhancement of reading comprehension (cf. Barnett, 1989; Block, 1986; Nassaji, 2011; Schirmer & Williams, 2003; Verhoeven, 2011; Wilkinson & Son, 2011). Furthermore, Nuttall (2005) contends that students have to monitor their comprehension in order to realize that they do not understand, find out why this is so and subsequently use strategies that will result in better comprehension.

Reading strategy instruction and its effect on reading comprehension in L1 has been subject of pedagogical research since the 1970s. In their survey of the development of research in this area, Wilkinson and Son (2011) point out that teaching has shifted from focusing on the individual strategies to a more flexible application of more strategies, which is consistent with the requirements placed nowadays on the reader, i.e. to be flexible, adaptable and capable of self-regulation, and with the view of reading as a dynamic and context-sensitive process.

The first studies have shown efficacy of strategies such as activation of pre-existing knowledge, construction of mental images during reading, summarizing, and story grammar. Later the research on the effectiveness of strategies moved its focus to specific groups of learners, particularly those at risk for academic failure or second language readers. The research findings indicated usefulness of strategies such as determining the topic of the story, self-regulation and semantic mapping for such groups.

The following period brought research focusing on the effect of multiple strategies instruction and also on effectiveness of direct explanation approach to strategy instruction, in which the teacher introduces and models certain strategies and subsequently directs controlled and free practice of these strategies. The impact such instruction had on comprehension could be detected not only in tests created by the researchers for the given research: a smaller, yet statistically significant effect was revealed by standardized reading comprehension tests.

One of the best known researches is Palincsar and Brown's study (1984) dealing with reciprocal teaching – a method which involves the teacher instructing students

to use strategies of asking questions, clarifying, summarizing and predicting in peer interaction. Modified versions of this research have been replicated several times in the context of L2.

Since 1989, Presley *et al.* started a series of researches concentrating on a flexible approach to teaching multiple strategies, called transactional strategies instruction (TSI) because it emphasizes the transaction between the reader and the text and between the individual participants of reading (the students and the teacher), and collective construction of comprehension. The strategies taught as part of TSI are related to these points. Intervention of TSI proved to be effective both in tests designed by the researchers to measure the degree of the research participants' awareness of strategies, their utilization and the level of comprehension as well as in standardized reading comprehension tests.

Research into reading strategies, their instruction, their use by readers and effectiveness of intervention usually takes the form of classroom based studies. Generally speaking, research findings in this field cannot be easily compared or summed up, as there are considerable differences in the research sample in terms of age and education, in the assignments and reading material, and most of all in the examined category of strategies. Moreover, these studies often do not adequately account for diversity within the participant group.

### 3.2 L2

Even though the basic points of reading in L1 and L2 are very similar, Block (1986) highlights the fact that the number of factors influencing reading in L2 is increasing. Among these factors is for instance the question of the influence of the first language on the foreign language, discussed in chapter 2.4, or the level achieved in the foreign language, which makes comparison of results across studies difficult.

According to Block (*ibid.*), researches in the field of strategies in L2 can be generally divided into two groups. First, there are researches assuming that the level of reading in a foreign language is a consequence mostly of the level of language competence achieved in this language and that language skills in a foreign language develop from lower level letter- and word-level skills to higher level cognitive skills. The second group comprises researches which presuppose that strategies mastered in L1 are employed in L2 together with new skills and strategies on a lower level.

Block (*ibid.*) conducted a research examining strategies employed by students in tertiary education – non-proficient ESL readers, and compared them to those used by native speakers. The methods of the research were think-aloud and observation. No significant difference in the strategies used by ESL readers on the one hand and native-speaker readers on the other hand was found. Other researchers have also found out that results of research in L1 are applicable to L2. For example, Carell's (1989) and Cotterall's (1990) studies confirm the effectiveness of teaching that combines cognitive and metacognitive strategies instruction.

Other scholars draw attention to differences in reading in L1 and L2. Barbara Birch (2002) explains that when examining reading L2, one should attach greater importance to the bottom-up part of the reading process and to strategies that develop it but are often neglected in research. Grabe (2009) points at a problem concerning especially readers with a lower competence in L2, which involves using inefficient local strategies (e.g. word to word reading, translating into L1 or undue attention paid to words or parts of the text irrelevant to overall comprehension). Readers often choose these strategies because they do not have adequate L2 knowledge or because the text is too difficult. The author emphasizes the role of the teacher who should make sure the students can process the text linguistically: only then can effective usage of strategies on the part of the students occur.

### 3.3 The deaf

The question of reading of the deaf and possibilities of its improvement has been the subject of much discussion because of enduring problems and weaker results of the deaf compared to the intact population. Despite the fact that most research literature contains recommendations and implications for teaching, research rarely includes intervention in instruction and its consequences (cf. Schirmer and Williams, 2003: 110). More research focuses on reading instruction and early literacy development in middle childhood in connection with early intervention, early language acquisition and bilingual education or the influence of sign language acquisition on competences in a written language. Less research is dedicated to later development of literacy and reading strategy instruction. Research on a topic related to the development of reading comprehension in a foreign language (another language besides the national written language) is scarce. Research by Schirmer and Williams (2003: 119) suggests the importance of cognitive and metacognitive strategies as is the case with intact population, but there is a need to document more techniques and strategies and to provide evidence for the effectiveness of certain specific methods of teaching cognitive and metacognitive strategies to deaf students. Generally speaking, research focusing on the deaf pays even more attention to the influence of the first language. Recently a consensus has been reached with regard to the necessity of developing proficiency in sign language for success in learning other languages (see Spencer & Marschark, 2010: 102-108).

Luckner and Handley (2008) made a survey of research into reading comprehension of the deaf, in which they included studies published in peer reviewed periodicals between 1963 and 2005. This survey shows that most of these studies are descriptive (testing hypotheses and collecting information about a specific group of learners); other types of research include experiments, quasi-experiments and case studies. The number of participants is usually low, which is given by the possibilities of research in such a specific group. Recurring conclusions include recommendations for explicit instruction of comprehension strategies, activation of background

knowledge, use of high-quality and interesting texts, emphasis on vocabulary development, and use of story grammar and mental imagery. Two studies give evidence of successful employment of DRTA (direct reading thinking approach).

Spencer and Marschark (2010) summarized evidence-based practice centred on education of hearing impaired students. They discuss for instance two researches conducted by Schirmer *et al.* in 2003 and 2004 which have indicated that students are more often encouraged to use dependent strategies (e.g. asking for help as a reaction to lack of comprehension), but teaching metacognitive strategies could stimulate students to work on tasks more independently. Another research discovered that students do not employ the strategy of continuous comprehension monitoring, which results in their inability to modify or change the strategies that are being used.

## 4 Conclusion

Although there is a consensus, based on a number of researches, that successful readers employ a wide range of strategies for reading comprehension, scholars disagree as to the form of strategy instruction. Some researchers advocate explicit strategies instruction or the so-called sub-skills approach. For example, Grabe (2009) argues that explicit strategies instruction is necessary but it must be set in context and the process of teaching should follow a method involving regular modelling of strategies by the teacher, creating of scaffolding and subsequently a sufficient amount of practice. Other researchers promote extensive reading and claim that an ample amount and frequency of reading in the target language, with the use of a wide variety of reading materials, will lead to an unconscious enhancement of skills and strategies. They base their criticism of explicit strategies instruction on the belief that too many theoretical details spoil the natural essence of reading as we mostly know it from reading in our mother tongue, and limit the reader's independence because they deflect the students' attention from the content of instruction to thinking tools.

Palinscar and Schutz (2011: 86) accept this criticism. They argue for explicit strategies instruction, yet they define conditions that have to be fulfilled to enable this approach to be useful. Strategy instruction should be the means, not the goal. To reach the real goal, which is comprehension instruction, strategy instruction should involve "related texts, remain close to the bone and focus on knowledge building" (*ibid.*).

It is vital to remember that employing strategies or automated skills is not the only factor influencing reading comprehension. It is also affected by cognitive processes, health, attention, motivation and other factors as well as by various features of the text (readability, the level of linguistic difficulty, content, etc.) and environment.



However, reader strategies instruction and development, whether more or less explicit, can enhance reading comprehension. This is especially important in the context of deaf (or other failure-prone) learners who face many difficulties in terms of language (vocabulary, syntax, inadequate competence in the first written language and in sign language), insufficient background knowledge, problems with memory and working memory, etc. Teachers and researchers should search for any ways of developing reading comprehension and of compensating for the challenging areas.

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## Nauczanie niesłyszących uczniów strategii czytania w języku angielskim: definicje, konteksty i implikacje

### Streszczenie

Autorki tekstu są lektorkami języka angielskiego i pracują ze studentami niesłyszącymi w Uniwersytecie Masaryka w Brnie. Niesłyszący studenci uczą się w tym uniwersytecie języka obcego na kursach zaadaptowanych do ich potrzeb. Zajęcia trwają 90 minut tygodniowo i mogą trwać do trzech semestrów. Centrum językowe, w którym odbywają się zajęcia jest bardzo dobrze wyposażone w sprzęt komputerowy, studenci używają także e-learningu. Jeśli studenci zgłaszają taką potrzebę, w zajęciach uczestniczą także tłumacze języka migowego.

Podstawowym problemem jest nabycie przez studentów umiejętności czytania w języku angielskim. Jest to istotne nie tylko ze względów edukacyjnych, ale ma znaczenie jako czynnik gwarantujący sukces we współczesnym świecie. Sprawność czytania, czyli zdolność do przyswajania, rozumienia, przekształcania i przekazywania informacji jest podstawowym kryterium w ocenie kompetencji danej osoby w zakresie radzenia sobie z wymaganiami codzienności. W coraz większym stopniu dotyczy to nie tylko języka narodowego, ale także języka angielskiego.

Czytanie jest czynnością złożoną, obejmuje bowiem zarówno umiejętność rozumienia znaczenia tekstu, rozumienie wartości komunikacyjnych poszczególnych zdań, ale też rozpoznawanie struktury formalnej tekstu, np. elementów informujących o typie prowadzonego dyskursu. W zakresie techniki czytania możemy rozpoznać czytanie w celu zdobycia głównych informacji (skimming), czytanie w celu zdobycia szczegółowych informacji (scanning) oraz czytanie w celu dokładnego zrozumienia całości tekstu.

Czytanie tekstu w języku obcym jest czynnością nieco odmienną niż czytanie w języku narodowym, opiera się bowiem na transferze informacji językowych i strategii czytania i rozumienia tekstu z języka pierwszego do języka drugiego. Niestety, w przypadku studentów niesłyszących, często taki transfer nie jest możliwy, ponieważ osoby te nie mają wykształconych sprawności czytania i rozumienia czytanego tekstu w języku narodowym (pierwszym). Co więcej, pojawiają się w tym kontekście pytania, który z języków (migowy? narodowy?) może być uznany za pierwszy język osoby niedyszącej? Bardzo często, zwłaszcza w przypadku niesłyszącej młodzieży spotykamy się też z sytuacją bilingwizmu: osoby te zaczynając uczyć się języka obcego (np. angielskiego) są już dwujęzyczne, posługują się językiem migowym i językiem narodowym swojego kraju. Problemem jest także zakres i rodzaj wpływu języka migowego na sprawność rozumienia czytanego tekstu zarówno w języku narodowym, jak i w języku obcym. Niektórzy z badaczy sądzą, że nie zachodzi tutaj zjawisko zależności i przenikania się języków, ze względu na różnice w zakresie modalności zaangażowanej w percepcję - wzrokową w sytuacji języka migowego i wzrokowo-słuchową w przypadku języka narodowego i obcego.

Czytanie w języku obcym pełni inne funkcje niż czytanie w języku narodowych. W czasie lektoratu języka obcego czytanie nie służy tylko zebraniu informacji, ale jest zazwyczaj wstępem do podjęcia produkcji językowej. Jeśli tekst zostanie zrozumiany przez ucznia i uznany za interesujący może dać początek interesującej wymianie słownej. Jeśli nie, staje się początkiem porażki w uczeniu się. Zrozumienie czytanego tekstu zależy nie tylko od jego długości i stopnia skomplikowania, ale także od szeregu innych czynników: ogólnych zdolności poznawczych (uwaga, pamięć, myślenie krytyczne, wizualizacja), poziomu motywacji, wiedzy ogólnej, wiedzy językowej, stosownych przez ucznia strategii rozumienia czytanego tekstu, a także doświadczenia.

Uczniowie stosują różne strategie czytania, najczęściej dzielimy je na dwa typy: strategie poznawcze (model/schemat stosowany w sytuacji czytania nowego tekstu) i strategie meta-kognitywne, wykorzystywane wtedy, kiedy zawiodą strategie poznawcze.

Brak jest badań nad fenomenem rozumienia czytanego tekstu w języku obcym przez osoby z uszkodzeniami słuchu. Badania nad procesem czytania w języku narodowym wskazują jednak, że kluczową kwestią jest dobór interesujących tekstów, uprzednia aktywacja wiedzy, kontrolowanie rozwoju słownika dzieci i młodzieży oraz wykorzystywanie wyobraźni. Ze względu na duże zróżnicowanie populacji osób z uszkodzeniami słuchu nie jest możliwe opracowanie jednego modelu postępowania, natomiast konieczne jest zastosowanie zasady indywidualizacji.

streszczenie przygotowała Ewa Domagała-Zyśk

# An English Quest: an art of teaching English to the deaf and hard-of-hearing students

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## Abstract

Teaching English to deaf and hard of hearing students is a richly rewarding experience, yet often a great challenge. Which approach/teaching method is the most effective? How do we cope with teaching English to deaf/Deaf students? Can hard of hearing students regard themselves as culturally deaf? And does it influence their learning style? Are all these questions really relevant when teaching English to the deaf and hard of hearing? Do we, really, have to pay any attention to these issues? And why continue teaching these students English? Why should they want to learn English at all? In my paper I am aiming to answer at least some of these questions. Later, in the paper, I shall describe the situation at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, and at our Language Resource Centre which is the main provider of English language teaching to deaf and hard of hearing Charles University students. Last, but not the least, I shall draw upon my personal experiences with teaching English to deaf, Deaf and hard of hearing students.

**Keywords:** CEFR, the Deaf, Language Resource Centre (LRC), MVL (Manipulative Visual Language), legislative, TEFL.

## Introduction

I have been working as an English teacher for over 15 years teaching mostly university students and adults. The biggest challenge started five years ago when I took up a position as an English teacher to deaf and hard-of-hearing students at Charles University in Prague, the Faculty of Arts. At that time, I had (or at least I thought I had) just a hazy idea about how to teach these students. To top it all, there was

hardly any information on methodology in the Czech Republic and very few experts to help me adjust my teaching methods to the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing university students.

First, I had to ask myself: What is so special about teaching English to Deaf and hard-of-hearing students? Is there a method or are there any methods that really work? After five year experience I can now say no to the former question and yes to the latter. Yes, there are methods, or, better, techniques that prove more efficient than others. No, because there is not just one, ultimate answer for the teachers of English as far as methodology is concerned. To make the matter even more complicated, we have to stress that this group is rather heterogenous. Hard-of-hearing students can have a moderate to severe hearing loss. As we are a specialized centre, we deal mainly with students with a severe hearing loss, the students for whom it is a great problem to participate in “normal“ English classes. Even though students wear their hearing aids, they rely heavily on lipreading to get the spoken information. The trouble is that English, being for them often a new language, is immensely hard to lipread. Moreover, it has been scientifically proved that, in comparison to the Czech language, deaf and hard-of-hearing people lipread about 40% in English, the rest is pure guesswork. Another difficulty arises during an in-class conversation. Hard-of-hearing students are not able to follow quicker conversations. They are not able to follow other students’ reactions. It is too fast for them. Moreover, the pronunciation of the students, which varies from student to student, makes it even more difficult to lipread. All these facts lead to frustration and that is when we, at the Language Resource Centre, hear of these students. Very often it is by word of mouth that they get to us. Our centre is predominantly for students from the Faculty of Arts, but we, of course, take students from the whole university if there is no other way for them to improve their English (They usually need to master English in order to pass an English exam which is compulsory for all Charles University students). For students we teach at LRC (Language Resource Centre), we have prepared a lower level of the English Exam (B1-CEFR), the reasons for which I shall explain later on. Now, these hard-of-hearing students come from different backgrounds. Some of them have never come across a sign language and are quite well immersed in the hearing society (even though that can be argued with people with a severe hearing loss. They are often stuck between the deaf and hearing world, which can sometimes affect their personality). With these students we deal almost in the same way as with hearing students. They only need smaller classes. A teacher must also devote more time to pronunciation and, when speaking, must speak at a normal pace, should not cover his/her mouth and be prepared to do a lot of repetition and to have at hand a big pile of paper to write the words and sentences on. Obviously, the most challenging part is pronunciation and speaking, namely spoken conversation. I consider us lucky as all our students are in their twenties and rather bright, which means they are mature enough to have set their goals, yet young enough to be eager to learn and not afraid to try new things. As far as pronunciation is concerned we use several breathing

techniques, especially for sounds that are not in the Czech language, such as /θ/ in thin /θɪn/, path /pɑːθ/, /ð/ in then /ðɛn/, bathe /beɪð/, /ə/ as in another /əˈnʌðə/ and /əː/ as in nurse /nɜːs/, which are so important for understanding.

As for the stress in a word, we use “drumming”: that means I play the rhythm/beat of the word on the desk or the table. Students then try to repeat the word and until they feel confident with the pronunciation of the word, they can do the beat as well. With conversation, it is hardly a problem (of course, a teacher must be prepared to repeat words or phrases several times) if it is logical and the student knows the topic and follows the teacher’s train of thoughts. The problem starts when a topic is unknown, a student cannot predict it and/or the conversation deviates from the logical order, which is very often the case of normal conversations. Then a student can get lost. I do not expose my students to these situations very often, although I tell them this can happen and it is no shame to ask for a repetition or to have a piece of paper and a pen ready to ask the speaker to write the sentence down. These situations can happen in a shop or in a crowded bar, where there is much noise and a student’s hearing aids cannot filter conversation sufficiently.

Another group of hard-of-hearing students we teach at LRC are those with a severe hearing loss, but still wearing hearing aids, who know a sign language, usually Czech sign language. During English conversation, I use a sign supported technique, but also we have a conversation without any signs, as would be the case in everyday situation in an English speaking country. The research has shown that lipreading is connected with reading skills, so we try to build on an extensive vocabulary (of course within the limits of the B1 level) and do a lot of reading, which improves understanding.

The third group of hard-of-hearing students represents the group that, for some reason or another, prefer to be considered deaf. These students sometimes refuse to speak in English and we treat them as our deaf students.

Nevertheless, it often happens that after some time, especially if they have been exposed to a native English environment, they start to try to speak in English and only after that, we also practise pronunciation. However, we never press students to speak if they do not want to. The reason is that, due to the oral system they often underwent at primary and secondary schools, students were often made to speak and for some of them the feeling of failure at not being able to make the right sound and the tediousness of these drills have made a block in their minds which is hard to overcome, but through patience, encouragement and exposure to real life situations in an English speaking country. This trio, i.e. patience, encouragement and exposure, I have to say, has never failed as motivation.

During my first two or three years at the Language Resource Centre I taught classes of hard-of-hearing and Deaf students. Recently, I have been teaching mostly deaf students, though I still have a few hard-of-hearing students. They are now being taught by Dr. Janakova, the head of LRC. We have no deafened students, only so called Deaf students. Capital D in Deaf means that they regard themselves as a cul-

tural minority and for some of them Czech sign language is their mother tongue (There are very few of those, though, usually deaf children of deaf parents which is very rare, as about 95% of deaf children are born to hearing parents. Or deaf children of hard-of-hearing parents who can sign, or children with one deaf parent that can sign, or deaf children of Coda parent(s)). These students, of course, know Czech sign language and sometimes other sign languages as well. However, the trouble may start with their knowledge of spoken languages which definitely can help in acquiring other spoken languages. Some of the Deaf students have insufficient knowledge of the Czech language, Mind you, we are talking about university students, those that made it, "crème de la crème". The best performers in the Czech language are usually deaf students of deaf parents. It has been argued that their language skills are good because their deaf parents had a meaningful communication with them from the very start and thus helped develop their language skills through sign language. On the contrary, with deaf children of hearing parents, a child's hearing loss can go undetected for up to two years (I had a student whose parents took her to a doctor when she was nearly two, only after her grandmother had expressed her worries that something might be wrong with the girl's hearing.). Unfortunately, we still do not have any screening for babies to check their hearing. Screening is done only to babies of deaf parents (the chance for them of being born deaf is 5% - that is very low) and babies of hard-of-hearing parents. So more often than not, deaf children start to lose on their language skills from a very young age. Also, hearing parents often do not know what to do and where to turn to, and some of them refuse to accept the child's difference, thinking it could be overcome by making the child learn to speak. But that does not develop a child's language skills greatly, does not increase his/her vocabulary and feel for language and its structure.

Another challenge that we face is that many deaf students up to now have rarely been taught any English at primary and secondary schools and therefore they come with zero, or next-to-zero knowledge of the language. This hopefully should change as state school-leaving exams were launched two years ago where one of the compulsory subjects that students must pass is a foreign language.

Interestingly, the Deaf awareness started in the Czech Republic about 12 years ago with the help of two missionaries from the U.S. At about the same time a new specialization was accredited at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, where deaf/Deaf, hard-of-hearing as well as hearing students could study Czech sign language and, to top it all, the head of the Language Resource Centre, Dr Janakova started teaching English to the deaf/Deaf and hard-of-hearing students at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague at approximately the same time. The deaf also had a supporter at the Czech government as the daughter of a government official was deaf, so naturally he handled this issue with the utmost sincerity.

Frankly speaking, teaching the Deaf in the Czech Republic is another kettle of fish. They are very sensitive about Deafness, like to talk about the issues of deafness and are proud members of the Deaf community. They prefer to sign and would rath-



er not speak, unless really necessary. They are usually very visual, but at the same time some of them get tired when they do too much reading. Basically, you can do neither speaking nor listening with them. So what remains is reading (but not aloud) and writing and grammar. Obviously, you cannot do just these all the time.

So how do you teach the Deaf? How do we do it at our Language Resource Centre? Luckily, I had a chance to observe the methods they employ in the United States, namely at Gallaudet University and then in England, namely at the University of Bristol and CityLit in London. As a result we have gradually developed our own system.

I would also like to point out the class arrangements we have tried and tested. I have taught English through a Czech sign language interpreter; without a sign language interpreter but with a hard-of-hearing assistant with whom I shared the class, thus preventing the danger of monotony; without an interpreter and an assistant by using the total communication method.

I believe, and the students' results and evaluation show it as well, that the best option is to have an assistant, or co-teacher with whom you share the teaching. This is very helpful for beginner classes, where you still have to use some Czech sign language and some Czech words for translation. With more advanced classes, we try to avoid the Czech language and Czech sign language, although this is not a dogma and we include comparative aspects and sometimes we do translate some parts of the text and give translation of some words in Czech. However, this language interference should not exceed 10-20% of class work.

Presently, I would like to discuss the five activities we perform in class. These are: vocabulary, reading, grammar, conversation and writing. As mentioned earlier, pronunciation and listening are not included in classes as Deaf students refuse to speak and to learn pronunciation and we do not feel it would be correct to force them.

As for teaching material, I would like to stress that as a framework, we use the New English File series, and of course material from the Internet that students would find interesting and that would be up (or down) to their level.

As far as vocabulary is concerned, it is always related to utterances that must make sense even though it does not have to be a complex sentence. This is to show the students the word in a context. If a student cannot guess the word, we try to explain it in English or, depending on the concreteness of the word, we use, for example Google pictures and an image of the word there. I discourage students from using online or paperback translation dictionaries. We sometimes use English-English dictionaries in paper form, so the students get used to them (for example, they have a task to find opposites of certain adjectives, which can prove rather a challenge for them).

Reading can take many forms. Starting from utterances and sentences and proceeding to shorter and then longer texts that can be general or specific. In many students we have to overcome their dislike for reading. Therefore, the text should be up-to-date and appealing to the students. Some of our students are rather slow readers, so considerable stress is laid on teaching reading techniques and practising scan-

ning and skimming. Sometimes, students have been taught at schools to translate every text they see, word by word. We try to dissuade them from doing this because in a text it is often not vital to know every word, but more important to understand the meaning correctly. We do matching reading (where you have to match chunks of text to a summary) and correct order reading (where you have to put the sentences into the proper order). These techniques teach students to see the coherence and logical flow of a text. Apart from scanning and skimming, students also practise intensive reading, after which they must answer questions connected to the text. For more advanced students we also require retelling the text in their own words from recall or according to pictures. It is always very useful if a text is divided into sections and there are pictures to support the story/content. A plain text only in black print on a white page can discourage many a student.

For teaching A1, A2 and B1 (CEFR) grammar we use a method developed by a deaf teacher from Gallaudet University, Mr. Jimmy Challis Gore. I have put this method into practice with Deaf as well as hard-of-hearing and hearing students, and it has proved one of the most effective methods. The method is called Manipulative Visual Language (MVL). It consists of a set of symbols (geometric shapes) that have different colours and represent different parts of speech. The biggest advantage of this method lies in its visuality and in the fact that students can easily transform in their minds a symbol into a word and because MVL exists in 2 dimensional as well as three dimensional forms, students can work with the symbols, can move them, feel them and „play“ with them, thus creating different sentence variations and practising different types of sentences and the correct word order, which is one of the biggest obstacles to overcome when teaching sentence structure. Needless to say, grammar is also taught and discussed through texts, conversation and writing.

Another aspect I want to mention is conversation. Our Deaf students do not speak, not even in the Czech language. As mentioned above, we do not force them to speak against their own free will. We can encourage them, but from my experience, Deaf (capital D) students never want to learn to speak in English. Instead, we use emails, which is a pre-planned conversation activity, but also falls into writing skills. For an instant conversation we use chat rooms on Google chat. Approximately every second lesson we go to the computers in our LRC, log in and start chatting. Chatting can have different forms and can be used at the beginning, in the middle or towards the end of a lesson. It usually lasts about 15-20 minutes. It can be used to greet each other, talk about a weekend, discuss different problems, or it can be used to talk about the topic of the lesson, to discuss the text and vocabulary we have read, or to discuss topics for essay writing. As with spoken conversation, a teacher must be sensitive when/if to correct his/her students, a teacher must be well aware that this is an instant reaction and also must take into account the level of English of his/her students. It is interesting to note, that sometimes the utterances students produce seem incomprehensible to a teacher; however, they are quite comprehensible to other students in the chat room. The content of a chat can be a good pool of ideas for future exercises on

grammar, or a topic for further discussion. I have been using chatting with my students for over four years. From my personal experience, on the other hand, I do not find out-of-class chatting very efficient (Of course, when students chat because they need something, it is different). The reason is that a student can often get distracted with other tasks when at home, he/she often does multitasking, can use Google translator for reading and writing the text of the conversation, and the chat can drag on and on, as one student has to leave to get something to drink, the other has to go to the toilet, etc. In my opinion, the use of out-of-class chatting is efficient only when students want to chat because they need some information, help with English, etc. In such cases, I chat only in English even though some students keep answering in Czech. It is important that they are able to understand the written English, i.e. instructions, and usually they gradually switch to English as well. We also use email conversation when sending minutes from the class, informing students about tests, cancellation of classes, etc. I always try to stick to English even though students sometimes reply in Czech. It is usually the same situation as with out-of-class chatting.

Last but not the least is writing. We hardly do any “real stuff” writing, i.e. essays, with beginners and very low pre-intermediate students. The reason lies in the fact that their vocabulary and sentence building structure skills have not been developed well yet, and by making mistakes again and again they can often get discouraged. Apart from emails and chatting, which are a cross breed between speaking and writing, we do in-class as well as out-of-class writing. One of the good techniques is to read a story and then try to retell it in your own words using pictures as a support. Another efficient way to teach writing is for students to keep a diary where they write about themselves and their lives. This can be rather time consuming and demanding for a teacher, because students usually write a draft and then after correction have to rewrite it again and again, until there are no mistakes. In-class activities also include writing on a white boards at the very beginning of the lesson about the students’ previous day, or about news they find interesting. Writing can take many forms, e.g. answering a job advertisement, writing an email to a friend, preparing a poster for a conference, describing a person, writing on topics related to Deaf issues. Sometimes, a topic is given and sometimes students have a free topic to write on. However, from my experience, students prefer more topics to choose from, and are not particularly keen on writing on a topic of their own choice.

As our Language Resource centre is well equipped, I like to use with my students different kinds of equipment to make lessons livelier and more variable. We use whiteboards where students can write at the same time, we use flip charts, we use computers for chatting, for grammar and reading exercises, for searching information online (of course in English). I use a Smartboard, which is a great help when a teacher wants to show something to all the students, for example a picture from the Internet, a film, a short captioned story from YouTube, or just to correct an exercise together, or to do reading together (which means students do not have to look down at their paper all the time). For exercises I use an overhead projector as well.

Recently, I have started using an iPad in class. It is an effective and popular gadget for smaller groups of students. You can share your iPad and have chat-like conversations, or when reading a text, students can instantly search for the explanation of an unknown word, or look up geographical and historical facts mentioned in the text. Students love it because it is new and gives them a break from pen and paperwork.

All this considered, there still remains questions to be asked: Do all these methods, techniques and equipment make a student want to learn English? Will a student be successful in acquiring all the necessary skills?

The longer I teach, the more I believe that all these things are good and can help a lot, but the main driving force for any student is motivation and opportunity. Students must realize for themselves that learning English is worth the pain and effort. Some do it because of their English exam, but we try to make them see that by mastering English the world opens to them. They can chat with their friends abroad, they can read books in English (most of the books written about Deafhood and related issues have been written in English), they will be able to get round and be independent when going abroad. It takes a while for some students to make this fact sink in. We try not only to motivate them, but also to give them an opportunity, so every year our first year students can go for a three week English summer course in England or the United States. The courses are prepared with deaf centres of the respective universities and are tailored to the needs of these students. I must say it has proved a big success. Students are exposed to real life situations, can test, practise and improve their knowledge, get to know the culture of the country, meet other people, visit deaf clubs or schools for the deaf. I was surprised to learn yet another advantage of these summer schools abroad. Many students are, maybe because of their loss of hearing, rather dependant on their parents and home surrounding. Now they have only other students around. They can do what they want and spend their money the way they want to. Of course, for many students it is nothing new, but for those who have never been exposed to a situation like this, it does wonders.

Summing up, without motivation and opportunity on the part of a student, even the best teacher with immaculate methods and great dedication would have very poor, if any, results.

## W pogoni za angielskim – sztuka nauczania języka angielskiego studentów niesłyszących i słabosłyszących

### Streszczenie

Nauczanie języka angielskiego studentów niesłyszących i słabosłyszących jest bardzo wdzięcznym doświadczeniem, ale też olbrzymim wyzwaniem. Jakie podejście/metoda są najbardziej efektywne? Czy studenci słabosłyszący uznają siebie za kulturowo głuchych?

Czy to wpływa na ich styl uczenia się? Czy w ogóle te zagadnienia mają znaczenie w procesie nauczania?

Autorka tekstu od pięciu lat uczy języka angielskiego jako obcego niesłyszących i słabosłyszących studentów w Uniwersytecie Karola w Pradze. Jej doświadczenia wskazują na fakt ogromnej heterogeniczności grupy studentów z wadą słuchu. Jedynie część z nich jest w stanie odbierać mówioną formę języka angielskiego – badania wskazują, że w ten sposób możemy odczytać jedynie 40% kierowanej do nas informacji. W grupie studentów z wadą słuchu pracę utrudnia fakt, że wymowa poszczególnych studentów ma wiele cech indywidualnych i nie jest możliwa do odczytania przez inne osoby uczące się w jednej grupie. Część studentów zna język migowy i funkcjonuje w środowisku niesłyszących, podczas gdy inni nie znają języka migowego i funkcjonują głównie w środowisku osób słyszących. W stosunku do tej drugiej grupy nie zachodzi konieczność stosowanie specjalistycznych metod czy technik nauczania – praca przypomina lekcje ze studentami słyszącymi, jednak studenci ci potrzebują więcej czasu na uczenie się, konieczne jest także organizowanie zajęć w małych grupach. Studenci uczą się także wymowy, szczególnie potrzebne są ćwiczenia uczące wymowy głosek nie istniejących w języku czeskim, np. /θ/ /ð/ /ə/ /ɜ:/, oraz ćwiczenia pokazujące akcent wyrazowy i zdaniowy – w tym względzie sprawdza się technika „bębnienia”: nauczyciel wyznacza akcent uderzając dłonią w stół w odpowiedni sposób, studenci powtarzają ten rytm. Mówienie i uczestniczenie w konwersacjach jest dla studentów wyjątkowo trudne, dlatego nauczyciel powinien kilkakrotnie powtórzyć skierowane do studenta zdanie. Student powinien także poznać wcześniej temat rozmowy; praktycznie nie są możliwe konwersacje, w których występują liczne zmiany tematu i dygresje. Studenci, którzy na co dzień korzystają z komunikacji w języku migowym, korzystają także w czasie lekcji angielskiego z pomocy tłumacza języka migowego. Część studentów tej grupy podejmuje także próby mówienia w języku angielskim, jednak jest również grupa studentów określających siebie jako kulturowo głuchych, którzy nie podejmują prób mówienia ani w języku narodowym, ani też w języku obcym. Ich niechęć do mówienia często wynika z negatywnych doświadczeń związanych z uczeniem się mówienia w języku narodowych we wczesnych latach szkolnych. Ponieważ próby te kojarzą się im z porażką, nie podejmują prób mówienia w języku obcym.

Z obserwacji wynika, że największe kompetencje w zakresie języka narodowego (czeskiego) mają niesłyszące dzieci niesłyszących rodziców, co wiąże się zapewne z dobrym kontaktem emocjonalnym między rodzicami a dziećmi i dobrą komunikacją między nimi zwłaszcza w pierwszych dwóch latach życia dziecka. Niesłyszące dzieci słyszących rodziców nie mają tej szansy, ich rozwój językowy jest opóźniony, a wada słuchu wykrywana zwykle zbyt późno. W Czechach nie ma powszechnych badań przesiewowych wady słuchu, badaniami objęte są tylko dzieci niesłyszących rodziców (które stanowią około 5% populacji niesłyszących). Kolejną trudnością jest fakt, że w Czechach język obcy nadal nie jest obowiązkowy w szkołach dla uczniów niesłyszących i wiele osób zaczyna się go uczyć na uczelni.

Centrum Językowe w Uniwersytecie Karola zostało założone przez prof. Daniełę Janakovą 12 lat temu. W tym samym czasie na Uniwersytecie Karola rozpoczęto lektorat czeskiego języka migowego – był to sygnał przebudzenia osób głuchych w Republice Czeskiej i ten nurt jest ciągle kontynuowany. Głusi studenci nie chcą mówić po angielsku, zatem możliwe jest tylko ćwiczenie umiejętności czytania i pisania. Korzystamy w tym

zakresie z metod wypróbowanych w Uniwersytecie Gallaudeta, Uniwersytecie w Bristolu i CityLit w Londynie. Najlepszą z opcji wydaje się nie korzystanie z pomocy tłumacza języka migowego, ale nauczyciela wspomagającego. Podręczniki, które uznajemy za najbardziej efektywne to seria *New English File*. W uczeniu słownictwa ważne jest podawanie słów w kontekście i unikanie tłumaczenia dosłownego. W zakresie nauczania czytania należy odchodzić od zwyczaju tłumaczenia tekstów na rzecz wyszukiwania informacji. W nauczaniu wykorzystywana jest także metoda J. Ch. Gore. W celu ćwiczenia funkcji komunikacyjnych studenci mają możliwość konwersowania z wykorzystaniem komputera (*chats*). W nauczaniu pisania istotną rolę pełnią ilustracje i pomoce wizualne, pisanie pamiętnika, pisanie zdań i krótkich tekstów na tablicach w klasie i wspólne ich poprawianie, a także wykorzystywanie sprzętu elektronicznego, np. iPads.

# Written English of Polish deaf and hard of hard of hearing grammar school students

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## Summary

In contemporary times, learning foreign languages, especially English, is a must for anybody who wants to acquire high quality education and be competitive in the job market. This is especially visible in Central and Eastern European countries and it is also true for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. However, their language disability makes it much more difficult to become a proficient foreign language user. They are hardly ever able to listen to foreign language speech and speak in a foreign language. The written form of communication becomes the main way to acquire and produce the target language.

The goal of this paper is to present deaf and hard of hearing students' abilities as competent users of the written form of a foreign language they have been learning. The paper describes both the theoretical background of this issue and results of several pilot studies, conducted in different kinds of educational settings, in Special Primary and Low Middle Schools for the Deaf and among KUL university students. The results show that deaf and hard of hearing students are only to some degree able to use English as a means of effective communication, although these abilities grow over time and are individually differentiated to a great extent. Finally, as university graduates, many deaf and hard of hearing students use a written form of a foreign language fluently, using it as a tool in solving different professional and personal problems. This issue needs further analysis, including longitudinal and comparative.

**Keywords:** deaf, hard of hearing, English as a foreign language (EFL), writing, Erasmus exchange

## Introduction

In the practice of teaching a foreign language it is very important to know who the students are, to know their personal characteristics, learning style, motivation to learn a foreign language, and past experiences in the field. Taking into consideration the situation of a teacher of hearing-impaired students, first of all it should be stressed that there are many different types of hearing loss and its consequences differ according to its level, time of occurrence, family communication patterns and other factors.

The goal of the main body of this paper is to present deaf and hard of hearing students learning English as a foreign language as competent and creative users of a written form of the language. It is done by describing and analyzing the results of four different pilot studies carried out among different age groups of deaf and hard of hearing students in Poland by the author of this chapter. The analysis is preceded by a characterization of the general situation of deaf and hard of hearing students in the context of foreign language learning.

The conclusion is that, despite their immense difficulties in reading and lip-reading, this group of students is able to prepare meaningful texts of different levels of complexity. Their level of English production systematically rises and finally they might be able to use English as a tool for solving different professional and personal problems.

### 1. Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Hearing Impaired in the Polish Perspective

In Poland, the first school for the deaf was established as early as 1817 in Warsaw by Father Jakub Falkowski, and only since that time was regular care for this population organized. Dynamic development of schools and rehabilitation centers were supported by the Institute of Special Education, initiated in Warsaw in 1923 by Maria Grzegorzewska (who previously earned a doctorate in Aesthetics at the Sorbonne), where teachers for disabled students had the opportunity to get the highest possible qualifications, also recognized abroad (Orizio 2006). This intense work was stopped by WWII, but soon afterwards schools and other special educational institutions started their work. In the case of hearing impairment, since that time schools were usually separately founded for the deaf and for the hard of hearing: the first school for hard of hearing students was opened in Poland in Trzebież Szczecińska in 1957 (Eckert 2001). According to traditions handed down from the German school system, in Poland the oral way of communication was most popular and Polish Sign



Language or the Polish Language-Sign System were only partial means of communication in education. In the 1970's, it was popular to find in schools for the deaf the slogan: "Behave well – do not sign." In 1984 Polish Cued Speech was proposed by Kazimiera Krakowiak (1995) and started to be used in several special schools. The system of education for deaf and hard of hearing students was mainly segregative, with a range of special boarding schools all over Poland. They were located in all the bigger towns and served almost all deaf and hard of hearing students across the country. Only after the transformation of 1989 was it possible to create integrative schools, and since that time more and more deaf and hard of hearing students have been educated in integrative and mainstream settings. Nowadays special schools offer education mostly for pupils who are profoundly deaf or students with hearing impairment and other disabilities living together. As anywhere in the world, the population of the deaf and hard of hearing students is very much diversified and this trend is magnified by phenomena such as newborn listening screening tests (obligatory in Poland since 2002), early diagnosis, early therapy, digital hearing aids and cochlear implantation that enable both early diagnosis and effective therapy for the majority of people with hearing problems.

In Polish pedagogical literature there are several terms describing people who have problems with their hearing. The official term used throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the term "deaf." It appeared in all official documents, names of schools and other institutions that provided care and education for this population. Along with it, the term "deaf-mute" (or "deaf and dumb") was used to describe these people who did not use speech as a means of communication. It is interesting to note that with the passing of time, these terms started to become pejorative, thus both in everyday use and in academic literature it was *politically correct* to use the term "hearing impaired" (cf. Krakowiak 1995, Dykcik 2001). During the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several other terms were coined, usually the tendency was to place "the person first," so we spoke generally of *persons with hearing impairment(s)* or *persons with hearing disorder(s)*. Only after the ideology of Deaf Culture began to be known in Poland, the term "deaf" (or "Deaf") started to be re-used by some groups of people with hearing problems, those who identify with this cultural trend and tend to feel pride in being a member of the Deaf Community. Others, however, still prefer to be named *hearing impaired* or *persons with hearing impairment*.

In the deaf world and literature, along with the terms "D/deaf" or "D/deafness," the term "Deafhood" started to appear. Paddy Ladd (2003) from Bristol University, England, who coined this term in 1993, states that it is meant to convey the positive meaning of being deaf. He sees it more as a process by which deaf individuals can actualize their deaf identity, their priorities and principles. Deafhood is viewed as an opposition to the term *deafness*, which indicates the biological and factual state of a hearing loss. Deafhood treats being deaf as a normal, even positive state and opposes those who want to cure it by hearing aids or cochlear implantation (CI). Deafhood is also understood as the personal journey of deaf individuals to discover who they

are and what role they are supposed to play in society. In order to do this, one has to liberate oneself from the oppressing hearing society:

“Deafhood is not, however, a ‘static’ medical condition like ‘deafness.’ Instead, it represents a process - the struggle by which each Deaf child, Deaf family and Deaf adult explains to themselves and each other their own existence in the world. In sharing their lives with each other as a community, and enacting those explanations rather than writing books about them, Deaf people are engaged in a daily praxis, a continuing internal and external dialogue” (Ladd, 2003, 3).

In the Polish context the above distinctions are very much theoretical, as there does not exist a Polish term for the English “deafhood.”

Nowadays, the most often used terms are: *persons with hearing impairment(s)* or *persons with hearing disorder(s)*. They include all the people who have problems with hearing, not considering the etiology and severity of the disorder. However, both in research and educational practice, there is a strong need to distinguish between the groups of deaf and hard of hearing persons. Traditionally, in Poland, the borderline between them is based on the audiological measurements proposed by BIAP (Bureau International d’Audiophonologie). It is presumed that naming a *person deaf* requires that one has a hearing impairment of 70dB or more. Those with minor levels of hearing impairment are described as hard of hearing. It is worth noticing that in Polish pedagogy for the deaf, two terms are used for describing the group of hard of hearing: 1. *Niedosłyszający (hard of hearing)* and 2. *Słabosłyszający (severely hard of hearing, cf. Krakowiak 2003)*. In the case of the former subgroup, *niedosłyszający*, it is implied that they can rely on their residual hearing while learning and using speech, although their hearing abilities are restricted. In the case of the latter subgroup, *słabosłyszający*, they are defined as people who are not able to use their hearing in the process of speech and language acquisition and who have to rely on visual signals to master it. Their level of hearing impairment is usually deeper than in the case of the first subgroup, but it is not the only criteria for being ascribed to either of these groups.

The distinction between people who are deaf and those who are hard of hearing has traditionally been based on audiological tests. However, medical and technological advances, early diagnosis and early intervention practices have made the audiological typology imprecise: it happens that a person with profound hearing loss, but with broad and early intervention experience, with constant rehabilitation, uses speech and functions more like a hard of hearing individual than a deaf person. On the other hand, in schools for the deaf, there are still children whose level of hearing impairment is relatively small (50-60 dB) and who are not able to use speech as their means of communication, because they prefer using sign language and being treated as deaf. Paradoxically, it sometimes happens that students at Special Schools for the Deaf prefer not to be called deaf, but hard of hearing – despite their severe hearing disorders (90dB or more). In the latter part of this paper there is some information about this phenomenon.

## 2. English Written Production of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

As mentioned in the introduction, for deaf and hard of hearing people writing constitutes the main means of acquiring the language (through reading) and using it in communication. For English teachers of the deaf, there are not many sources that might help them to understand the nature of this process and its conditions in the process of foreign language learning.

Teaching and learning foreign languages in groups of deaf and hard of hearing students is one of the most recent *terrae incognitae* in contemporary methodology of foreign language learning. The author's extensive search for any research studies in this field brought no results. In this situation a kind of enlightenment may come from analyzing the results of research on the writing skills of hearing students learning foreign languages and writing skills in the national language of deaf and hard of hearing students.

Lee and Krashen's (2002) theory may appear especially useful. They identified four elements that condition the success or failure in writing among hearing students. These are: reading, fear of writing, self-correction and the process of writing. In a detailed analysis, Lee and Krashen explain their theory, suggesting that it might be completed by each teacher with his or her own observations. They suggest that, first, in order to write well, one must read extensively, not only obligatory texts, but also be in the habit of reading just for pleasure. Second, fear of writing correlates highly with failure in writing: students are afraid of disclosing their thoughts, making mistakes and they prefer to copy well-known schemata instead of preparing their own texts. Third, mature self-correction style (when the student concentrates on structure, preciseness of words and expressions and not only on formal aspects such as spelling) correlates with success in writing. And last but not least, as for the process of writing, the most important aspect is the frequency of assigning writing tasks – the more often a student writes a text, the better the texts are.

Research on written production of deaf students in their national language was analyzed by e.g. Cornett (2001) and Svartholm (2008). Cornett noticed that the written productions of deaf students often resemble a foreigner's style: language is generally simplified and clumsy. Svartholm notices that the language used by the deaf very often resembles *pidgin*: most often, the order is subject-verb-object (SVO), sentences are short and simple and mainly concerning facts but not opinions. The texts contain many vocabulary and grammar mistakes. Svartholm is one of the first researchers who considered the written output of the deaf and hard of hearing students not as *inferior* but *specific*. As such, deaf students' texts demand special methods of description and assessment (cf. also Berent 1996, Krakowiak 2003).

Written English production of hearing impaired Polish students was assessed in a series of studies by Domagała-Zysk (2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d). These studies

involved different age groups and diversified research methodologies. The results will be presented below.

### 3. Written Production in English of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools

In order to better understand the results, some information is necessary about the Polish school system and the status of foreign languages taught here. The Polish school system is divided into 3 types of schools: 6-year primary, 3-year lower secondary (*gymnasium*) and 3 year secondary school. Learning a foreign language is obligatory at each stage of education. After the total domination of Russian as the only foreign language taught and learned after WWII, in 1989 Poles started to learn foreign Western languages on a big scale, both at schools and at private language schools and centers. Needless to say, this possibility was withdrawn from deaf and hard of hearing students: together with students with speech disorders they could easily have been exempt from foreign language classes and in the majority of cases, this was done. Till 2001, only a few had the possibility to be taught foreign languages. Only in 2001 was the rule established by the Polish Ministry of Education that deaf and hard of hearing students had to have foreign language classes organized on a par with other students. According to this rule, they can only be exempted from second foreign language classes.

Nowadays, all Polish children learn a foreign language (usually English) starting in first grade. After 12 years of learning, they are expected to pass a Matura exam that consists of 5 parts, including Reading Comprehension, Grammar and Vocabulary, Writing, Listening and Speaking. For some of the students, it is possible to achieve level C1 or C2 by that time and pass the *Extended English Exam* that is a good starting point to enter a university. Others pass the *Basic English Exam* (A2/B1). Deaf and hard of hearing students have two options of passing the Matura Exam: the first is to take a regular *Extended English Exam* without its speaking and listening parts and the second is to take the *Basic English Exam* which has a form prepared for deaf and hard of hearing students. Its main modification involves providing additional vocabulary and grammar exercises instead of the speaking and listening parts. Apart from this, the texts prepared for the *Reading Comprehension* tasks, clues and introduction to *Writing* are prepared in such a way as to answer the special language needs of the deaf and hard of hearing students (the topics tend to be connected with regular life events rather than abstract phenomena, and vocabulary that is too abstract and sophisticated is exchanged with more regular words).

In the following fragment, the results of some pilot studies will be presented and discussed. They were conducted in primary and low secondary schools and among

university students. It has not been possible to conduct research among secondary school students, so there is a kind of a gap within the presented research body. Such research is to be undertaken in the very near future.

The written production of deaf and hard of hearing primary school students was analysed in research by Domagala-Zysk (2012a). In this research 78 deaf and hard of hearing primary school students (IV, V and VI grade) took part. They have been learning English as a foreign language for 2-4 years. The subjects were 12-16 years old<sup>1</sup> and a majority of the group consisted of males – there were 38 boys (73%) and only 14 girls (27%) in the whole group. 33% of the participants identified themselves as deaf and 67% as hard of hearing.

As a research task the children were asked to prepare as many sentences in English as they could for the following topics: 1. *Me*; 2. *My family*; 3. *Food*; 4. *Animals*; 5. *Weather*. Although the research group consisted of 78 persons, only 39 written works were obtained. The pupils prepared altogether 265 sentences and that result means that it is almost 8 sentences *per capita*. The shortest answer consisted of 3 sentences and the longest contained 16 sentences. The sentences were very simple in their form and provided information about the students and their family members' names, age, likes and dislikes and place of living. Information about favourite animals and food usually consisted of a series of nouns presenting the students' choices (e.g. *dog, ham*) and information about the weather consisted of adjectives describing the weather conditions. The sentences were analyzed and their grammatical correctness was checked. All the sentences without any exceptions were single sentences of the simple pattern *subject – verb – object* (SVO) and this type of structures is typical for students with hearing impairment (Berent 1996). Unfortunately, only 140 (53%) of the entire corpus of 265 sentences were grammatically correct (cf. Tab 2). The most common mistakes included incorrect sentence structure (16.6%) that usually resembled a group of freely gathered words, not a sentence structure. Next, common mistakes include the incorrect use of verb forms (16.4%), the omission of definite and indefinite articles (15.6%) and the lack of plural form markers (13.6). Other common problems appeared in adjective sentences (8.8%). Deaf and hard of hearing children quite often, when they do not know a word in English, use a Polish word that may mean the same (8.8%). The results are presented in table 2.

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<sup>1</sup> In Poland, children attending primary schools are usually 7-12 years old, but in the case of disability the education process may last longer.

Tab.2. Type and number of errors – primary school students (Domagała-Zyśk 2012a)

Type of errors	Examples	Number of mistakes (N)	Percentage of mistakes (%)
Incorrect sentence structure	*Mother works nurse; *Teacher English nice;  *I have brother three	26	16.6
Incorrect verb forms	*I am has two brother	24	16.4
Definite and indefinite article omission	*I am boy  *My mother is teacher	23	15.6
Lack of plural forms	*I like dog	20	13.6
Wrong forms in adjective sentences	*The weather is cloud	13	8.8
Using Polish equivalents	*I like zupa ogórek;  *My favourite animal is świnka morska	13	8.8
Subject omission	*Don't like eggs;  *Like English	8	5.4
Incorrect prepositions	*I live for Lodz	5	3.4
Possessive	*My mother name is Krystyna	3	2
Spelling	*fudbool, *podatose	2	1.4

In the second research study (Domagała-Zysk 2012b) the written production of lower secondary school (*gymnasium*) deaf and hard of hearing students was analysed. A group of 124 students of Lower Secondary Special Schools for the Deaf and/or Hard of Hearing all over Poland participated in this study. 68 (55%) were boys and 56 (45%) were girls. As for their identification, 72 (58%) consider themselves hard of hearing and 41 (33%) deaf, 11 did not describe their hearing status, but they experienced hearing problems. 93 persons wear hearing aids and 5 use CI. As for the main means of communication, 30 students (30%) know and exclusively use sign communication: Polish Sign Language or Polish Language-Sign System, 42 (34%) use both speech and sign language and 14 (11%) use speech solely. The students had been learning English as a foreign language for 4-6 years.

