

INTRODUCTION



When I traveled to Madrid, Spain, in 2002 to research Deaf culture —as a Spanish-speaking, hearing researcher and native English speaker interested in the topic—I was immediately informed by a contact that there was, in fact, no “Deaf culture” to be found. This book is the outcome of my struggle to make sense of this statement. The readings it contains are documents of a complex struggle. Understanding the history of this struggle—one that involves both hearing people and deaf people, paradigms of education, and attitudes toward language itself—is important if we are to fashion a more just world. I hope that the reader will gain a sense of the problems of the past that endure even today and also of how far we still have to go.

Before my trip to Madrid, I had taken courses in American Sign Language (ASL) as an undergraduate at the University of Virginia and during my graduate studies in Spanish at the University of Arizona, and I took my developing understanding of the Deaf world for granted. As I understood things, Deaf people were a linguistic minority, ASL was the expression of a cultural identity, and this identity, in its modern expression, had been the result of a concerted effort by both deaf and hearing people alike. Like other students of ASL and Deaf culture, I knew that the history of this effort could be traced through numerous publications, organizations, and demonstrations from William Stokoe’s work in the late 1950s and 1960s through Gallaudet University’s Deaf President Now! student movement of 1988 and beyond. I was familiar with the turbulent history of oralism in deaf education—the idea that deaf people should be taught to speak—after reading such masterful works as Harlan Lane’s *Mask of Benevolence* (1992) and Susan Plann’s *A Silent Minority* (1997). In casual conversations with hearing people who knew little about deaf people, I was often in the position to point out to others that, no, there was no such thing as a

universal sign language and that sign languages have a grammatical structure of their own and amount to much more than merely “waving your hands.”

Yet, despite this rudimentary knowledge, I was not in the position to appreciate that the Spanish context was so different. I wondered how it could seem that there was no Deaf culture in Spain. Although I did not believe this at the time and still do not believe it today, I needed to understand the turbulent history of deaf people in Spain to make sense of this statement. This volume seeks to present this turbulent history—its ideas, its key figures, its institutions, its recent developments—through documents dating from the early fifteenth century through today. It is my hope that deaf and hearing people alike, whether they are interested in Spain in particular or deaf history and culture in general, will find much in this work that, despite its historical context, is relevant to the struggle deaf people face in a contemporary hearing society.

It is my belief that there has been Deaf culture wherever deaf people have been able to find and establish relationships with one another. In this sense, there has always been Deaf culture in Spain. Yet from today’s perspective, “Deaf culture” (with a capital letter) connotes a certain self-conscious formation of identity, an acknowledgement of the power relationships that have always structured relations between hearing and deaf people—in short, an essentially social and even political project. The later selections in this volume make it very clear that this project is alive and well in Spain today. Contemporary authors, poets, linguists, and investigators of culture have been putting together a body of work that testifies to the deaf experience and to the legitimacy of a language and a culture that an overwhelming hearing majority has historically denied them.

Nevertheless, the road to Deaf culture in Spain has been a long one. It has required struggle by both hearing and deaf people, a struggle that has only recently begun to bear fruit. Many of the early readings in this book, given their oralist focus, are sure to provoke strong reactions. Sadly, this oral bias continues to be expressed even through many of the more contemporary writings included here, either in the guise of a preference for postlingually deaf people over prelingually deaf people or in the act of maintaining the metaphorical notion of deafness as silence—a metaphor that implicitly continues to frame deaf experience in opposition to hearing society and not on its own terms. Although understanding the history of deafness in Spain certainly cannot excuse this bias and its multiple manifestations, such a historical contextualization as that which I hope to have accomplished here serves to underscore the notion that recognizing Deaf culture is a struggle, and moreover, a struggle that must continue.

Whereas in the United States, the legacy of a vibrant contemporary Deaf culture can be traced back through a scholarly and academic literature that spans almost fifty years, in Spain that tradition is scarcely ten to fifteen years old. Moreover, within

Spain, the struggle for the official recognition of sign language (including, for example, Spanish Sign Language [LSE] and Catalán Sign Language [LSC]) culminated only recently. A law supporting sign languages was drawn up in 2005 and finally supported by the Spanish Senate in 2007. Thus, although in the United States, Deaf culture has been an established starting point for research (at least within communities of deaf people, university classes, and a substantial portion of disciplines such as linguistics and anthropology), in Spain it has been a subject of more debate over the years.

The historical documents and critical essays included in this book form a story that begins with early (mis)understandings of deafness as an illness, moves through turbulent centuries of misguided deaf education, and ends with the official recognition of sign languages (and the acceptance of Deaf culture) in the Spain of the twenty-first century. History is continually shaped through conflict, as it evolves, and it is subsequently reshaped as it is retold. Thus, this volume does not seek to present a tidy, straightforward narrative of the history of deaf people in Spain. Instead, it constitutes a collection of disparate voices incorporating written documents by both hearing and deaf people; lawyers, teachers, historians, linguists, poets, visual artists, travelers, and researchers of culture; Spaniards writing from within Spain and also those writing from abroad. I believe that this approach allows readers to assess the nature of the conflicts that have shaped and continue to shape the experience of deaf people in Spain.

The greatest conflict in this long history can be concisely summarized in this way: On the one hand, the oralism characteristic of the early period in deaf education is worthy of note because it broke with deep-rooted philosophical ideas concerning deafness and language. This assimilationist model arguably had good intentions—to further incorporate deaf people into society. That is, as the readings constituting this volume reveal, there were tangible social benefits for those who could learn to speak. For example, nonspeaking deaf people were routinely prohibited from inheriting property, but those who could learn to speak were allowed to inherit. On the other hand, whereas the history of benevolent paternalism regarding deaf people in Spain may have had its benefits, it has also unquestionably prevented the full integration of deaf people into society. From today's perspective, in which there is now a consensus that sign languages are full-fledged languages and not merely limited codes, it is easy to see that the oralist focus on teaching deaf students to speak expresses the bias of a majority hearing society, which, good intentions or not, used its social and cultural power in ways that notably discriminated against deaf people of the time.

This problematic treatment of deaf people fused with other cultural forms of discrimination. Even in the beginning of oralism in the mid-sixteenth century, only those deaf people who belonged to privileged families could benefit from

instruction. Later on, as some of the readings in this volume indicate, Spain was relatively slow to develop public schools for deaf students, and even when schools were founded, they often closed quite prematurely. Additionally, the tuition needs of students attending these schools were not adequately addressed as a problem of the larger hearing society. More recently, even the assimilationist attempt to incorporate deaf people into hearing society has been only partially successful, as a number of documents in this collection testify, not only in terms of education but also in terms of employment. The fact of the matter is that oralism has had lasting repercussions in Spain: selections in this volume indicate that signed television shows and public interpreters appeared only in 1984 and 1986, respectively, and only after another twenty years would Spain would see legislative support for sign language. Ultimately, this conflict between deaf people and the society in which they must educate themselves, find work, forge social relationships, and so forth is still a point of concern in Spain just as it is elsewhere.

Undoubtedly, hearing people must accept deaf people on their own terms. Nevertheless, the problem is more complex. Another conflict that appears in the readings scattered throughout this book is one that is manifest within deaf communities themselves. Just as, since 1550, those (privileged) deaf people who were in a position to benefit from oral language instruction were more able to advance in a hearing society, even today there are those deaf people who enjoy greater access to oral language and are more likely to assume leadership positions in the Spanish deaf communities. More than a few of the selections in this book take time to reflect on a distinction between prelingually and postlingually deaf people, which is an issue of simultaneously both a linguistic and a social nature.

Although readers familiar with the scholarly literature on Deaf culture and the linguistics of ASL in the United States will certainly be familiar with the two (interrelated) conflicts I have mentioned, there is one more conflict of interest that is particular to this set of documents. This is perhaps better understood as an encounter than a conflict, and it consists of a prolonged dialogue between researchers in Spain and those in the United States. It is most curious, given that Spanish historical documents laud the importance of the “Spanishness” of teaching the mute to speak, that the country that is today regarded as the birthplace of deaf education (Spain) should come to be reinvigorated by direct influence from America. As the act of tracing the circuitous route of this movement (Spain to France to America to Spain) constitutes the whole of this volume, for the moment it is sufficient to say that deaf education in Spain was brought to France by a teacher named Jacobo Rodríguez Pereira, that this transposition would ultimately see the development of Abbé Charles-Michel de l’Epée’s “methodical” signs (spoken-language grammar rendered in visual form), and that the transmission of sign language to the United States occurred through none other than Laurent Clerc, a deaf instructor who ac-

accompanied Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet from France to found the first school for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817.

Because the purpose of this volume is to present primary sources for their contemplation by the reader, in this introduction I will situate the readings by giving only those biographical details that are crucial to an initial encounter with the documents. The “Historical Introduction” by A. Farrar includes further details, as do a number of other selections included here, but those readers who are interested in gaining a full appreciation of the figures whose writings are presented here should refer to texts that discuss those figures in more depth, including, but not limited to, Susan Plann’s *A Silent Minority* (1997), Marilyn Daniels’s *Benedictine Roots in the Development of Deaf Education: Listening with the Heart* (1997), and Harlan Lane’s *When the Mind Hears* (1989). Readers who are able to read Spanish may consult two recently published encyclopedic works by Antonio Gascón Ricao and José Gabriel Storch de Gracia y Asensio: *Historia de la educación de los sordos en España* (2004) and *Fray Pedro Ponce de León, el mito mediático* (2006).

Onward, then, to the readings.

Part I: The Birth of Oralism and Deafness as Metaphor

The idea that deafness is an illness, a stigma rife with social consequences, has long been a part of the social imaginary of the hearing world. Nevertheless, this viewpoint stems from specific circumstances that are far from universal. It is undeniable that not all of us are born being able to hear. Some who are born able to hear become deaf quite early on, before acquiring oral language, whereas others become deaf later in life. The view that deafness is an illness, then, is necessarily culturally negotiated, arising in a specific social group that is in its majority hearing and that communicates orally. The judgments cast regarding the inherent characteristics of the deaf person, and what he or she can accomplish or not accomplish, are necessarily cultural, if not also political. In this way, the deaf person is relegated to the role of being a foil for the majority that now defines itself and identifies itself (negatively) in opposition to what it is not. Shaped by the particular social imaginary of this group, deafness comes to acquire a significance that transcends its mere physical aspect. Deafness acquires a metaphorical quality. It is now a symbol whose meaning is largely manipulated and controlled by the hearing majority. In fact, its symbolic expression, whatever form it may take, will now carry with it the norms of the (hearing) society in which it was produced. Although the society and its values may change, the symbol will still possess this meaning potential to the degree that these norms are maintained, renegotiated, and reshaped by the group as it evolves.

The key cultural meaning that is expressed through the idea of deafness in early modern Spain hinges on isolation. According to writers of the time, the deaf person

is isolated and alone: unable to communicate with others and unable to hear them. In his *Book of Consolations of Human Life* [*Libro de consolaciones de la vida humana*], Pedro de Luna (Benedict XIII; 1328–1423) refashioned the biblical consolation addressed to deaf people: “those who are physically deaf shall hear with the ears of their soul.” Later, Teresa de Cartagena, who was deafened at a young age after already having acquired written and spoken language, composed *Grove of the Infirm* (1455–60) based on Pedro de Luna’s writings. Here the narrative hinges on the elaborate metaphor of deafness as an island: “the cloud of temporal and human sadness covered the borders of my life and with a thick whirlwind of anguished sufferings carried me off to an island called ‘Oprobrium hominum et abiecio plebis [the Scorn of Mankind and Outcast of the People]’ where I have lived for so many years.” