

Exploring Linguistic and Cultural Identity:

My Personal Experience

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I am the eldest child of a deaf couple in England. My father was the only deaf person in his family, and he was raised orally. He learned British Sign Language (BSL) when he met my mother and now uses BSL as his preferred language for communication. He works in a hearing-dominated workplace and regularly attends the local deaf club. My mother comes from a large deaf family, which has four generations of deafness, and she grew up with BSL as her first language. The few hearing members of her family can all sign, so for her, being deaf and using sign language were the norm. My mother was the first person in her family to get a university degree, which she completed without the assistance of note takers or interpreters. She began her career as a BSL teacher, moved on to training deaf people to become BSL teachers, and now manages a college department that offers BSL and BSL teacher-training courses. Thus she works in a deaf/sign language-dominated workplace. She regularly attended a deaf club while growing up and continued to do so once married, but does so less now.¹

BILINGUAL STATUS

I grew up using BSL in the home from birth. Thus I would identify myself as a native signer. I have one younger sibling, who is hearing and also signs. My parents made a concerted effort to expose us to spoken language by using both BSL and English, mouthing the English words, fingerspelling, and/or speaking and signing at the same time. Such contact signing is commonly referred to in the United Kingdom as Signed Supported English (SSE), which is different from the Signed Exact English (SEE) systems available in the United States, as it is essentially a form of code-blending or code-mixing between BSL and English

(Emmorey, Borenstein, & Thompson, 2003; Lucas & Valli, 1992). Many deaf people in the United Kingdom would state that they use SSE rather than BSL (Corker, 1997). Given that I was exposed to both BSL (and SSE) and English from a very young age, I would not necessarily say that BSL is my first, or “A” language, as I acquired both languages simultaneously. Thus it could be said that I am a “double A,” because I have native-like proficiency in both languages (Pöchhacker, 2004).

Early bilingualism researchers variously described bilingual individuals as perfect, true, or balanced, with “native-like control of two languages” (Bloomfield, 1942: 56), and viewed positively the native speaker-like quality of a bilingual’s two languages. According to this view, the bilingual has two separate language competencies that are similar to the corresponding competencies of the monolingual. More recent research into human cognition tends to indicate that language processing in the bilingual brain is more complex than simply the sum of two monolingual modes of processing (de Groot & Kroll, 1997; Grosjean, 1992). In addition, a large body of research has demonstrated that the profile of bilingual individuals is complex and diverse (Hoffman, 1991; Romaine, 1995). Bilingual language use is known to vary according to the nature of language acquisition and usage. Bilinguals can be characterized according to a wide range of parameters, such as whether their languages were acquired naturalistically or formally, simultaneously from birth or consecutively; whether they have bilingual proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking; and their degree of biculturalism (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). It is also known that bilinguals generally use each of their languages in different domains and may not have equivalent proficiency in all domains (Myers-Scotton, 2006).

According to Bloomfield (1942), I am a *balanced bilingual*, as I do have equal fluency in both BSL and English. However, when considering Myers-Scotton’s (2006) point, I would say that I am more dominant in English in some contexts and more dominant in sign language in others. For example, I am more comfortable using sign language when talking about how I feel or when telling a story, as that is how I learned to do those things. Alternatively, when discussing politics or linguistics, I prefer to use English, as I learned about these topics at school or university by reading and listening to English. Therefore in sociolinguistic terms, my language use is influenced by context.

My bilingual status is further complicated by the fact that after moving to Australia in 1998, I learned Australian Sign Language (Auslan).

Auslan has its roots in BSL, and research has shown that there is a high level of grammatical and lexical similarity between the two languages (Johnston, 2002; Johnston & Schembri, 2007; McKee & Kennedy, 2000). In fact, Johnston (2002) has questioned whether BSL and Auslan are separate signed languages or dialects of the same language. Thus, I have developed a level of proficiency in Auslan which is equivalent to my competency in BSL, and I feel as comfortable conversing in Auslan as I do in BSL. Furthermore, I have also learned American Sign Language (ASL) through attending conferences in the United States. However, my ASL proficiency is more limited due to the nature of acquisition. I can watch conference presentations and participate in conversations and discussions concerning linguistics and related topics in ASL, but I cannot describe my favorite TV program or detail a shopping list, as I have never been exposed to using ASL when talking about those everyday topics. While at school, I studied French for six years and still have basic competence, although my comprehension surpasses my production. Additionally, I studied Spanish for two years and have retained a smattering of conversational phrases. Therefore, technically, I can be defined as *multilingual* (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998) rather than bilingual, as I can use several languages: three at high levels of receptive and productive proficiency, and three with basic competence. The language that I choose to use is influenced by the context that I am in, as well as the people with whom I am conversing. I can also be described as a *polyglot*—a person who uses several languages (Hudson, 1984).

The bilingual status of hearing people with deaf parents is an interesting issue to consider, as many state that their first language is a signed language and go on to become interpreters because they sign well and are bilingual. However, just because someone grows up signing does not mean that he or she is a good interpreter. Grosjean (1997) stated that few bilinguals are proficient interpreters and listed several factors that can influence a person's ability to perform as an interpreter. These factors may include unequal fluency in both languages, an accent in one's second language, late acquisition or learning of the second language, lack of stylistic varieties in each language, undeveloped transfer skills, or lack of pragmatic competence or cultural knowledge about the two distinct groups. Grosjean makes the distinction between the *regular bilingual* and the *interpreter bilingual* by clearly stating the following:

Interpreter bilinguals, unlike regular bilinguals, will have to learn to use their languages (and the underlying skills that they have in them)

for similar purposes, in similar domains of life, with similar people. This is something that regular bilinguals do not often need to do. (p. 168)

Therefore, although balanced fluency in at least two languages is desirable, interpreters are also required to have a wide range of knowledge and skills in order to effectively transfer messages between two different languages. Baetens Beardsmore (1986) made a similar statement:

Rapid translation from one language to another need not come spontaneously to the bilingual. Indeed many bilinguals who can function extremely well in two languages in clearly demarcated situational contexts often find it difficult to translate spontaneously between their languages without heavy interference. This is one reason why professional interpreters require special training for a task that does not necessarily come naturally, even if they were childhood bilinguals. (p. 106)

Hearing bilinguals who are fluent in both a signed and a spoken language may not automatically have the linguistic skills to effectively interpret between those two languages. Their skills in the majority spoken language may be inadequate, or they may only have ever used a signed language conversationally in the home and do not have the sign language vocabulary to cope with more formal contexts. Or perhaps they do not have the cognitive processing ability to quickly and accurately transfer a message from one language to another. Many people from deaf families comment that they interpreted for their parents regularly during interactions with hearing people, and have been effectively interpreting all their lives (Preston, 1994, 1996). But can they necessarily function as professional interpreters?

INTERPRETING STATUS

Many people assume that because I can hear, I interpreted for my deaf parents as a child; but as a matter of fact, I did not do that much interpreting. Of course I did some, as it is common for any child to want to assist their parents with communication if they cannot access the majority language. This is prevalent among children of immigrant parents, as well as children with deaf parents.² Children who take on this role

have been described as *language brokers* (Acoach & Webb, 2004; Castaneda, 2005; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002).

Rather than have the role of interpreter or language broker foisted upon me by my parents, I used to offer to interpret because it made me feel grown up. Research shows that, typically, the eldest female child in a family functions as the interpreter (Preston, 1996; Singleton & Tittle, 2000). I fell into that category. I did interpret when someone came to the front door, during telephone calls, and for parent-teacher meetings. I particularly enjoyed the latter, as my teachers were softer in their criticisms when I was sitting in front of them! I always liked interpreting and found it to be a positive experience. When surveying 55 Latino adolescents about their perceptions of their language broker role, Weisskirch (2005) found that, generally, the participants regarded their role positively, which possibly led to stronger feelings of ethnic identity.

I know that my experience is very different from that of other hearing people who grew up with deaf parents, who have described to me how they would come home from school and their mother would be waiting with a list of phone calls for them to make. They would then bicycle to the local phone booth, make the calls, bicycle back, and report the outcome of each call to their mother. Or they would be asked to interpret the news on the television, even when they were only five years old and could not understand most of what was said. I was born into a generation where technological advancements made a difference in the lives of my parents. By the time I was ten years old, we had a text telephone typewriter (known as a minicom in the United Kingdom), closed captioning was available on television, and a national telephone relay service had been established. Thus, access to information was much improved.

My teenage years in the mid- to late 1980s coincided with the professionalization of sign language interpreting in the United Kingdom, where the role of interpreters was separated from that of welfare workers (Pollitt, 1997; Scott Gibson, 1992). The Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP), which was established by the British Deaf Association in 1980 to develop BSL teaching curricula, courses, and assessment, established a register of interpreters. Initially, any person who had attained their advanced-level BSL certificate (Stage 3) had their name included in the register. CACDP then divided the register into two tiers (Registered Trainee and Registered

Qualified) and introduced an exam to assess actual interpreting skills, which served as the mechanism for full qualification.³ Given that I attained the BSL Stage 3 certificate when I was 16 years old, my name went on that register as a trainee.⁴

I had never aspired to be an interpreter. When I interpreted for my parents, it was just something I did to assist with communication. I certainly never thought I would make a career out of it. Due to the fact that my name was on the CACDP register of interpreters though, I kept receiving phone calls inquiring if I was available to interpret. One day, I relented and accepted a job interpreting for a staff meeting at my mother's place of work (when I was about 17). I have a very clear memory of the meeting. In particular, I remember how challenging it was, yet how exciting. I realized it was very different to the interpreting I had done for my parents, and I was determined to get better at it.

After that, I took interpreting work while I studied sociology at university, and I read books about deafness and sign language. I still was not sure whether I wanted to interpret as a career, which is why I opted to study something that could lead me into various vocations. The more I studied, and the more I interpreted, however, the more I realized that I was fascinated by language and that I loved interpreting. When I graduated from university, I began working full time as an interpreter and attended a part-time training course, where I went to class one day a week for a year. I learned a lot from the course, and my interpreting significantly improved.

By this time, the CACDP had introduced its interpreting exam, so that people who passed could become fully qualified members of the register of BSL interpreters. I took the exam and passed. The pressure to succeed was enormous—people assumed I would pass because I had deaf parents. Although I recognized that I had an advantage, I did not think that having deaf parents necessarily made me a good interpreter. As I mentioned earlier, being bilingual does not mean that one has the skills to interpret. In fact, I wrote an article in the magazine of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (ASLI) in response to an anonymous article written by an interpreter with deaf parents who asserted that bilinguals had no need for training (Napier, 1997). I was insulted by the assumption that if I was a good interpreter, I had not worked for it; that I had not focused on developing my skills; that my job had been handed to me on a plate. I knew (and still know) many hearing people who have deaf parents who can

sign well, but cannot and choose not to interpret as they struggle with the interpreting process (i.e., message transfer).

To prove my point, I decided to further my interpreting skills by enrolling in a master's program in BSL/English interpreting at Durham University. While taking this course, I discovered linguistics, interpretation analysis, and research. From then on, there was no turning back. I became involved in training interpreters, then moved to Australia and completed a Ph.D. in linguistics, analyzing the translation styles and interpreting omissions produced by Auslan/English interpreters in university lectures (Napier, 2001, 2002b). I am now an academic in a linguistics department, coordinating translation and interpreting programs in different languages (including Auslan), conducting research on translation and interpreting, and practicing as a sign language interpreter as often as I can.

My status as a bilingual and an interpreter has shifted and changed. I have acquired several languages in addition to the two that I grew up with, and my role as an interpreter has changed significantly: from something I did informally on an ad hoc basis for my parents, to something more formal that I fell into by accident, to a professional role that I chose, to a position where I am teaching other interpreters. Being a polyglot interpreter (Fabbro & Daro, 1995) is a strong part of my linguistic identity. My cultural identity, however, is more closely attached to community membership and notions of deafness.

AM I DEAF?

A deaf community is well established as a linguistic and cultural group, and its members identify with one another based on their common use of a national and natural signed language, their cultural identity, and their social norms and values (Brennan, 1992; Ladd, 2003; Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996). Hearing people with deaf parents are often described as bilingual and bicultural (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996; Singleton & Tittle, 2000), in that they have grown up with two languages and two cultures—the dominant hearing culture and the minority community Deaf culture. I will return to the notion of biculturalism later in this chapter.

Many readers will be familiar with debates concerning notions of deafness and cultural identity and the introduction of the D/deaf

convention to identify the extent of a person's deafness (Woodward, 1972). It has been argued that a deaf person, who uses a signed language as his or her first or preferred language, identifies as being a member of the deaf community and a proponent of deaf culture, and is to be referred to as "Deaf" (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). Alternatively, people with a hearing loss who do not use sign language (or do not use it well), and do not associate with the deaf community, are referred to as *deaf*.

I remember a deaf BSL teacher arguing that I would be more suitable to teach BSL than some deaf people, because I was a native signer and more "culturally deaf" than deaf people who had learned BSL later in life. A controversial point. But an interesting one, given that I have grown up in the deaf community and now work and socialize in the deaf community. The late Ben Steiner, a British interpreter who had deaf parents, would have agreed with this viewpoint.⁵ Before he passed away, Steiner began using a sign to represent the notion of being "Deaf at heart"—a sign combining the BSL signs for DEAF and HEART in one movement. He argued that although he was not audilogically deaf, he regarded himself linguistically and culturally as a Deaf person. Since that time, some people would argue that the sign has been over-exploited by hearing people (and particularly interpreters) who would like to consider themselves as being culturally Deaf, but did not grow up in the community. Johnston and Schembri (2007) have also noted that the sign for DEAF is sometimes used to refer to hearing people who are considered members of the deaf community and think and behave the deaf way. So who gets to decide who can be referred to as Deaf? Who gets to decide who is Deaf enough? The key issue to consider is in relation to defining community membership.

Community Membership

When we moved to Australia, my husband and I knew nobody. An Australian deaf person, whom we had met at a conference in the United Kingdom, met us at the airport and proceeded to introduce us to members of the deaf and interpreting communities. In some ways, the transition was difficult, as nobody knew who we were. People would ask if I had deaf parents; when I confirmed that I did, they would automatically ask, "Which school did they go to?" Then I would explain that I was British, so my parents went to school in England. Nobody knew my

family, so I could not make connections with people based on mutual and historical friendships. I did not have any shared experiences with the Australian deaf community. I did not understand the nuanced communication which was embedded in Australian deaf history and culture. Yet growing up in the British deaf community actually made it easier, because of the perceptions of community ties. Even though people did not know me or my family, as soon as I mentioned that I had deaf family members, I was accepted. There was an implicit understanding that I was a member of the community. Mindess (1999) would say that this occurs due to the understanding that some hearing people have empathy with the deaf experience, ally themselves to the deaf community, and engage in reciprocal relationships with deaf people (e.g., interpreting in exchange for being taught the language).

According to Higgins's (1980) model of the deaf community, I would only satisfy one or two of the following elements of community membership: hearing-impaired, shared experience, identification with one another, and participation in community activities. Baker and Cokely (1980) defined four avenues of membership to the deaf community: audiological, political, linguistic, and social. According to their model, only those people who satisfied all four aspects could be considered as core members of the community. But there is an allowance for the involvement of hearing people in the community on a linguistic, social, and political level.

According to Padden's (1980) early definition of the deaf community, I am clearly a member:

A deaf community is a group of people who live in a particular location, share the common goals of its members, and in various ways, work toward achieving these goals. A deaf community may include persons who are not themselves Deaf, but who actively support the goals of the community and work with Deaf people to achieve them. (p. 92)

Padden (1980) stated that deaf culture, however, is different, implying that although hearing people can be members of the community, they cannot have ownership of deaf culture:

The culture of Deaf people, however, is more closed than the deaf community. Members of the Deaf culture behave as Deaf people do, use the language of Deaf people, and share the beliefs of Deaf people towards themselves and other people who are not Deaf. (p. 93)

I grew up as a member of the deaf community, enculturated to the deaf way of life, and I am a person whose first (and sometimes preferred) language is a signed language. When I am with deaf people, I behave as they do, use the language they do, and share their beliefs. But ultimately, I am not deaf or Deaf. I do not have the majority of the (positive or negative) shared experiences that most deaf people have—in relation to education, access, communication, discrimination, etc. Although I could be considered a member of the deaf community, do I really belong? The fact is that to some extent I have a choice. I can choose to participate in the community; I can choose to behave culturally like a deaf person. But I can also choose not to when in a hearing dominated environment.⁶ Similarly, a second-generation child born to Greek parents in Australia may choose to occasionally spend time with Anglo-Saxon English-speaking Australian friends, and at other times socialize with his or her family speaking Greek; this person can choose which community and culture to participate in. Does this make them any less a member of each community?

The point of confusion is essentially in relation to the nexus between community and culture. Hodge (1987) defined culture as “[t]hat web of behaviours, beliefs, values, customs, artefacts and social institutions that we share with others whom we recognise as belonging to the group of people” (p. 4). Therefore, if someone is a member of a community and engages in the appropriate behaviors, beliefs, and values of that community, then they should be considered as a full member of that community.

Turner (1994) criticized Padden’s (1980) definition of deaf culture, saying that her rationale was too self-referential and not based on any ethnomethodological observation. He suggested that her definition perpetuated an “us and them” approach to hearing people, as well as to deaf culture and community membership. Ladd (1994) agreed with Turner about the risks of an “us and them” philosophy and suggested a continuum of cultural identification, rather than separate groups (i.e., deaf/hearing). Ladd’s suggestion allows for a person like me to feel comfortable in identifying with deaf culture and the community, without necessarily saying that I am Deaf. In Ladd’s (2003) later work, he questioned previous definitions of deaf culture, stating that the study of any form of deaf culture needs a thorough theoretical grounding, drawing on anthropology, linguistics, sociology, and politics. Through a major ethnomethodological study involving interviews with a wide range of

deaf people, Ladd introduced the notion of *Deafhood*, which he defined as “a process—the struggle by each deaf child, deaf family and deaf adult to explain to themselves and each other their own existence in the world” (p. 3). So although I have grown up in the deaf community, I have not necessarily participated in the process of Deafhood, because I have not experienced life in the same way as most deaf people, and I have not struggled in establishing my identity. So what should I call myself? I am a member of the community, but what is my identity if I am not deaf?

IDENTITY AND NOMENCLATURE

By now it should be noticeable that I do not use the big-“D” deaf convention. I stopped using it after writing an article about the role and status of hearing people in the deaf community, particularly sign language interpreters (Napier, 2002a). In that article, I discussed the notion of a third culture—first mooted by Bienvenu (1987) and Sherwood (1987)—recognizing that deaf and hearing people come from different cultures but that sign language interpreters (and others, such as hearing people with deaf parents) have a foot in both worlds. Acknowledgment of a third culture allows for deaf and hearing cultures to blend, and it accounts for how hearing people can comfortably feel that they are a part of the deaf community without being audiotically deaf.

The premise of my article was that I did not feel comfortable being referred to as a hearing person, that I did not want to be associated with the hearing majority who do not understand the deaf community and deaf culture. Thus I suggested:

By inverting the D/deaf convention, I propose the following convention: Hearing people are those consumed by the Hearing culture; they are ignorant or naive about the Deaf community and its culture and typically regard deafness from a pathological point of view; hearing people, however, are those who have internalized Deaf culture, ally themselves with Deaf people, and are regarded as members of the Deaf community. (Napier, 2002a, p. 145)

This convention has also been suggested by Ladd (2003) and further developed by Stone (2005) who proposed a more “deaf-centered”

perspective by using the term *Deaf (hearing)*. I have stopped using any such convention, as I realized that in trying to advocate a written principle that distanced me from other people who can hear and may not be sympathetic to the deaf community or deaf culture, I was still suggesting a nomenclature that identified me as a hearing person, that distinguished me (and others) from deaf people. Even Stone's deaf-centered categorization still focuses on audiological status. In her later writings, Padden (1998; Padden & Humphries, 2005) changed her rhetoric about deaf culture. Although she retained her earlier definition of the deaf community, she focused more on linguistic and cultural boundaries rather than on boundaries between hearing and deaf people. In a similar vein, Bahan (1997) and Jokkinen (2000) have both suggested that deaf community members should be referred to by their linguistic rather than audiological status—as sign language users.

So what is my cultural identity in relation to the deaf community? I am a multilingual sign language user. I am *bicultural*, in that I know how to navigate through both deaf and hearing cultures. A *multiculturalist* is a person subject to the influences of more than one culture (Wikipedia, 2006). Thus it could be said that I am *multicultural*, as I have adapted my behaviors to fit with Australian cultural norms and values, some of which differ from British cultural values. I also hold dual citizenship, thus I can be considered as both British and Australian.

I define myself in relation to the languages I use and the cultures in which I participate, but essentially I identify myself as me. There is no one else who has had exactly the same life experience as me. Returning to Ladd's (2003) notion of Deafhood, I would like to assert that I would like to be identified by what constitutes my selfhood, my personal identity, and my individuality—my *ipseity*. *Seity* is defined as “that which constitutes the self, selfhood” (Wikipedia, 2006), and I would consider myself to have different identities, depending on the context I am in. Thus far, I have discussed my status as a multilingual interpreter, who is a multicultural member of the deaf, hearing, British, and Australian communities. There is at least one more aspect of my *seity* to explore.

In reading this chapter, you will have noticed the conspicuous absence of the term *Coda* (adult who has deaf parents), which is commonly used to describe people like me. The reason I do not use the term *Coda* is because I do not identify with that term. Let me explain why.

THE CODA PHENOMENON

The Coda phenomenon exploded in the 1980s after the establishment of CODA International, which is an organization that represents the needs of hearing people with deaf parents and seeks to educate the wider community about Codas. Since that time, hearing people with deaf parents have been able to attend conferences to discuss their life experience of growing up hearing in a deaf family.⁷ Many people have reported that until the Coda identity was defined, they felt caught between two worlds and unsure of their identity, as they were neither deaf nor hearing. Thus they found relief in engaging with other people like themselves and realizing that others had similar confusion.

People now identify themselves using the term (e.g., “I’m Jane, I’m a Coda”) and go to great lengths to ensure that they are introduced to one another. At deaf-, sign language-, and interpreting-related conferences, delegates who are hearing with deaf parents meet for Coda-only sessions. There are Coda discussion lists, publications, and workshops. The concept has been expanded to incorporate Koda (a young child with deaf parents) camps and D-Coda (Deaf Child of Deaf Adult) identification. At conferences or workshops where I am presenting on linguistic or interpreting topics, I am often introduced as a Coda first, even though I am not there in my capacity as a hearing person with deaf parents. This label has been embraced by Codas and deaf and interpreting communities worldwide.

I have never felt particularly comfortable with the Coda label for several reasons. First, just because I am hearing and have deaf parents does not mean that I will get along with other people with the same background. Having deaf parents may be the only thing we have in common; we may have no other mutual interests; we may not have the same sense of humor. I am uncomfortable with the notion that we all have to be friends. I do, in fact, have several hearing friends who grew up with deaf parents, and I have enjoyed many a night sharing funny stories about the similarities and differences in our upbringing; but it is not a given that I will want to become friends with every Coda that I meet.

Second, it seems to me that there is an assumption that all hearing people who grew up with deaf parents need to “offload” about their experience; that they did not have a normal childhood because of the responsibilities that they had to bear for their deaf parents. I have never

had any interest in bemoaning the life I have had, because I would not be the person I am if most of my family were not deaf. Someone once said, “Don’t knock it until you’ve tried it,” so I did. I attended a Coda meeting which was taking place as part of a wider conference. Everybody told a story, most of which recounted the negative impact of having deaf parents. I was not interested in criticizing my parents. At another conference, I was told about a Coda meeting taking place and was asked if I planned to attend. I said no and was then told that it was my duty to go; that I had to let go of my suppressed frustration at having to interpret for my parents all my life. I understand that for many people, these meetings are a release, and I wholeheartedly support people wanting to attend such meetings or workshops if they feel they benefit. But I do not like the expectation that I must attend or that I must have something to say. Is there an assumption that children of immigrant parents need to attend meetings to discuss their upbringing?

Finally, I have a problem with the term. My parents are my parents, not just adults; and I am no longer a child, I am an adult! If I have to label myself based solely on my relationship to my parents, I prefer to use the term coined in the United Kingdom—*Hearing, Mother Father Deaf* (HMFD), as it better reflects how I would describe myself to deaf people in sign language: ME HEARING BUT MOTHER FATHER DEAF.

Life as an HMFD

In searching for information about life as an HMFD, one can locate many autobiographical descriptions that detail what it was like to grow up as a hearing person with deaf parents (see Abrams, 1996; Corfmat, 1990; Davis, 2001; Drolsbrough, 2000; Miller, 2004; Sidransky, 2006; Steiner, 1995; Walker, 1987). Videos have been produced which provide amusing narrative perspectives (Kraft, 1997) or documentary interviews (Davie & Carty, 1995) on the life of an HMFD. There are even some works of fiction that feature an HMFD character as central to the story (see Ferris, 2001; Glickfield, 1993; Greenberg, 1984; Whitney, 1988). Schiff-Myers (1988) and Singleton and Tittle (2000) have provided informative descriptions of the language development issues for HMFDS. George Taylor (2007) writes a regular column about his thoughts and experiences as an HMFD in the British Deaf Association magazine. Thomas Bull (1998) published an extensive

annotated bibliography, which details the range of HMFD-related publications. However, very little research has been carried out on, for, and with HMFDS.

In recent years, linguists have taken an interest in HMFD language use, given that they often grow up bilingual with a spoken and a signed language. Bishop and Hicks (2005), Bishop (2006), and Bishop, Hicks, Bertone, and Sala (2006) have investigated the bimodal code-blending used by hearing adults from deaf families when conversing with one another in ASL or Italian Sign Language (LIS). Pyers and Emmorey (2006) have also explored bimodal bilingualism in adult HMFDS, whereas Baker and Bogaerde (2006; in press) have analyzed the bilingual bimodal acquisition and use of a spoken and signed language by hearing children of deaf parents. These studies can typically be regarded as research on HMFDS, with some involvement from researchers who are HMFDS themselves.

Taking an ethnographic approach to research on, for, and with HMFDS, Hale (2001), Preston (1994; 1996), and Adams (2006) have all conducted interviews in order to examine HMFD experiences of growing up with deaf parents. The most well-known study would be that of the HMFD Paul Preston (1994), who published a book resulting from interviews with 150 HMFDS. Preston found that his informants had positive and negative experiences, and they shared a cultural perspective of the deaf community and its culture. He also conducted an analysis of gendered roles in HMFD children, identifying that it is predominantly the eldest female child who functions as the family interpreter (Preston, 1996).

More recently, Adams (2006)—a non-HMFD—collected narratives from 50 participants (26 HMFDS, and 12 deaf and 12 hearing people) to examine the experiences of HMFDS at key life stages. Adams sought to moderate past definitions of HMFDS in terms of their cultural affiliation and community membership, and instead focused on patterns of experience. She classified four unique patterns of experience particular to their situation as HMFDS, which include “go between,” “misfit,” “foreigner,” and “glass ceiling,” and stated that these should be considered as the life experiences that define HMFDS. One thing that is common among the majority of publications, regardless of whether they are anecdotal or research-based, is the use of metaphors in the titles, which do not always reflect my HMFD experience.

HMFD Metaphors Versus Reality

Many publication titles dwell on conflict, pain, loss, and frustration. For example, Walker's (1987) book is titled *A Loss for Words: The Story of Deafness in a Family*, and the cover copy states that the book "recreates the pain and joy of growing up between two worlds." Hale's (2001) dissertation title highlights *The Conflictual Experiences of Hearing African American Children of Deaf Parents*. I would be lying if I said that my experience was not frustrating at times, especially when I missed my bus and could not call my parents to let them know; or while signing to my parents in a restaurant, I would overhear another diner mocking our signing, feigning sympathy, or being patronizing about deaf people. Nonetheless, my experience of growing up with two languages and cultures means that I gained rather than lost, felt privileged rather than conflicted, and was rewarded rather than in pain.

Another common metaphor in book titles is the reference to silence, such as *Living between Sound and Silence* (Preston, 1994), *The Silents* (Abrams, 1996), and *My Sense of Silence* (Davis, 2001). My experience was the opposite, as our house was noisy, with banging cupboard doors, the television volume on too loud, and banging on floors or tables to get attention! From my conversations with other HMFDs, this seems to be a more common experience.

Other book titles emphasize a sense of difference and otherness by referring to the deaf world (e.g., Corfmat's [1990] *Please Sign Here: Insights into the World of the Deaf* or Sidransky's [2006] *In Silence: Growing Up Hearing in a Deaf World*). As I have made clear in this chapter, I do not feel like an outsider. Although I recognize that I am not deaf, and therefore that I am different from many of my family members, friends, and community colleagues, I embrace this difference. Only one publication title (that I could find) reflects my own experience and what I would likely call my own book if I were to publish one: *Best of Both Worlds (a Not So Silent Life)* (Worzel-Miller, 2000).

Moving away from the use of metaphors, I now find it more helpful to discuss my linguistic and cultural identity, rather than notions of deafness/hearingness. Only one other author focuses discussion on linguistic and cultural identity in the same way (Mudgett-Decaro, 1996), talking about being both deaf and hearing in terms of community membership and identity.

It is important to acknowledge that in my chosen professional career, I had an advantage because I grew up within a deaf family. I am thank-

ful and proud of my heritage and the linguistic and cultural exposure I have had due to growing up with a signed and spoken language. Ironically, I am married to someone who is also an HMFD, which makes my life easy for so many reasons, in terms of our mutual understanding of linguistic, cultural, and community issues.

WHO I REALLY AM

So what is my linguistic and cultural identity? I propose that I am, in fact, *multi-seitic*—I have several identities. My individuality is influenced by the fact that I operate differently, linguistically and culturally, depending on the context. In functional linguistic terms (Halliday, 1994), my identity shifts according to the context of culture, the context of situation, and the field of discussion. My persona changes according to the people with whom I am conversing and the tenor of our relationship. My individuality is influenced by the mode of communication. My multi-seitic individuality is complex and comprised of the following identities (not necessarily in this order): woman, daughter, granddaughter, sister, cousin, wife, mother, interpreter, teacher, researcher, manager, friend, deaf, hearing, HMFD, British, Australian, multilingual, multicultural.

However, at the core of my being, I am comfortable with who I am and the fact that I am multi-seitic. Drawing on humanistic psychological theory, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, every person must satisfy different needs in order to develop fully as a person and achieve "self-actualization." According to Maslow's self-actualizing characteristics, and the arguments I have put forward regarding my identity, I believe that I am self-actualized as

- I have a keen sense of reality and have objective rather than subjective judgment in relation to having deaf parents;
- I see problems in terms of challenges and situations requiring solutions, rather than see problems as personal complaints or excuses;
- I am reliant on my own experiences and judgment, I am independent and not reliant on my culture and environment to form my opinions and views;
- I am democratic, fair, and nondiscriminating—embrace and enjoy all cultures, races, and individual styles;

- I accept others as they are and do not try to change people; and
- I am comfortable with myself.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the notion of linguistic and cultural identity in relation to being a hearing person with deaf parents. Using my personal experience to foreground the discussion of what it means to be a hearing person with deaf parents, I have explored the topics of bilingualism, interpreting, community membership, and identity, drawing on literature from the fields of linguistics, interpreting, sociology, and anthropology and psychology to analyze my experience as compared to more widely held beliefs. I have established that I am multilingual with several identities. I have explained why I do not relate to the Coda identity, why I do not partake in Coda activities, and why I prefer the term *HMFD*. I have emphasized the importance for any person to have a strong impression of their own identity and sense of self (ipseity), and to feel that they belong. In saying that, I have acknowledged that identifying as a Coda and attending CODA conferences is a valuable experience for many people, and they should be entitled to that experience, but that it is not necessarily for everybody. I have revealed different aspects of my own linguistic and cultural identity and have asserted that I would prefer to be considered in terms of my multi-seitic individuality, rather than just in relation to the fact that I have deaf parents.

My goal in writing this chapter was to capture many discussions that I have had throughout my life and to share an alternative way of thinking about being a person who is an HMFD. It seems to me that I have had so many conversations with people who feel the same way as me, but the general perception of a Coda as having a particular kind of identity, with certain needs, still dominates. In asserting my own perspective, I do not want to invalidate or undermine the experiences of other HMFDS. Instead, I ask that people respect that HMFDS are heterogeneous: We are not all the same and do not all need the same things. We all have one thing in common: that we grew up with deaf parents. But our life experiences may be very different. We may not all be bilingual or identify more strongly with deaf culture than hearing culture. And not all of us feel torn between two identities; in fact, some of us embrace all of our identities.

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NOTES

1. This is common among the emerging middle class of deaf professionals whose social involvement in the deaf community is reduced or takes on a different form, either because they are working in a deaf/sign language environment and no longer need to go the deaf club to get their "fix" of sign language and deaf culture, or they feel social pressure in their role as a professional (De Meulder, 2006; Ladd, 2003; Padden & Humphries, 2005).

2. For example, Pöchhacker (2000) found that the majority of non-German-speaking patients in hospitals in Vienna, Austria, were assisted by their children in their communication with doctors and nurses.

3. CACDP has since changed the assessment and qualification requirements to acknowledge the need for training and has introduced a vocational qualification which requires the development of a portfolio. For more information, see Napier (2004).

4. I had decided to take the Stage 1, 2, and 3 BSL exams with the encouragement of my mother, as I thought it would be useful to demonstrate that I could use another language.

5. See http://www.asli.org.uk/AW_BS.htm for information about Ben Steiner and ASLI's "Ben Steiner Award."

6. According to Breda Certy (personal communication, 23 March 2007), "enculturation means that we often react or behave involuntarily, even when we have some measure of 'controlling' or being aware of our cultural behaviour or perspectives. For example, maybe you will involuntarily feel offended by someone belittling sign language or deafness, or you will involuntarily say something in English in response to some situation—you do not always have a choice. Of course one can minimize these reactions with awareness and discipline, cultural behaviours or attitudes are not always a matter of choice."

7. See <http://www.coda-international.org> for more information.

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