In order to assess the language production of the study group, each student was asked to write a letter to a pen friend about him- or herself, his or her family, friends, likes and dislikes, favourite food and drinks, weather, holiday plans and special features of their English teacher. 36 (29%) of the participants prepared the letters. Their works were divided into 3 categories, according to the level of their complexity. 11 students prepared remarkably simple works, consisting on average of 3.14 sentences of about 13 words. Their structure was simplified and contained many mistakes (e.g. *I am Ula R. I has 5 four family. I don't like go bike* (G34). Seven works belonged to

the second category: they were longer and consisted on average of 7.66 sentences of about 32 words. Students of this group ambitiously wanted to pass their real thoughts on to the receiver, although their language abilities did not allow them to do it precisely (e.g. *My name is Aldona. My surname is K. I am thirteen years old. My favourite animals are dog and cat. I have got family. I have got sister. My sister name is Julia. My parents are nice. My favourite sports are swimming and volleyball.* (G5)). 19 students prepared texts belonging to the third category. They consisted of an average of 11.66 sentences consisting of 57 words. These students tend to present their situation creatively and were able to correct some of their mistakes themselves. An example of such a work is provided below:

*Dear Yasser,*

*My name is Sara. I live in Łodz. I am 15. I haven't got any sister or brother. I like playing computer games, watch TV and reading „Manga”. I like cats and dogs. I have a cat. I want to go on my Holiday to Egypt lub Japonii. The weateher is dark and sunny. I hate eating meat. Pa, amios*

Sara (G29)

#### 4. Written production in English of Deaf and Hard of Hearing University Students

At the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, *English as a Foreign Language* classes for the deaf and hard of hearing have been offered since 1999, when the first students with severe and profound hearing impairment started Pedagogy studies at this university. Since then more than 30 deaf students have taken their obligatory foreign language courses in the Centre of Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing that was established in 2004. It is ensured by university regulations that each student with severe disability has the right to participate in specialised foreign language classes.

##### 4.1. Supportive Framework of Class Organization

The key to our success is the *personalization* of the program. This means that the syllabus and study program are tailored for each student individually, so the students have the possibility to revise and improve language abilities acquired in primary and secondary schools, improve their level of general English and get accustomed to some professional language connected with their field of studies. The groups are small and consist of 2-3 people, so it is easy to work together at one table. Special

attention is devoted to care for the students' abilities to cooperate within the groups. However, some of the students require individual teaching, which is also possible. Individual teaching is always offered in cases of additional disabilities, like vision impairment (e.g. in case of Usher's Syndrome) or motor impairment (e.g. cerebral palsy). EFL classes are held for 90 minutes a week for four semesters altogether; after this period, each student is supposed to take a university exam. Each group is taught by a teacher who is a qualified English teacher and a pedagogue for the deaf.

Computer and Information Technologies are widely used during our classes. The study room is equipped with a *Smart Board* and Internet access, which enable our students to use different English web sites and on-line exercises for free. In addition, English is practiced during e-mail and sms communication, especially for organizational purposes, like re-arranging the time of the class or changing the date of tests. Students are also encouraged to participate in different on-line forums and other commonly accessible activities that may help them to practice English in a natural context.

The atmosphere of emotional security and personal goal-setting provided by this class organization supports students to achieve the best possible results.

#### 4.2. The teacher's role

Each person teaching English as a second language for the deaf is in a natural way obliged to perform a multi-task role. It is not enough to simply be an English teacher and it is also not enough to be a pedagogue for the deaf. Knowing only regular methodology of English as a foreign language is a basic, but not a satisfactory condition to perform this task successfully, which also requires a thorough knowledge of the specificity of the psychological and social functioning of deaf and hard of hearing persons. On the other hand, a pedagogue of the deaf who speaks English, but is not a qualified English teacher should not take it for granted that he or she is skillful enough to teach a foreign language to the deaf and hard of hearing, even at a very basic level. This may cause misunderstanding as to a student's expected language behavior and de-motivate the students to undertake future learning.

In our program, each English teacher plays the role of both a language teacher and an interpreter, he or she may be an oral interpreter (lip speaker), sign language interpreter or Cued Speech transliterator, depending on students' needs. Apart from that, it is not uncommon that we are expected to serve as note-takers or classroom assistants (learning needs assistants) or even speech therapists – to some extent, while practicing phonology and phonetics of English.

#### 4.3. Students' Characteristics

Deaf and hard of hearing students at KUL represent different faculties: Law, Culture Studies, Economics, Computer Sciences, Journalism, Psychology, Pedagogy and Administration. Their hearing loss is usually severe or profound. All of them fluently



use lip-reading techniques, some students use Cued Speech, and almost half of the group know Polish Sign Language. Their choice of the study field is personalized to a great extent, and this results in a high level of graduation: out of 35 BA and MA students who studied between 1999–2012 only 3 persons dropped out and did not graduate.

The level of hearing impairment of the students is usually severe (71-90 dB) or profound (91-120dB) – in the whole group of 37 deaf and hard of hearing students who studied in the period of 1999–2012, there were 35 such persons. KUL students with minor levels of hearing impairment usually study in regular groups. Our students present different levels of English language competencies: they have been mainly beginners or late beginners (A1, A2), but some of the students have represented intermediate levels of English (B1, B2), but very seldom do students present an advanced knowledge of English (C1, C2) – so far there have been only 2 such students.

#### 4.4. Presentation and Analysis of the Students' Written Output

The two studies presented here were conducted among university students and they were both qualitative (Domagała-Zysk 2012a) and quantitative (Domagała-Zysk 2012b) in their nature.

The research study (Domagała-Zysk 2012c) was devoted to analysing the written production of deaf and hard of hearing university students. Thirteen students participated, and their level of hearing impairment was 80 dB or more (2 persons reported having a hearing impairment of 80 dB and 11 persons reported a hearing impairment of 90 dB or more). One of the students came from a deaf family, 12 students have hearing parents and siblings. All of them fluently use the lip-reading technique, four students use Cued Speech, and almost half of the group know Polish Sign Language. Their levels of English were different, so students were divided into four groups: beginners (2 students), elementary (7), pre-intermediate (3) and upper-intermediate (1). Each group was taught by a teacher who is a qualified English teacher and a pedagogue of the deaf. The preferable means of communication were lip-reading and lip-speaking, but elements of Polish Sign Language and Polish Cued Speech were also introduced, if necessary. The research methods used in this study comprised participatory observation, textbook analysis and analysis of the students' written work.

Participatory observation took place during all English for the deaf classes designed for the 2008/2009 academic year, and they numbered 360 lessons. After each class, a short note was prepared gathering the students' achievements and problems. As for the students' written works, altogether 180 pieces of documents were collected, among which: vocabulary and grammar tests (VGT, 62 items), grammar exercises (GE, 20), written assignments (WA, 26), short text messages (SMS) in English sent to the teacher (SMS, 22), written translations of the reading material (WT, 8) and teacher protocols from some of the classes (TP, 42). All the documents were named, dated and content analyzed regarding the students' difficulties in acquiring and using

vocabulary of English as a foreign language. Apart from this, three sets of handbooks (*Enterprise 1* (beginners, E1), *Enterprise 2* (elementary, E2) and *Enterprise 3* (pre-intermediate, E3) by V. Evans and J. Dooley were scrutinized as far as vocabulary content and teaching methods are concerned. The research problems were to assess typical difficulties in language acquisition and production and describe effective methods of facilitating the process. Hereonly a part of the results, namely those connected with written production, will be presented.

Naturally, language production is generally more difficult for students that language acquisition, although written production is regarded by the participants as generally much easier than spoken production. Research in this field suggests that for deaf students, it is difficult to acquire the writing skills first of all in their national language, and they tend to use a simplified version of it, which sometimes resembles *pidgin* (Svartholm 2008): more complicated ideas are simplified, sentences are short with a simple *subject - predicator - object* structure. Grammar and vocabulary mistakes can often be spotted; students tend to write about facts, not opinions. In Domagala-Zysk's (2012) research, English written production was assessed by analyzing five types of documents: vocabulary and grammar tests (VGT, 62), written assignments (WA, 26), short text messages in English sent to the teacher (SMS, 22) and written translations of the reading material (WT, 8). After checking the documents for mistakes, 214 were found. Out of this, the greatest number of errors were connected with choosing an improper word, which may be the result of difficulties in remembering the exact meaning of the words as they are not often used by the deaf students, or with difficulties in choosing a word in a proper register (*poached/fried, shook a hand/move a hand, rode a car/drive a car, make a shower/have a shower, wine list/wine menu*). Almost one-fourth of the errors were connected with the incorrect use of prepositions, and it seems to be this part of the language where it is extremely difficult to get to know and remember the proper collocations. Other errors concerned the improper choice of countable/uncountable items and singular or plural forms of nouns. It is also difficult for students to differentiate between adverbs and adjectives, and this may be influenced by using sign language, as Polish Sign Language does not always have two separate forms for an adjective and an adverb.

Table 3. Types of Vocabulary Errors in Students' Written Work:

Types of error	Frequency of appearance (N)	Frequency of appearance (%)
Errors in using prepositions	60	23.6
Incorrect choice of a word	102	40.2
Differentiating between countable & uncountable noun	13	5.1
Differentiation between adjectives and adverbs	12	4.7

Using singular/plural form	5	2
Spelling mistakes	40	15.7
Others	22	8.7
Total	254	100

In the fourth study (Domagala-Zyśk 2012d) three English texts were presented and analysed. All of them were prepared by prelingually deaf students whose level of hearing impairment was 90dB or higher. All the texts were classified as independent, autonomous productions, with significant personal traits. The authors wrote about their real personal experiences and use English as a tool to convey their thoughts. One of the works is presented below<sup>2</sup>:

Dear Mum and Dad,

Hello! I'm so happy in Zakopane for our holidays. I am having fantastic time and exciting views. Jenifer and I are staying at the wooden houses looking to as Tatra houses. At the moment we are enjoying the spectacular view of the mountains. The weather is sunny and windy. The big mountains are beautiful and amazing view. We spend most of our days hiking in the mountains with our Slovakian friends. We went for walks in the PARK TATRA National. It was great and gorgeous. The food is delicious. We like eating fish. I just love eating fresh Tatra cheese and smoked trout for lunch.

I think you should come here next year. I am sure would love it

See you soon

As it appears, deaf and hard of hearing university students described in this research can be included among competent language users. The fourth presented studies are not longitudinal in their nature and they present different populations. However, the long way from a 3-word simple sentence to a high quality piece of writing might be representative of the path many deaf and hard of hearing students take.

## Instead of a Conclusion

Magdalena Rosowicz is now a graduate of English Philology studies at KUL. She is a deaf person herself, with a hearing loss of 100 dB in both ears. Her hearing loss was diagnosed when she was about 4 years old. Magdalena comes from a hear-

<sup>2</sup> The letter is presented in the form it was prepared, without any external correction.

ing family. She attended mainstream primary and low secondary school and was forced to continue education in a Special Grammar School for the Deaf, where she learned sign language. After passing her Matura exam, Magdalena decided to fulfill the dream of her life: study English. She applied to KUL and was admitted in 2007. Using different study methods, her own cognitive resources and hearing friends and teachers' support, she was able not only to finish her education, but meanwhile she has become a strong supporter for the quality of deaf education, participating in several international seminars and study groups. In 2010, Magdalena decided to apply for an Erasmus grant to Sweden. She spent one semester there, relying on everyday communication only on her English skills during her studies, since there was nobody there who spoke Polish.

As a conclusion to this paper, Magdalena's letter written in the first month of her stay in Sweden will be presented. Written English plays the role of a life-saving tool – only thanks to it Magdalena was able to present her problem and ask for the service that may improve – or make possible – her studying. Magdalena reached her goal. Not only did she present a mature assertive attitude, but also proved that she reached the utmost aim of foreign language learning – namely she can use it as means for solving life problems, and her English was accepted as such a tool.

**From:** Magdalena Rosowicz  
**Sent:** Monday, September 12, 2011 7:16 PM  
**To:** XXXX  
**Subject:** erasmus student with hearing loss

Dear XXXX,

As for my studying at XXXX University I would like to inform you that I am in a great need for a note-taking service.

The professors are very nice and they give me some written materials, but I think it is not enough for me to study successfully.

Just to give you an example: I had a lecture last Wednesday. The lecture seemed to be very interesting. It was introduction to a Swedish university. The lecturer screened her presentation which was sent to me. However, the presentation included only some short points which were broadly explained orally to students. I could not understand anything. As I comprehended, lecturer explained through 2 hours about, among others, how should we talk with Swedish, what is Sweden known for? Etc. These above pieces of information are the tips which I would like to know. I received the presentation from a lecturer, but still my knowledge is not satisfying. I might just as well not to be present in the lecturer. Of course, the lecturer wrote that if I have any question, I can ask, but it is not the same. I still won't have the same knowledge as my hearing mates. I have to admit that I felt

very depressed during the lecture that I do not have the access to education and knowledge together with hearing students.

Apart from that, I have to mention that classes are based on discussion and I cannot follow the discussion, because of my hearing loss. Discussion during classes enables hearing students to understand the material. Information uttered by students/lectures could be very valuable tips and helpful information. Only having detailed notes from each classes I could fully use them.

Therefore, I wish to inform you that I need a note-taking service, as it was established between my university International Office and your office before my coming here. I need a person who could write the whole sequence of classes, preferably on a computer so as they could be saved for further repetition. It could be speech-to-text or a person who could quickly write on notebook/laptop.

I have contacted International Association of the Hard of Hearing people and I found out that the coordinator Monica S. at Stockholm University (is the person who has more information on speech-to-text interpreters and how to book them. I know they have those interpreters at the University of Stockholm, and Monica is the person to ask for more information. I hope you might be able to contact her.

I will be extremely grateful for a positive answer for my letter. If necessary, I can provide you with more information. I hope I will be able to use the note taking service at your university soon.

I am looking forward to hearing from you

Best regards,

Magdalena Rosowicz

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## Pisanie w języku angielskim przez polskich uczniów i studentów niesłyszących i słabosłyszących

### Streszczenie

Znajomość języka angielskiego jest współcześnie koniecznością dla każdego, kto chce osiągnąć dobre wykształcenie i być konkurencyjnym na rynku pracy. Dotyczy to szczególnie mieszkańców krajów Europy Środkowej. Jest to trend powszechny i obejmuje także grupę osób niesłyszących i słabosłyszących, którzy jednak, ze względu na swoją niepełnosprawność językową, mają szczególne trudności w zostaniu zaawansowanymi użytkownikami języka angielskiego. Jest im trudno słuchać rozmów i mówić w języku obcym, jednak są w stanie w dobrym stopniu opanować umiejętność pisanie w języku, którego się uczą.

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie osób z uszkodzeniem słuchu jako kompetentnych użytkowników pisanej formy języka obcego. W artykule opisano zarówno teoretyczne przesłanki tej rzeczywistości, jak i wyniki kilku badań pilotażowych, prowadzonych w ostatnich latach przez autorkę artykułu.

Nauczanie języka obcego uczniów i studentów niesłyszących i słabosłyszących jest obecnie obowiązkowe dla uczniów niesłyszących i słabo słyszących na każdym etapie edukacji. Osoby niesłyszące i słabosłyszące kończące liceum zdają maturę z języka obcego, z wykorzystaniem specjalnie dostosowanych arkuszy. Nauczanie języków obcych prowadzone jest także w uczelniach wyższych. Przykładem może być lektorat dla studentów niesłyszących i słabosłyszących w KUL. Zajęcia prowadzone są w małych grupach 2-3 osobowych przez 90 minut tygodniowo i trwają tak długo, jak długo student chce uczyć się

języka obcego (maksymalnie 10 semestrów). Nauczyciel nie tylko uczy, ale pełni różne funkcje: tłumacza, powiernika, nauczyciela tłumaczącego wiedzę ogólną, terapeuty mowy.

Badania pilotażowe nad sprawnością pisania w języku obcym prowadzone były przez autorkę artykułu w różnych grupach. W badaniach w szkołach podstawowych (Domagała-Zyśk 2012a) uczestniczyło 78 uczniów z klas IV-VI szkół specjalnych. 33% określiło siebie jako niesłyszący, zaś 67% jako słabosłyszący. Z tej grupy 39 osób (50%) przygotowało wypowiedzi pisemne w ramach 5 tematów: *Ja, Moja rodzina, Jedzenie, Zwierzęta, Pogoda*. Uczniowie przygotowali razem 265 zdań, spośród których 53% było gramatycznie poprawnych. Najczęstsze błędy dotyczyły szyku zdania (16,6%), nieprawidłowego użycia czasów (16,4%), przedimków (15,6%), brak formy liczby mnogiej (13,6%), stosowania przymiotników (8,8%) oraz używania słów polskich zamiast angielskich (8,8%).

Drugie badania (Domagała-Zyśk 2012b) dotyczyły uczniów gimnazjum. Wzięło w nich udział 124 osoby, 58% określiło siebie jako słabosłyszący, zaś 33% jako niesłyszący. 30% komunikuje się w języku migowym, 42% używa mowy i języka migowego, zaś 11% posługuje się tylko mową. Zadaniem uczniów było przygotowanie listu do przyjaciela opisującego autora listu, jego rodzinę, zainteresowania i plany i zadanie to wykonało w stopniu umożliwiającym analizę 36 (29%) uczestników badania. 11 osób przygotowało pracę na podstawowym poziomie, każda z nich składała się średnio z 3,14 prostych zdań (np. *I am Ula R. I has 5 four family. I don't like go bike* (G34). Siedem prac zaliczono do drugiej kategorii. Każda składała się z średnio 7,6 prostych zdań (np. *My name is Aldona. My surname is K. I am thirteen years old. My favourite animals are dog and cat. I have got family. I have got sister. My sister name is Julia. My parents are nice. My favourite ło przygotowani sports are swimming and volleyball.* (G5)). 19 uczniów przygotowało prace należące do 3 kategorii, odpowiednio długie i zawierające zróżnicowane słownictwo i struktury gramatyczne (np. *Dear Yasser, My name is Sara. I live in Łodz. I am 15. I haven't got any sister or brother. I like playing computer games, watch TV and reading „Manga”. I like cats and dogs. I have a cat. I want to go on my Holiday to Egypt lub Japonii. The weateher is dark and sunny. I hate eating meat. Pa, amios).*

Kolejne badania dotyczyły niesłyszących i słabo słyszących studentów. W pierwszym z nich (Domagała-Zyśk 2012c) analizowano prace pisemne niesłyszących I studentów uniwersytetu z prelingwalnym znacznym i głębokim ubytkiem słuchu. Przygotowane przez studentów prace analizowano pod kątem rodzaju trudności doświadczanych przez studentów w pisaniu, do najważniejszych nich zaliczono: używanie słów nieprawidłowych w danym kontekście, błędy w używaniu przedimków, błędy w różnicowaniu rzeczowników policzalnych i niepoliczalnych, błędy w poprawnym zapisie słów. Czwarte studium dotyczyło analizy jakościowej prac przygotowanych przez niesłyszących studentów. Zwrócono w niej uwagę, że prace studentów niesłyszących, nawet jeśli zawierają błędy językowe, zasadniczo osiągają cel komunikacyjny, który jest naczelnym zadaniem nauczania i uczenia się języka obcego.

W zakończeniu artykułu wykorzystano list niesłyszącej polskiej studentki, która wyjechała na wymianę w ramach programu Erasmus. Zaprezentowany list świadczy o tym, że osoby niesłyszące, pomimo ogromnych trudności językowych – zwłaszcza na pierwszych etapach edukacji, są w stanie radzić sobie z uczeniem się języka obcego i wykorzystywać go w realnej komunikacji w dorosłym życiu.





# Cued Speech as an empirically-based approach to teaching English as a foreign Language to hard of hearing students

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## Abstract

At John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, many students with hearing impairment have expressed interest in attending English for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing classes. Because the curricular objectives for regular foreign language courses put emphasis on perfecting such language skills as speaking (and pronunciation), listening comprehension, reading and writing, most deaf and hard of hearing students have complained of failing to understand the linguistic and topical content of the lessons and of being marginalized in the classroom. Since the main purpose of Cued Speech is to facilitate access to the spoken language, it can be used as a tool for developing both receptive and productive language skills. This paper presents an empirically-based approach to foreign language instruction that incorporates Cued Speech as one of the modes of communication used in the classroom.

Keywords: hard of hearing, Cued Speech, English as a foreign language instruction, language skills

## Introduction

Every few years, new foreign language teaching approaches arrive on the scene. There has been a tendency historically to promote them as more effective than those that have preceded them. To give an example, one approach to teaching may emphasize the value of using analytical procedures that focus on the explanation of grammar rules while another stresses the importance of direct and spontaneous communication between learners. Teaching English as a foreign language to students who are

hard of hearing presents considerable challenges. The traditional Grammar Translation approach<sup>1</sup> can be implemented through extensive use of visual media (realia, wall pictures, flashcards, Cuisenaire rods<sup>2</sup>, computer-based presentation technology, etc.). Fingerspelling<sup>3</sup> can be used to convey graphemic information about the English language. Gaps in deaf and hard of hearing students' conceptual knowledge can be filled through the use of Polish Sign Language. However, the development of conversational skills and strategies and the acquisition of phonological information about English present more difficulties. Since Cued Speech represents spoken language visually in real time, it can be used as a tool for developing the aforementioned skills. The way to evaluate the extent to which various language teaching approaches can be applied to foreign language instruction for students with hearing impairment is to derive appropriate classroom practices from empirical evidence on the nature of language acquisition and use and from insights into what brings about positive changes in hard of hearing students' learning. The empirical database for this paper is derived from observations and transcripts from *English for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing* classes at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin.

### English for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Classes at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

*English for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing* classes have been conducted at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin since 1998. They were set up on the initiative of Ewa Domagała-Zyśk, (cf. Domagała-Zyśk 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Podlewska 2012). The classes are taught in small groups or on a one-to-one basis by a teacher/translator whose primary tasks include making the content of each lesson more accessible. Thus various methods of communication are used during classes, from

<sup>1</sup> An approach to foreign language teaching which is characterized by the explicit instruction of grammatical rules, followed by the application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences from the target language (L2) back to the students' first language (L1) and vice versa. It hence views language learning as consisting mainly of memorizing rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the foreign language. The goal of foreign language study is to pass an examination rather than to use the language for daily communicative interaction. Consequently, Grammar Translation gives little if any consideration to speaking or listening. For a more detailed analysis, see Howatt (1984) and Kelly (1969).

<sup>2</sup> Small blocks of wood originally designed for maths teaching by the Belgian educator Caleb Gattegno. Cuisenaire rods are useful for demonstrating a whole range of semantic and syntactic areas, particularly with people who respond well to visual and kinaesthetic activities.

<sup>3</sup> One of the four options for conveying traditionally-spoken languages to the deaf conversationally in face-to-face interactions. American English fingerspelling uses 26 handshapes on a single hand to represent the 26 English graphemes (letters of the alphabet).

speaking clearly and lipreading, gesticulating wildly and giving students step-by-step instructions in Polish Sign Language, to using Cued Speech. The regular feedback provided by our students towards the end of each semester shows that they find these methods of communication both helpful and satisfactory (cf. Podlewska 2012).

The classroom was adapted to hard of hearing students' needs. Since the microphones in hearing aids and cochlear implants pick up and amplify all sounds and not just the speaker's voice, day to day management of the listening environment is of primary importance. In an effort to make sure that the acoustics of the room are acoustics as good as possible background noise levels<sup>4</sup> and reverberation time<sup>5</sup> were reduced to a minimum. The hard surfaces in the room were softened with carpets, soft wall coverings and blinds. The students are encouraged to develop values that ensure noise is kept low. Moreover, they are always positioned near the speaker.

During the 2011-2012 academic year a total of eleven hard of hearing students were enrolled in the class for a variety of reasons: to pass examinations and get the necessary credits, to travel in anglophone countries, to be able to actively participate in international conferences and workshops, to learn a new language and culture. Throughout the University the students have varying degrees of language ability in English and of hearing loss: between 70 and 100 dB in both ears. To assess students' foreign language backgrounds, a Beginning English Inventory (see Appendix A) was developed. Respondents were asked to address detailed questions or to tick their response from the following options: very well, well, average, a little, not at all. The directions for completing the items were given in Polish. Participants were allowed approximately 10 seconds to write or tick their response on the form provided. Of the ten students who completed the form, six rated their ability to read, write or speak English as either "average" (2 students) or "a little" (4 students). All students rated their ability to read, write, or speak Polish as "very well" or "well". Eight of these students indicated an ability to read, write, or speak one or more of the following languages: Polish Sign Language (3), German (4), Latin (1), Italian (1). Two students indicated that they did not know any other foreign languages. None of the students enrolled in *English for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing* class had prior exposure to British Cued Speech. Two students indicated some exposure to the Polish adaptation of Cued Speech, *Fonogesty*, but were not proficient users of the system.

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<sup>4</sup> Background noise – the amount of noise going on in a room before the conversation or listening takes place. The most common sources of classroom background noise include: air conditioning systems, lights, computers, projectors, traffic and people.

<sup>5</sup> Reverberation – the length of time it takes for a sound to die away. Short reverberation times can make a voice easier to hear.

## Background to the general use of Cued Speech

Cued Speech is a visual communication system which employs eight handshapes and four hand locations to supplement the visual manifestation of normal speech making spoken language visually clear on the levels of phonemes – the smallest meaningful units in the sound system of a language, morphemes – the combination of phonemes into meaningful elements, syntax – the arrangement of words in sentences, semantics – conveying the relationships between linguistic forms and meaning, duration, stress and, if needed, intonation (see Figure 1). The system can also help to facilitate the development of the pragmatic uses of language as well as the use of different registers for a variety of communicative circumstances and interlocutors.

## The use of Cued Speech at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

Although Cued Speech was originally devised to give the deaf and hard of hearing access to spoken language by conveying all the necessary building blocks, the system has also proved to be a useful tool for focusing on developing specific language skills such as speech production, extensive and intensive listening and literacy. At John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin cueing is used with deaf and hard of hearing adult students, who have not received Cued Speech before, to speed up communication in their instruction, to help them to clarify their articulation, to minimize the frequency of phonetic errors occurrence and to ease the strain of lipreading. It was necessary therefore to create a new approach to accessing English with cued English<sup>6</sup> to match the needs of the students at the University.

## Introducing Cued Speech to students

The idea of facilitating the process of learning English as a foreign language through cueing is gradually introduced to the first year students during a workshop aimed at explaining the fundamental principles of the system, its advantages and

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<sup>6</sup> Cued English – the term referring to Cued Speech used with the English language (just as cued Polish means Cued Speech used with the Polish language). Even though a cued language and a traditionally spoken language can co-occur, neither hearing nor speech is necessary for the reception or expression of cued language.

history. The introductory workshop always provokes an open discussion of the issues involved in foreign language learning and hearing impairment. A lot of hard of hearing students complain of having very limited access to natural settings for language learning such as exposure to the language outside the classroom. The same students admit that they are frustrated with their mainstream school English teachers who frequently modify the way they speak when addressing the hard of hearing learners. Hard of hearing-directed speech involves a much slower rate of delivery, shouting, shorter, simpler sentence patterns, repetition, and paraphrase and is counterproductive, as it uses unnatural lipshapes and grammar structures. The students often express the need to master the sounds and pronunciation of the target language. One of their most important learning goals is to develop communicative effectiveness and intelligibility. The workshop participants quickly realize that Cued Speech can cater for all the aforementioned needs and are usually willing to try this new approach to foreign language learning.

## Learning to cue

Materials and lessons are planned to gradually introduce students to the eight handshapes and four placements employed by the system in order from the most commonly used phonemes to the least commonly used ones:

- Handshape 5: /t, m, f/ and mouth placement: /i:, ɔ:, ʌ/
- Handshape 3: /h, s, r/ and chin placement: /e, v, u:/
- Handshape 2: /k, v, ð, z/
- Handshape 4: /b, n/ and throat placement: /ʊ, ɪ, æ/
- Handshape 1: /p, d, ʒ/ and side placements: /ɑ:, ə:/ and /ə/
- Handshape 6: /w, l, ʃ/
- Handshape 7: /ŋ, g, dʒ/
- Handshape 8: /tʃ, ŋ, j/
- Diphthongs: /eɪ, ɔɪ, eə, ɪə, ʊə, aɪ, əʊ, aʊ/.

Right from the start the class teacher adds some cued words to the vocabulary used every day such as: 'hello', 'goodbye', students' names, simple instructions and incorporates some of the topic vocabulary where possible. As students become more confident with the Cued Speech system, they are asked to tackle simple and complex phoneme-specific tasks.

## English for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing classroom in action

As has already been stated, in order to place English for the hard of hearing methodology on an empirical footing, one has to observe, document, and analyse what goes on in their classroom and other classrooms catering for the needs of students with hearing impairment. The author of this paper has attempted to go some way towards grounding her methodological practices in the day-to-day reality of her classroom by collecting real classroom data. The following transcript has been taken from a lesson with four pre-intermediate hard of hearing students. The extract is based on a pronunciation practice task. In the previous lesson the students were introduced to vocabulary related to the body. In the present lesson the pronunciation focus provides the context for revising all recently encountered lexical items. The students' task is to match words with single vowel sounds to their phonetic symbol using dominoes. They have been divided into two groups of two students (S1 + S2 and S3 + S4). Each group has been given the following set of dominoes<sup>7</sup>:

/i:/	B <u>ODY</u>	/ɒ /	LIPS	/ɪ/	ARMS
/ɑɪ/	ST <u>OMACH</u>	/ʌ/	TOOTH	/u:/	BACK
/æ/	WALK	/ɔɪ/	ST <u>ERNUM</u>	/ʒi:/	FING <u>ER</u>
/ə/	HEAD	/e/	FOOT	/ʊ/	CHEEK
/i:/	SPOT	/ɒ /	WRIST	/ɪ/	HEART
/ɑɪ/	TONGUE	/ʌ/	SHOE	/u:/	HAND
/æ/	TALK	/ɔɪ/	FIRM	/ʒi:/	SHOUL <u>DER</u>
/ə/	NECK	/e/	<u>BULL'S</u> EYE	/ʊ/	KNEE

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from *Inside Out* upper intermediate Resource Pack.

The students have been told to play a game of dominoes where single vowel phonetic symbols are connected to words which contain that single vowel sound. Each student in the group has the same number of dominoes. The one who has the domino with ‘body’ is to start the game by placing this domino on the table. The students take turns to try to dispose of their dominoes. Before placing their domino on the table, the member of the opposite team has to cue the word. If one does not have a domino that matches a particular IPA symbol, they miss a turn. The first pair to play all their dominoes wins. Having divided the dominoes, the students decide to start the game. All four of them are sitting in the middle of the classroom facing each other across a desk.

Student 1: I have body. We start.

[Student 1 places her domino on the table.]

S1: Your turn.

[Students 3 and 4 take a look at their dominoes.]

S4: *Mam!* (Polish for “I’ve got it!”)

[Student 4 attempts at cueing ‘body’ by subsequently placing handshapes 4 and 1 at the mouth location. She says each sound aloud as she cues it: /bɔɪdi/. Finally, she places the domino with /ɔɪ/ sound next to the domino with ‘body’. One of the members of the opposite team objects to this decision.]

S2: No! It should be short, on the chin. *Proszę Pani, mam rację?* (Polish for “Miss, am I right?”)

Teacher: Can you cue ‘body’ for me?

[Student 2 cues ‘body’ by subsequently placing handshape 4 on the chin and handshape 1 at the mouth. She cues and speaks at the same time: /bodi/. The student substitutes the apparently same-sounding Polish /o/ for the English /ɔ/. Since Polish learners tend to exaggerate the lowering of the tongue when trying to articulate the English /ɔ/, with the result sounding more like the Polish /a/ or the English /ʌ/, and because neither of these is better auditorily than the Polish /o/, the teacher does not comment on the pronunciation.]

Teacher: Perfect cues! Good for you!

[Student 4, then, experiences a ‘lightbulb’ moment when she realizes that certain words have individual phonemes in common.]

Student 4: Body, body... /ɔ/ as in ‘what’.

Teacher: That’s right! Let’s cue and say ‘body’.

[All four students and the teacher cue and say ‘body’ (4c 1m).<sup>8</sup>]

Teacher: Now, let’s cue and say ‘what’.

[All four students and the teacher cue and say ‘what’ (6c 5s).]

Teacher: What other spellings for the /ɔ/ sound can you think of?

<sup>8</sup> Cued Speech handshapes and positions can be written using Cue Notation. Cue Notation uses numbers for the handshapes and letters for the placements around the mouth.

[The students do not seem to understand the question. The teacher repeats the question and cues it at the same time.]

Student 3: I don't know.

Teacher: Go to page 157. Take a look at the Sound Bank.<sup>9</sup>

Student 1: Because.

Teacher: That's right! The most typical spelling is...

Student 2: o.

Teacher: Yes, but also...

Student 3: au.

Teacher: Yes, and...

Student 3: and a as in 'what'.

Teacher: Well done! Now, get back to the game.

Like most extracts, the one presented above could provide analytical data for various aspects of language learning and teaching and become a means of professional development. To give an example, it could be used to illustrate the way in which hard of hearing learners of English as a foreign language can be stimulated to master a consistent coding system for referring to sound units. In the long run real classroom data should also become a basis of learning tasks and foreign language teaching materials and their adaptations for use with deaf and hard of hearing students.

## Cued Speech and teaching language skills

As an experienced teacher of students with hearing impairment, the author of this paper feels that, if learners are to make maximum use of cues for understanding English, Cued Speech must be incorporated into all segments of the foreign language instruction process. If the system is not introduced to students in a systematic fashion, they might have no incentive to expend the time and effort necessary to achieve fluency. That is why Cued Speech use should parallel listening, speaking, and other language skills currently taught in class.

## Cued Speech and listening comprehension

CDs containing listening practice, pronunciation work and recordings of some of the reading texts have now become a basic component of every English course available on the market and an indispensable educational aid. They help foreign lan-

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<sup>9</sup> A four-page section of the *New English File* student's book with the *English File* sounds chart and typical spellings for all sounds.



guage learners improve their listening skills and are the source of valuable language input. Sadly they are not useful to students with hearing impairment. Teachers who instruct students with this type of disability and want to help them improve all language skills, including listening and speaking, face the necessity of adapting class listening material to the format suitable for their needs. Skipping an exercise based on a recording as a form of "adaptation" will inevitably lead to serious alterations in the methodological conception of a course book. It would also considerably reduce the number of tasks to be completed by the students. Reading tapescripts instead of listening to the recordings does not offer a real solution either as it shifts the focus of language skill development from one skill to another.

One way to prepare a useful adaptation of class audio listening material is by recording videos for each tapescript featuring cueing native speakers of English. A video recording of audio class listening material can be prepared with the help of just one teacher or native speaker of English who is a fluent Cued Speech user willing to become an actor/ interpreter. A video recording participant can either read or recite from memory the lines of two interlocutors using his/her left and right hand alternately.

Adapting audio material to the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students does not pose a serious technical problem. The basic equipment needed is: a digital video camcorder, a DV cable, a Mini DV cassette and a computer equipped with an IEEE1394 (DV) terminal or IEEE 1394 capture board. The editing software supplied with the computer/ capture board can be used to transfer video recordings from tape to computer. A driver is preinstalled on a Windows operating system later than Windows 98 Second Edition and Mac operating systems later than Mac OS 9, and will be installed automatically.

Adaptations of audio material take time to prepare, but they do have the advantage of being reusable. They can be transferred to students' computers by means of a USB flash drive. In this way, it is possible for deaf learners to watch the recordings repeatedly at home for specific information they missed during classes. Students should also be provided with video clip worksheets to be done as homework.

## Cued Speech and mastering the sounds of the language

The ultimate aim of most students, and hard of hearing students are no exception, is to be able to communicate in the language they spend so much time trying to acquire. Correct pronunciation is one of the conditions of effective communication. Deaf and hard of hearing learners of English in Poland are often frustrated by English pronunciation, particularly the sound-spelling relationships. They try to speak English using Polish sounds. They often do so not because they are incapable

of articulating English sounds, but because they are unaware that the two languages differ in this respect.

In recent years, the potential for deaf and hard of hearing students to develop and use spoken language has improved noticeably. The two main factors responsible for this improvement are technology and teaching/ learning methods. At John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin the 44 vowel and consonant sounds of English are introduced to deaf students systematically through sound grids<sup>10</sup> (see Figure 2), which give clear example words to help students to identify and pronounce the sounds. Filling out sound grids involves providing English equivalents of Polish vocabulary items, fingerspelling English words, determining how many letters, sounds and syllables there are in a given word, putting it down in phonetic spelling and cuescript<sup>11</sup> and finding sample words that use the same spelling options for each of the sounds in a given word.

Sound grids make students comprehend the concept of there being one phoneme, e.g. /ɜ:/ but often more than one letter to represent it, e.g. the digraph 'er' in 'verb' or the trigraph 'ear' in 'learn'. Breaking words down into consonant and vowel blocks and putting them back together helps deaf learners realise that a single graph can make different sounds in different words, e.g. 's' in 'smoke' is making a /s/ sound but in 'music' it is making a /z/ sound.

## Course evaluation

At the end of each academic year, all *English for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing* class participants complete the class evaluation form. Last year nine out of eleven students agreed that learning Cued Speech was helpful. During the first two months, however, some students needed encouragement to push themselves to use the system and the new language that they were learning. Pronunciation practice exercises such as filling in sound grids were rated as particularly useful for building on the students' awareness of sound-spelling relationships, weak forms, and silent letters. Students also reported the confidence-building role of frequent exposure to adapted listening comprehension materials.

<sup>10</sup> Sound grids were first developed by Cate Calder, the Cued Speech Association UK's tutor. The author of this paper made a couple of changes to the original model (e.g. putting words down in phonetic spelling, using *New English File* course books as a source of sample words) to make it ideally suited to her teaching agenda.

<sup>11</sup> Cuescript – a diagrammatic way of illustrating the handshapes and hand placements of Cued Speech. For instance the handshape which uses only the index finger is shown by the symbol which uses one horizontal line.

## Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, I should like to highlight the importance of an empirically based approach to language teaching methodology. Comprehensive accounts of English for the hard of hearing classrooms in action illuminate a number of pedagogical and methodological concerns. The differences in speech perception and spoken language performance among hard of hearing students cannot be attributable solely to the high quality of amplification devices or cochlear implants that some of them use. Together with other factors foreign language teaching programs can either promote or hinder learning regardless of a student's degree of hearing loss or type of amplification used. Cued Speech enhanced instruction has proved to be beneficial to the extent that a substantial proportion of hard of hearing students can achieve highly intelligible speech and good speech perception scores. Adaptations of class audio listening material make various types of linguistic input accessible to learners with hearing impairment and thus facilitate constructive and interpretative work in which hard of hearing listeners integrate what they hear with what they know about the world. Since late and limited exposure to Cued Speech can positively influence the development of language skills of hard of hearing adult students, future work with younger participant samples could prove even more effective. Students need sufficient time to comprehend and internalize the concept of the system, and to build up speed and fluency in executing the cues. Finally, learning both Cued Speech and a foreign language requires teachers' and students' commitment to practice in more natural settings outside the classroom.

## Appendix A

### Beginning English Inventory

#### Information about the student

1. Why do you want to learn English?  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you know any foreign language(s) other than English?  yes  no

If yes, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where did you learn the other foreign language(s)?

at High School

from a private tutor

from my parents/siblings

other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do your parents/siblings speak a foreign language?  yes  no  
If yes, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you familiar with Cued Speech?  yes  no
6. Are you familiar with *Fonogesty*?  yes  no
7. What degree of hearing loss do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

Tick one answer.

Polish skills

1. I am able to read Polish:  
 very well  well  average  a little  not at all
2. I am able to write Polish:  
 very well  well  average  a little  not at all
3. I am able to speak Polish:  
 very well  well  average  a little  not at all

English skills

1. I am able to read English:  
 very well  well  average  a little  not at all
2. I am able to write English:  
 very well  well  average  a little  not at all
3. I am able to speak English:  
 very well  well  average  a little  not at all

Other foreign language skills

If you know any foreign language(s) other than English, please complete this section.

1. I am able to read \_\_\_\_\_:  
List names of other foreign languages  
 very well  well  average  a little  not at all
2. I am able to write \_\_\_\_\_:  
List names of other foreign languages  
 very well  well  average  a little  not at all
3. I am able to speak \_\_\_\_\_:  
List names of other foreign languages  
 very well  well  average  a little  not at all

Appendix B

English for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Class Evaluation

1. Learning Cued Speech was helpful in acquiring English.  
strongly agree   agree   no opinion   disagree   strongly disagree

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2. Using classroom materials that allow for visual presentation and practice of Cued Speech was helpful.

strongly agree    agree    no opinion    disagree    strongly disagree

3. Practising pronunciation was helpful.

strongly agree    agree    no opinion    disagree    strongly disagree

4. Filling in sound grids was helpful.

strongly agree    agree    no opinion    disagree    strongly disagree

5. Listening comprehension exercises were helpful.

strongly agree    agree    no opinion    disagree    strongly disagree

6. Adapted audio class listening materials were useful.

strongly agree    agree    no opinion    disagree    strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

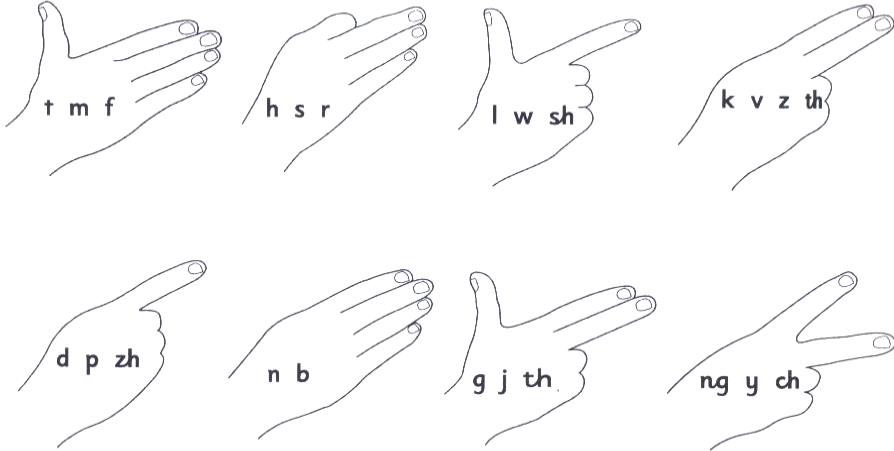
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

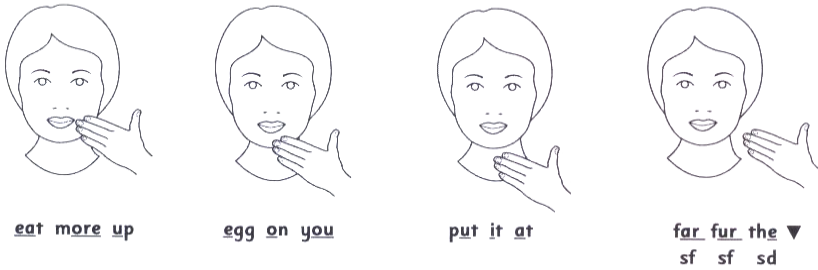
\_\_\_\_\_

# Cued Speech Chart

Handshapes show consonant sounds



Hand positions show vowel sounds



Diphthongs

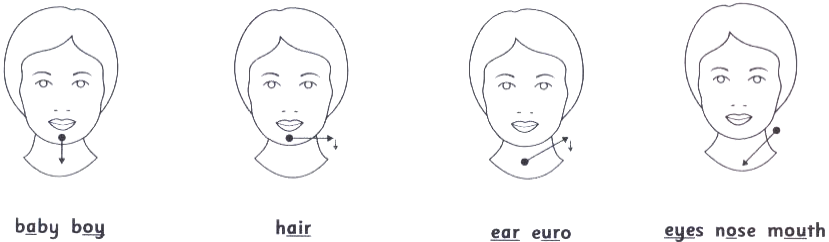


Figure 1. The current British English cue chart, as disseminated by the Cued Speech Association UK.









Word in Polish: ROWER								
English equivalent: BIKE								
FINGER SPELLING					NUMBER OF LETTERS	NUMBER OF SOUNDS	NUMBER OF SYLLABLES	
					4	3	1	
SAMPLE WORDS	<u>ba</u> g	sm <u>i</u> le	<u>ke</u> y	sm <u>i</u> le				
SPELLING OPTION	<u>c</u> b	<u>v</u> i	<u>c</u> k	<u>v</u> e				
I.P.A	b	aɪ	k					
 CUESCRIPT (SOUNDS)	 s	st	 s					
 CUESCRIPT (WHOLE WORD)	 st  s							
								

Figure 2. A sound grid

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# From a blackboard to an interactive whiteboard. Teaching English as a foreign language to deaf and hard of hearing students at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

Anna Nabiałek

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## Abstract

In this article the author wishes to present the assumptions, schemes of work and some aspects of teaching English as a foreign language to Deaf/ deaf and hard of hearing students of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

**Key words:** Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing students, teaching/learning English, sign language, multimedia laboratory, interactive whiteboard, individual approach, visual techniques.

The establishment of both the language course for hearing-impaired people studying at our university and a modern, excellently equipped multimedia laboratory was initiated by Mr. Roman Durda, M.A., the rector's representative for students with disabilities. With great support of the rectoral services, a specialist outline for the English language course for students with hearing impairment of all faculties of AMU was very quickly developed by two English teachers of the university: Anna Nabiałek, M.A. and Izabela Komar-Szulczyńska, M.A.

The English language course assumptions are as follows:

1. The language is taught over 6 semesters (360 hours), with 4 teaching hours per week (2 x 2x45 minutes).
2. The classes are conducted in two modules:
  - for hearing-impaired students (instructor – Izabela Komar-Szulczyńska)
  - for deaf students who use the Polish or manually-coded sign language (instructor – Anna Nabiałek) with interpretation from sign language (Joanna Nehring, M.A.).

3. The course ends with a written exam at least at the A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.
4. The number of students in a group (2-4) is adjusted to the students' needs and degree of hearing impairment. It is also assumed that individual instruction will be possible in exceptional cases.
5. Implementation of the course is based on the material of the Pearson Longman course books *Total English* and *Language Leader*, as well as *Total English Digital* and *Language Leader Digital* – interactive whiteboard software, and is supplemented with texts and exercises supplied to the students in the form of photocopies and online techniques, taking into account the specificity and the needs of hearing-impaired people. Further modification possibilities depend on the learners' competence and the teachers' choice. The course can also be implemented on the basis of other course books.
6. The use of the VIDEODIDACT computer system and diverse visualisation techniques, in particular multimedia ones, that enable the best possible conveyance, establishment and verification of knowledge.

The following instructional objectives were also adopted:

1. Learning the English language to the degree of enabling independent reading of original texts
2. Conveyance of the basic knowledge of English speaking countries (including everyday life, geography, culture and customs, writers of prose and poetry...)
3. Teaching the use of various grammar books and dictionaries, both in book form and online, taking into account the specificity of the use of the phonetic alphabet by hearing-impaired people
4. Teaching and perfecting the correctness and clarity of written texts and utterances
5. Working on understandable pronunciation as our students constantly insist on learning spoken English as much as possible

The main centre the experiences of which we employed was the Podlasie Academy in Siedlce, now Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, where the instructors from Poznań encountered teaching English to hearing-impaired students for the first time. During the Integration Days in May 2008, Ms. Beata Gulati, M.A., the rector's representative and director of the Centre for Instruction and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities of the Podlasie Academy, familiarised us with teaching-related solutions and the use of the interactive whiteboard. We also had the opportunity to share opinions and hold discussions with representatives of Student Disability Services of the universities of Oxford and Edinburgh, as well as Professor Allan Hurst from Preston.

When developing the format of the course, we also made use of the experiences of excellent specialists in the field, such as Professor Daniela Janakova, the director of the Language Resource Centre, Faculty of Arts, Charles University of Prague, who invited us to the Czech Republic in April 2009 to participate in English lan-

guage classes with hearing-impaired students and to familiarise us with the specialist equipment. Thanks to the visit, not only was cooperation between the universities established in the field of teaching English to hearing-impaired students, but we also had the opportunity to meet an exceptional woman, a teacher with extraordinary personality, Professor Daniela Janakova and her colleagues fully involved in instructional issues: Maria Dolezalova and Jakub Janak. We hope to start cooperation with other universities such as Masaryk University in Brno, the Czech Republic, and the John Paul II University of Lublin (KUL) in Poland.

To meet the formidable challenge of organising and conducting a course for hearing-impaired people, during the classes I started to learn Polish sign language by participation as an auditor in the undergraduate course. I also completed the elementary sign language course for civil service employees passing the examination with a very good grade and distinction in June 2008. To my surprise, the Language and Sign System (System Językowo-Migowy, SJM) I learned turned out not to be the natural language of the Deaf. SJM is actually a visual representation of the Polish language, a set of manual signs following the grammatical rules of Polish. Used by the majority of 'sign-language interpreters' in Poland and seen, for example, on television, SJM is often confused with Polish Sign Language (Polski Język Migowy, PJM), the natural language of the Deaf community.

Trying to avoid this confusion I took part in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the Summer School of Polish Sign Language (Polski Język Migowy, PJM), organised in Cracow by the Sign Language Educational Centre of the Polish Deaf Society in July 2009. The main assumptions of the School, which lasted almost three weeks, were:

- perfecting communication skills when using PJM in various language situations (24 instructors – culturally Deaf people)
- development of metalinguistic competence (knowledge about the language)
- extension of the knowledge of the Deaf Culture (language differences, historical awareness, habits, values, humour, poetical expression, artistic activity); it was emphasised that PJM is a cultural identifier of the Polish Deaf community and that the Deaf are in all respects a people culturally belonging to a community which is a language minority.
- development of the skill to hold conversations in PJM with culturally Deaf people

I perceived all of the assumptions as exceptionally important for working with hearing-impaired students, who, apart from SJM acquired by them at school, most often naturally communicate in PJM among themselves.

Analysing my experiences and translating them into preparation for teaching the English language, I noticed the need to redefine the concepts of "mother tongue" and "foreign language" with reference to deaf students. For, depending on the kind and degree of hearing-impairment, as well as the family and school situation, hearing-impaired people communicate in different ways: with the use of the signs of the natural sign language, verbally, using the Polish language and reading the words from the

lips of the interlocutor, or verbally in the Polish language using SJM at the same time. Yet all of them use Polish in writing, which is the basis for claims of deaf people's bilingualism. Not infrequently does it happen that hearing-impaired people cannot indicate whether sign language or the Polish language is their mother tongue, and which one they learned as a foreign language. The studies of Ewa Domagała-Zyśk, Ph.D., (2004) from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, and her definition of the concept of surdoglottodidactics were of much assistance when looking for an answer to this question.

The first examinations in English for hearing-impaired people were carried out at the university in Poznań in the 2009/2010 academic year. They were taken by six students: four people at the A2 level and two people at the B1 level. The obtained results (2 very good grades, 3 good grades and 1 sufficient grade) showed that hearing-impaired students not only are not behind, but with the application of appropriately selected instructional methods they may reach a level of command of English comparable to or even higher in some cases than those of students from 'regular' groups.

At present, English classes for our students are conducted in 6 groups:

- 3 groups for deaf people (levels A2 and B1)
- 3 groups for hearing-impaired students (levels A1, B1 and B2).

In addition, English classes were attended by one visually-impaired person and two people with other disabilities. In total, in the 2011/2012 academic year our course is attended by fifteen students from various faculties and studying for various degrees, from bachelor's to postgraduate, one person who studies extramurally, while two students, having passed the exam, returned to us selecting English as an optional subject.

The classes are held in an easily accessible modern multimedia laboratory, located on the ground floor, designed specially for people with hearing impairment. The room has been carefully sound-insulated and equipped with an audio induction loop, it has the right sound system and is well-lit. The oval table, at which we sit, enables close, direct contact. We see our faces and nobody is hidden behind anyone else.



Photo 1. Multimedia Foreign Language Laboratory and the youths who use it

What is an extremely important factor is the interactive whiteboard and the projector, both devices of the highest quality, enabling the conveyance of a great volume of diverse information in the visual manner, recording exercises or even whole classes and sending them to the students by email. Multimedia presentations are an invaluable technique, where ingenuity and skills of students often exceed our expectations and they themselves learn from each other, which is an important component (peer teaching) in the instructional process.

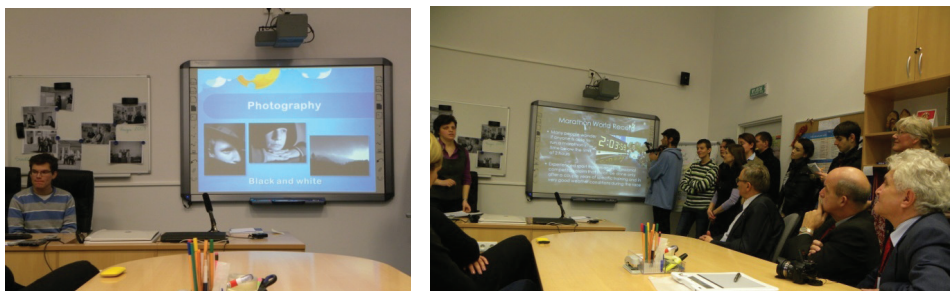


Photo 2 Two of the presentations during the official opening of the laboratory

What is just as important an ally is the Videodidact computer system connected to all computer stations (one of the stations has been designed for a person in a wheelchair). While students do an exercise, the instructor may use his or her computer to:

1. imperceptibly monitor their work switching to any station
2. block a student's keyboard and interfere with his or her actions, correct a detected error, e.g. using a different colour, or highlight an incorrect phrase
3. project an image of the screen of any station to the interactive whiteboard to, for instance, show to everyone and discuss an excellently done exercise.

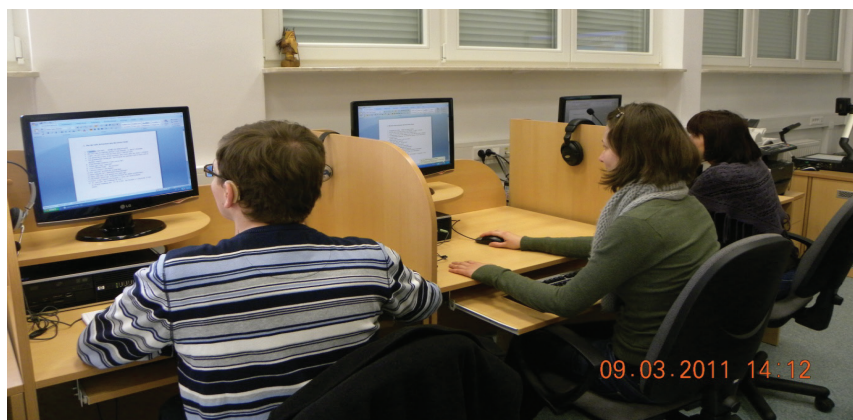


Photo 3 The students are doing the exercise simultaneously



Photo 4 *The device controlling the communication between computer stations*



Photo 5 *The author of the article is monitoring students' work on her computer screen*



Photo 6 *The exercise has been transferred to the interactive whiteboard*

We use the Videodidact system also as a form of internal chat when practising spontaneous utterances, or acting out scenes e.g. in a restaurant, on a street, in a shop, etc. Such recordings can be revisited later on, errors can be corrected, we can check what was properly formulated, doubts can be clarified.

Our laboratory is also equipped with many other devices facilitating the visualisation, communication, storage and transmission of information, such as: a cordless tablet, high quality headphones, scanners, photocopiers, projectors and flipcharts. There are also five magnetic boards to give all our students a chance to do the writing task simultaneously. It is very important to keep them active. We use movement and space. At the same time, we have not put aside traditional teaching aids, starting from pencils, crayons and felt-tip pens, to sheets of coloured and gray paper. In our study room there is a special library section with graded reading textbooks, various dictionaries of American and British English, the dictionary of Polish and System and Sign Language, course books with subtitled DVDs, books on the history and culture of English speaking countries, subtitled feature films and other materials. The collection expands year by year. We keep looking for new solutions and modify them, adjusting to the predispositions and learning strategies of particular students, applying an individual approach. What gave me great satisfaction was the statement by a student of the Law and Administration Faculty after three months of studying: *“at school, it was assigned-reproduced, nobody was interested in my problem, only here do I start to understand what English is about”*. Our students appreciate new ideas and make use of technical innovations. They feel at home in the laboratory, handle the equipment easily and they have even mastered the whiteboard calibration. Moreover, they themselves often inspire us as they are active and creative. They participate in classes very regularly, welcome the teachers in English and try to speak English whenever possible. I use English in contacts with the students also outside of the laboratory: in emails and text messages.

An important role in conducting classes is played by the sign language interpreter. Here, the area of activity significantly exceeds reproductive translation of the utterances of the instructor and students, but includes many elements of the work of a teacher assistant.

The theses put forward by Beata Gulati (2005) and Ewa Damagała-Zyśk (2004) on the qualities and significance of a foreign language course find confirmation. It is much more than only achieving a certain level of language skills. It creates an opportunity for the development of a deeper understanding of the surrounding reality and fuller participation in the culture created by both hearing and deaf people. It opens up new information channels (access to English language Internet, specialist foreign language articles), new entertainment and leisure opportunities, television programmes in English, films with subtitles, social networks, video games become available. Knowledge of a foreign language is an asset when looking for a job. Therefore, I hope that it will help our students in achieving a social, educational and professional success.

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## Strategie, które działają. Nauczanie języka angielskiego jako obcego niesłyszących i słabo słyszących studentów w Uniwersytecie Adama Mickiewicza

### Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono założenia, program i niektóre aspekty lektoratu języka angielskiego dla studentów niesłyszących i niedosłyszących Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu.

Inicjatorem powstania zarówno zajęć językowych dla osób z problemami słuchu studiujących na poznańskim uniwersytecie, jak i nowoczesnej, multimedialnej pracowni, był pan mgr Roman Durda, pełnomocnik rektora do spraw studentów niepełnosprawnych. Przy wsparciu władz rektorskich opracowany został specjalistyczny program nauczania języka angielskiego, autorstwa mgr Anny Nabiałek i mgr Izabeli Komar-Szulczyńskiej. Zajęcia prowadzone są w dwóch modułach: 1. Dla studentów niedosłyszących i 2. Dla studentów niesłyszących z udziałem tłumacza języka migowego. Liczba osób w grupie (1-4) dostosowana jest do potrzeb i stopnia dysfunkcji słuchu studentów. Lektorat kończy się egzaminem pisemnym na poziomie minimum A2 według Europejskiego Systemu Opisu Kształcenia Językowego. Realizacja programu oparta jest na materiałach z podręczników z oprogramowaniem do tablicy interaktywnej i jest uzupełniana tekstami i ćwiczeniami dostarczonymi studentom w formie kserokopii i online, uwzględniając specyfikę i potrzeby osób z dysfunkcją słuchu. Zakłada się wykorzystanie komputerowego systemu Videodidact oraz różnorodnych technik wizualizacyjnych, a zwłaszcza multimedialnych, umożliwiających jak najlepsze przekazywanie, utrwalanie i sprawdzanie wiedzy. Nakreślone zostały obszary działania: poznanie języka angielskiego w stopniu umożliwiającym samodzielną lekturę tekstów oryginalnych, nauczenie korzystania z różnych książkowych i internetowych gramatyk i słowników, przekazanie podstawowej wiedzy na temat krajów anglojęzycznych, nauczanie i doskonalenie poprawności i jasności wypowiedzi pisemnej i ustnej oraz praca nad zrozumiałą wymową.

Przy opracowywaniu kształtu zajęć korzystano z doświadczeń Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach i czeskiego Uniwersytetu Karola w Pradze, nawiązując także współpracę z Katolickim Uniwersytetem Lubelskim i Uniwersytetem Masaryka z Brna. Lektorka, Anna Nabiałek, przygotowująca się do prowadzenia zajęć ze studentami niesłyszącymi, ukończyła kurs Systemu Językowo-Migowego (2008) i uczestniczyła w I Letniej Szkole Polskiego Języka Migowego (2009), ucząc się PJM i pogłębiając wiedzę na temat społeczności Głuchych. W poszukiwaniu odpowiedzi na wiele pytań dużą pomocą były prace Ewy Domagały-Zyśk z Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.

Pierwsze egzaminy z lektoratu języka angielskiego dla osób z niepełnosprawnością słuchu zostały przeprowadzone w roku akademickim 2009/2010. Przystąpiło do niego szescioro studentów: cztery osoby na poziomie A2 i dwie osoby na poziomie B1. Uzyskane wyniki (2 oceny bardzo dobre, 3 oceny dobre i 1 ocena dostateczna) pokazały, że studenci z dysfunkcją słuchu nie tylko nie odstają, ale przy zastosowaniu odpowiednio dobranych metod dydaktycznych, mogą osiągnąć poziom znajomości języka angielskiego porównywalny ze studentami z regularnych grup lektoratowych. W roku akademickim, 2011/2012,

z lektoratu skorzystało piętnaścioro studentów w 5 grupach: 2 grupy dla niesłyszących (poziom A1 i B1) i 3 grupy dla niedosłyszących (poziom A1, B1 i B2). Oprócz tego na zajęcia z języka angielskiego uczęszczała jedna osoba niedowidząca i dwie osoby z innymi niepełnosprawnościami.

Zajęcia odbywają się w zaprojektowanej specjalnie z myślą o osobach z problemami słuchu, łatwo dostępnej, usytuowanej na parterze, nowoczesnej pracowni multimedialnej. Sala jest starannie wygłuszona i wyposażona w pętlę induktofoniczną, posiada prawidłowe nagłośnienie i jest dobrze oświetlona. Owalny stół pozwala na bliski, bezpośredni kontakt. W wyposażeniu pracowni znajduje się wiele urządzeń ułatwiających wizualizację, komunikację, przechowywanie i przekazywanie informacji. W artykule omówiono kilka podstawowych technik z wykorzystaniem tablicy interaktywnej i komputerowego systemu Videodidact. Lektorki, stosując indywidualne podejście, stale poszukują nowych rozwiązań, modyfikują je, dostosowując do predyspozycji i strategii uczenia się konkretnego studenta. Studenci doceniają nowe pomysły, są aktywni i twórczy, korzystają z nowinek technicznych, sami często inspirują nauczycieli. Język angielski jest używany w stosunku do studentów także poza pracownią: w mailach i smsach.

Ważną rolę w prowadzeniu zajęć odgrywa tłumacz języka migowego. Tutaj obszar działania wykracza znacznie poza odtwórczy przekład wypowiedzi lektora i studentów, zawiera wiele elementów pracy nauczyciela wspomagającego.

Podsumowując należy stwierdzić, że lektorat języka angielskiego stwarza studentom szansę na głębsze poznanie otaczającej rzeczywistości i pełniejszy udział w kulturze tworzonej przez słyszących i niesłyszących. Znajomość języka obcego może być pomocna w osiągnięciu sukcesu społecznego, edukacyjnego i zawodowego.

Streszczenie przygotowała Anna Nabiałek

# Deaf students and English – the art of teaching and learning

Beata Gulati

Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities

**Challenge, Adventure, Experiment, Work at the Foundations, Search, Research and Evaluation, Looking for new paths, Satisfaction** – those associations come to my mind when I think of my work with Deaf students.

So first and foremost teaching English to the Deaf was and is a continuous **challenge**.

But before I talk about it let me give you a little bit of background to show why I started teaching English to deaf students, in what circumstances and how my work has changed so far.

At that time (2001) I was the head of the Centre for Education and Rehabilitation of Disabled Students at Akademia Podlaska (present name-Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities). And I am proud to say that it was the first institution in Poland which introduced education for the disabled at university level. The Centre was established thanks to an agreement between two Ministries: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Politics, and was the first disability office in our country. Hence **the work at the foundations** started and day by day we improved our program. The goal of the Centre was to make education as accessible as possible for students with disabilities. We quickly found out that simple theoretical categorization can not be implemented, that students themselves are experts in the way of their lives and are aware of their needs. Our work at the centre has a three-fold influence, at PRE-STUDENT, STUDENT- and POST-STUDENT levels. At PRE-STUDENT level we organize Adaptation Days during which our prospective students are interviewed and fill in special questionnaires to help us understand their specific educational requirements.

Of course our biggest interaction with disabled students takes place during the time of their studies, the second level called STUDENT level. We offer different services for students according to their specific needs, which means making the university physically, educationally, psychologically and socially accessible.

And so for students **with mobility problems** we offer access to most University buildings. All the repair work and all newly constructed buildings are architecturally

adapted. There are ramps, lifts, special non-slippery linings. There are more parking spots for the disabled, spacious classrooms and auditoria with places for people on wheelchairs. Students can work in individual work cabins in our beautiful, modern library. Physical Education classes are substituted by rehabilitational sessions and sports. We organize personal assistance and transport to move between the different University buildings that are scattered around the city. In dorms we offer adapted accommodation.

For *students with visual impairment* we have talking lifts with signs in Braille. Students take part in Typhloinformatics classes to learn how to use equipment and different software. In the Accessible Resources Unit at the Library, a blind technician prepares alternative materials. He converts black print into Braille, records data, files on CDs and other alternative forms.

For *students with hearing impairment* we have flashing alarms, inductive loops, and special arrangements in some classrooms. Sign language interpreters are present during most of the classes. Besides, we offer speech therapy and Polish language course especially for the congenitally deaf.

All this time I was not only mastering the program of adjustment (adaptation) for the disabled as the head of the disability office, but I was also a lecturer in special education. I was always very close to students, their needs and passions trying to make my classes more creative and interesting. While speaking about Surdopedagogics or Typhlopedagogics I realized that I cannot just use the theory talking about deafness or blindness when I have deaf and visually impaired students in my class. So I decided that I have to use or rather encourage my students to conduct lessons themselves, to talk about their experiences, about their educational ways and what equipment they were using during lessons. The deaf taught us basic sign language, the blind explained how to use the Braille system and how to explore the world in a tactile or other non-visual way. They showed us that they could joke about their disability. They taught us to be modest, more humble and to admit that we cannot judge anyone because of our fears and our imagination about what it is like to lacking eyesight, the power to hear, speak or move. When we got to know one another better, we found out that we have a lot in common: we only explore the world and lead our lives in a different way (Gulati 2012).

During this time I prepared a leaflet for all teachers and academics. I invited three professors who are specialists in their respective fields of studies because they have firsthand experience in particular disabilities. So, Professor Kirenko, a wheelchair user, wrote about students with mobility problems, Professor Szczepankowski, who is hard of hearing himself, wrote about deaf students and Dr Jakubowski, who is blind, about students with visual impairment. We sent the advisor to all institutes and departments of our university.

And this is when I realized that Deaf students cannot attend regular language classes where the communicative approach is valued, where there are a lot of discussions and listening practice.

Now talking only about students with hearing impairment, the situation will be better understood when the following fact is taken into consideration. Before the year 2001, hearing-impaired pupils were seen as unable to learn foreign languages and were consequently exempt from attending foreign language classes. That is when the Ministry of Education introduced a decree that stated that all deaf and hard of hearing pupils should be taught a foreign language.

This brings us back to the **challenge** I was talking about in the beginning. I myself started teaching English to deaf students in October 2004. My **adventure** or you can even call it **experiment** took the form of the so-called *hydraulic model of education* (Neal, 1998; further exploration of the hydraulic model may be found in many sources, e.g. Mohanty, J. and Mohanty, J, 2004; Marschark, M. and Hauser, P. C., 2012) to be then changed into the *water park method with shades of my own creativity and humanistic approach*.

Every step I took was with one aim, to teach, to share my experiences, to show how much I like English, to discover how important and useful English can be for deaf students, how easy it is and to encourage students to study and improve their language skills. Now I can admit that it started from a mainly teacher and language oriented method but slowly and steadily moved to a student and effect/outcome oriented one.

At the beginning, (**STEP I**) I worked with the help of a support teacher – who happens to be my husbandJ. He helped me unify the level of students' knowledge of English. Thanks to him, we were able to pay individual attention to each student. While I introduced material, he helped weaker students. At the academic level, unfortunately, funds are not provided for additional teachers like in integration schools, elementary and secondary schools in Poland, so the support teacher could only work on a voluntary basis.

Now, I prepare lessons with the use of the Interactive Board. (**STEP II**) I scan lessons from textbooks or different written materials, then display them on the board. I can simultaneously use different websites, work on-line, save and pause films. In this way students are able to monitor what is happening on the screen. As everybody knows, deaf people need to see what is said to them, so during the lesson a sign language interpreter is present to clarify communication. Students monitor what is happening on the screen; the interpreter is necessary for signing, finger spelling, to convey other vital information, to help in communication.

I invite different guests, mainly Native Speakers, to encourage communication in English. We watch films in English also about Deaf communities. (**STEP III**). We have had guests from Cameroon, India, the USA, England, Scotland. Students got to know the geography, culture and customs of these countries. I would like to encourage teachers to invite native speakers to their classes in order to make lessons more attractive and to develop their skills too. The most important point in contact between Non-Native and Native Speakers is to cooperate, complement each other, share experience, strategies, learn from each other and learn from the feedback

which is given by our students. My students were very happy and appreciated the face-to face contact with foreigners. Let me cite some of my students: „*I had many attempts to start studying English but it was the first time when they were fulfilled with additional elements like meetings with people from foreign countries*”(student 1); „*The way people were dressed interested me so much that I decided to visit those countries. I liked India from my childhood, because of its unique nature, the highest mountains in the world- The Himalayas. I would like to see it with my own eyes. Equally interesting was the story about Cameroon, especially because it was told by the grandson of the Sultan of Cameroon. I love travelling and I am not afraid of visiting foreign countries so for example a journey to the USA would be fun for me. I was in Italy, England, the Czech Republic, Austria and I managed so I will survive and I am curious of the world.*” (student 2); “*I really liked those meetings and would love to have more such meetings from different corners of the world.*” (student 3)

The **IV STEP** is the introduction of Power Point Presentations prepared by my students. At the beginning I show sample presentation about myself, I point out the lexical and grammatical elements that a presentation should contain. Students are encouraged to use their own ideas and imagination, to write about themselves, their family, friends, their interests, passions, their dreams and successes. The groups with a higher level of English use more complex grammatical structures. During our classes we always have 1 or 2 presentations. Thanks to them, students learn new vocabulary and about their friends' lives. This repetitive process and the change of role i.e. students taking the place of the teacher and correcting the material helps them learn it better. I must admit that students are really creative and thanks to such lessons there is better integration between them, better functioning and that leads to making learning more pleasant.

Preparing PPTs, using the Interactive Board and using computers help in teaching foreign languages. Peer teaching is also an important element of the didactic process. The quality of students' performance, their involvement in the educational process and good marks show that the idea of using those presentations is effective. (Dębski, 1997)


The next step is cooperation with other known authorities in the field of TEFL to the disabled which has been present since the beginning (**STEP V**). Professor Bogusław Marek, who teaches visually impaired students at KUL (Catholic University of Lublin), is my mentor. His attempts have been awarded even by the British Queen. He is a teacher with wonderful, creative ideas, and a unique attitude to work with students and engagement. Dr Ewa Domagała –Zyśk, also from the Catholic University of Lublin, conducting classes with prelingually deaf students is also a source of inspiration for me. Then I have had the pleasure to host at our University Professor Daniela Janakova from the Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. She conducted workshops for the teachers of deaf students during Integration Days. The meeting resulted in a book “*Teaching foreign languages to disabled students*” (B. Harań, 2005). I am open for cooperation and hosted many

teachers and students from different universities, also international ones. (Gulati & Gulati 2007)

**STEP VI** is a combination of “what works” ideas.

The last stage is when students start conducting lessons themselves, introducing grammar or vocabulary. I learn myself ( “*Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow.*” Anthony J. D’Angelo, *The College Blue Book*), and laugh sometimes at how strict and fastidious they are towards their fellow-students. When the role changes and they become “teachers”, they become very responsible, trying to focus students’ attention. They even bang on the table and clap their hands, and check and correct students’ work on the spot. What I have learnt from my students giving lessons to their peers is that they prepare more repetitions than I do and give more handouts and reward every and any progress, any good answer. I have noticed that they pay attention to preparing materials in both English and Polish (Grammar Translation Method) which is time-consuming but it was the way they were taught in their high schools and you can hardly get rid of this habit.

As a teacher I am constantly **looking for new paths**. I have attended two levels of sign language courses but I still need to practice more to be able to conduct lessons without the help of a sign language translator (that is my dream). I am fluent in finger-spelling which I use to show the pronunciation of key words and it also helps

me in attracting students’ attention for example by showing the “s”  letter to remind them of the 3rd person singular form for the Present Simple. While check-

ing the answers students just show “a”



“b”



“c”



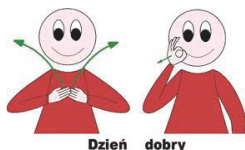
“d”



in sign language, then I can have the overall view of the group who knows who does not know the correct answer. I use various ideas during my classes; brainstorming, associations, miming, pictures, flashcards, pantomime. Deaf students are masters of pantomime. We talk a lot about different festivals, sing Christmas Carols in Sign Language. Compare signs from Polish Sign Language and American or British Sign Language.

English classes last for 3 semesters 180 minutes of English weekly or for 2 semesters with 240 minutes weekly. It depends on the major subjects a student follows. There are students of different courses (pedagogy, marketing and management, history, mathematics, etc...) who are divided according to their language skills into elementary and pre-intermediate group levels.

From the beginning of the lesson there is constant code-mixing and code-switching. Why? In a group there are approximately 10 students of whom some use Polish Sign Language and some even know ASL or BSL but others none. There are ‘deaf and dumb’ students, and those who can speak. I constantly encourage them to learn to speak English as well. It is a huge problem that teachers in high schools have convinced them that, because they are deaf, they do not have to learn to speak. I believe that they should also be taught speaking skills otherwise they sound wrong in English, they are not understood and unfortunately people think they are less intelligent. So the lessons start with an English greeting and sign for: good morning



**Dzień dobry** in Polish Sign Language, how are you and so on? (Polish Sign Language is used a lot to support the understanding of spoken English). Then I try to introduce the topic by using different tactics. Guessing games, miming, writing on an Interactive Board. An important issue is how I stand and the position of Sign Language interpreter/translator as he/she has to be seen by students and they have to see whatever is being discussed or practiced. I try to give brief instructions and check the understanding. While students perform, I usually sit to see their performance, and leave the space of performance free. Students switch their language, some of them use sign language while they are at the board so then I have to make sure that the interpreter speaks this time so that the students who do not know sign language can also understand what is going on during the lesson. It is also very important to keep track and constantly mix code from sign language, using finger spelling, speaking, showing, using English as well as some Polish. Awareness is the key. Keep the students involved and informed. Of course there are students who chat or do other things during the lesson. And there I have to learn that not all students can have As only. I have to work on it that not all students are able to succeed. Fortunately most of them are eager to use English even after classes when they meet me. They even text message me or write e-mails to share their thoughts. It is a pleasure to work with them and even though you have to be prepared for every single lesson, put much more effort into collecting, searching for appropriate materials, I still love working with this particular group of students and this gives me a lot of **satisfaction**.

To sum up, our University has the biggest number of deaf students studying in Poland and in comparable European universities. Today we have 74 students with hearing impairment, among them 25 deaf and 49 hard of hearing students.

Now I should touch on the last POST-STUDENT level. So far we have had 159 hearing impaired graduates. They have achieved a great deal of success. Our first student, deaf and mute Sylwia Wojciechowska (1989), graduated, became a researcher and finished her PhD in 2007. Two graduates working as teachers achieved the title *the best tutor of the year* in their institutions. One graduate became the first



deaf psychologist and crisis intervention worker in Poland – she helped a lot during the floods, supporting the deaf with the use of sign language. Many of them work as teachers in schools where they had studied previously. Some of them work at universities as sign language translators. Some develop their talents in different fields like photography, sports, art, career, scientific research and personal life. Paraphrasing an old Chinese saying: *the teacher only opens the door, and the student has to walk through it himself*. Because “the art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.” (Mark Van Doren)

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## Studenci niesłyszący i angielski- sztuka uczenia i nauczania

### Streszczenie

Uniwersytet Przyrodniczo-Humanistyczny w Siedlcach, znany także jako Akademia Podlaska, jako pierwsza uczelnia w Polsce wprowadziła nauczanie studentów niesłyszących. To również miejsce gdzie powstało pierwsze w Polsce biuro osób niepełnosprawnych jako porozumienie dwóch ministerstw: Ministerstwa Edukacji i Ministerstwa Pracy i Polityki Społecznej. Biuro to nosi nazwę Centrum Kształcenia i Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych i mam przyjemność być jego dyrektorem. Biuro działa na trzech poziomach nazwanych przeze mnie: *Pre-student*, *Student*, i *Post-student*. Pierwszy etap to kiedy docieramy do maturzystów staramy się przybliżyć im ofertę naszej uczelni. Drugi w którym oczywiście istnieje największy zakres naszych oddziaływań towarzyszy naszym studentom podczas tego najciekawszego etapu życia jakim są studia. Osoby niepełnosprawne są dla nas ekspertami w dziedzinie własnej drogi edukacyjnej.

Z nimi zmienia się środowisko uczelni powstają nowe pracownie, specjalistyczne zajęcia, indywidualne adaptacje tak aby studenci mogli uczestniczyć w życiu akademickim na równych prawach. Mamy pracownię tyfloinformatyki dla osób niewidomych i niedowidzących, rehabilitację i sekcje sportowe zamiast zajęć WF-u, pomoc asystentów na zajęciach dla studentów niepełnosprawnych ruchowo, lektorat języka polskiego, terapię logopedyczną i lektorat języka angielskiego dla niesłyszących. Właśnie pracy z osobami niesłyszącymi podczas zajęć z języka angielskiego poświęciłam mój artykuł. Jest ona dla mnie wyzwaniem, twórczym działaniem, codziennym poszukiwaniem, ewaluacją i dosko-

nalaniem ale jednocześnie wielką satysfakcją. Mam do czynienia ze zróżnicowaną grupą osób, są to studenci niesłyszący i niedosłyszący, ci którzy mówią, i tacy którzy w ogóle nie posługują się mową, ci którzy znają Polski Język Migowy, ci którzy posługują się Systemem Językowo-Migowym, niektórzy znają nawet podstawy BSL lub ASL czyli brytyjskiego lub amerykańskiego języka migowego, wśród moich studentów są osoby migające po czesku. Poziom ich angielskiego jest również bardzo zróżnicowany. Do tego dochodzi fakt, że moi studenci są na różnych kierunkach studiów. Zatem dobranie odpowiednich grup staje się wielkim wyzwaniem. Również niezwykle edukacyjną przygodą stają się same zajęcia. Rozwijanie i doskonalenie ich podzieliłam na etapy od pracy z nauczycielem wspierającym, poprzez wprowadzenie tablicy interaktywnej, włączenie studentów w przygotowywanie prezentacji Power Point w języku angielskim, prowadzenie zajęć przez samych studentów. W zajęciach zawsze bierze udział tłumacz języka migowego, sama stosuję daktylografię aby przybliżyć studentom wymowę. Ponadto stosuje różne metody i techniki i poszukuje tego co działa aby usprawnić zajęcia. Zachęcam do lektury tekstu w języku angielskim i dzielenia się swoim doświadczeniem. Moje motto to: *share, inspire create*. Dziel się doświadczeniem, inspiruj i twórz.

*Streszczenie przygotowała Beata Gulati*



## Notes on Contributors

**Ewa Domagała-Zysk** – pedagogue and English Philology graduate (Ph.D. in Pedagogy, MA in English Philology). After her studies she worked as a pedagogue and an English teacher in a J.Ch. Andersen Therapeutic School for children with special educational needs. Since 1998 she has been working as a researcher and lecturer at the Pedagogy Department of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and at the Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education at KUL. She was a pioneer of teaching English as a foreign language to deaf university students in Poland, starting her work with a specialist and innovative *English for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing* course in 1999. She is the author of more than 30 empirical papers on that issue, both in English and in Polish, a co-author (with K. Karpinska-Szaj) of *Uczeń z wadą słuchu w szkole ogólnodostępnej. Podstawy metodyki nauczania języków obcych. [Hearing impaired student in mainstream school. Basics of methodology of teaching English]*. She participated in more than 30 international conferences presenting papers on teaching English as a foreign language to deaf and hard of hearing students.

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**Franz Dotter** – born 1948 in Salzburg, Austria; studied German language and literature, mathematics, and philosophy; Dr. Phil.1975. Has worked since 1973 at the Institute for Linguistics and Computer linguistics of the Klagenfurt University. Specialization (in iconicity in syntax) 1990, then Associate Professor of General Linguistics; since 1996 head of the Centre for Sign Language and Deaf Communication (<http://www.uni-klu.ac.at/zgh>). Main interests: Typology and cognitive linguistics, sign languages, sociolinguistics of politics and minorities, text/discourse analysis, deaf education.

**Zuzana Fonioková** – has been teaching English as a foreign language since 2005, including courses at university level. She has taught students with hearing as well as visual impairments. Since 2011, she has been working for the Centre for Students with Special Needs at the Masaryk University as a teacher, methodologist and coordinator of English for the deaf and hard of hearing. She has co-authored a study on “Early Language Development of the Deaf and Its Relation to Foreign Language Learning,” presented in the ULD special track of the ICCHP conference in Linz in 2012 and published in the proceedings of ULD@ICCHP 2012.

**Beata Gulati** – lecturer at the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, Director of the Centre for Education and Rehabilitation of Disabled Students, President of the Association for the Promotion of Education for Disabled People “Hefajstos”. Author of many publications about education for the disabled at university level, a specialist in TEFL for Deaf students. She has presented a model of inclusive education in Poland and abroad at many conferences (Edinburgh, Oxford, Kenilworth at annual NADP conference). The author of a handbook for university teachers *How to work with students with disabilities*, and *Teaching foreign languages to disabled students*.

**Elena Intorcía** – graduated in Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Salerno in 1998. She has been teaching English both at High school and at the University of Sannio, Faculty of Engineering, since 2001. She has been involved in different teaching experiences abroad on behalf of the University of Sannio, namely at the Technical University of Košice (Slovakia) and at the Technical University of Istanbul (Turkey) since 2005 within the framework of the Socrates-Erasmus project. In the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 academic years she was involved in an experimental degree course for deaf and hard-of-hearing students and thus started teaching English to the deaf. From 2004 to date she has participated in numerous national and international conventions: She has also been involved in the PSELDA (Progetto Sperimentale di e.Learning per Disabili Audiolesi) project with participation in the On-line English for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students multimedia course, on behalf of the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Sannio. In 2008 she was the recipient of a Fulbright scholarship for a four-week summer seminar at the UIC (University of Illinois at Chicago), USA. She is currently a PhD candidate in “Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World” at the University “L’Orientale” in Naples, focusing on Deaf studies within the larger framework of Disability studies.

**Kazimiera Krakowiak** – professor at KUL (the Catholic University of Lublin), a specialist in applied linguistics, audiophonology and speech therapy, chief of Department of Special Education of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. She works on applying linguistics theories and results of linguistics research in language education of children and adolescents with hearing impairment. She is the creator of Polish Cued Speech, based on R.O. Cornett’s conception of Cued Speech. This method enables people with severe pre-lingual hearing impairment to acquire a mastery of Polish in writing and speaking. She is the organizer of a ten-year long pedagogical experiment in the pedagogy of the deaf. Privately – a mother of two adult deaf sons. Her most important works are:

*Fonogesty jako narzędzie formowania języka dzieci z uszkodzonym słuchem. Komunikacja językowa i jej zaburzenia. [Cued Speech as a tool of forming language of hearing impaired children. Language communication and its disorders] T. 9, Lublin 1995; Kim jest moje niesłyszące dziecko. [Who my deaf child?] Lublin 2006; Studia i szkice o wychowaniu dzieci z uszkodzeniami słuchu. [Studies and sketches about education of children with impaired hearing]. Lublin 2006.*

**Anna Nabialek** – a senior lecturer of English at the Foreign Languages Centre of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She has been working with deaf and hard of hearing students since 2008. She was the co-founder and has been the Head of the Multimedia Foreign Languages Teaching Centre for AMU hearing impaired students since 2010.

**Elana Ochse** – Associate Professor of English Language and Translation, University of Turin since 2007. Besides teaching regular EFL courses at BA and MA levels, since 2000 she has been organizing and teaching experimental EFL courses for deaf students at the University of Turin. She has been involved in various local and national research projects. She was responsible, together with J.C. Kellett Bidoli, of the scientific organisation of the International Seminar “Deaf Identity and Culture in European Integration: the Role of Interpretation, Translation and Teaching” which was held at the University of Trieste, 30 – 31 October 2006. She collaborated in the organization of ESSE X, held in Turin in August 2010 where she convened a seminar entitled “Rethinking the challenge: English as a Foreign Language for Deaf Adult Learners”. She is the Turin Leader of the SignMedia EU Lifelong Learning Project. Since 2000 she has been focussing on the language education of the Deaf from an acquisitional and sociolinguistic perspective. She has presented numerous papers at international conventions on sign languages and Deaf cultures, has been visiting well-known Deaf programs abroad for study and research purposes and has developed cooperation links with foreign universities. Together with Ewa Domagała – Zysk she convened a seminar entitled “Deaf people’s mastery of English as a second or foreign language” for the XI Conference of the European Society for the Study of English held at the University of Boğaziçi, Istanbul in September 2012.

**Anna Podlewska** – a PhD student of the English Department at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. She is also affiliated with the Institute of Pedagogy and the Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. Her research interests focus on the use of Cued Speech to support the development of language skills in English language instruction for students with hearing impairment.

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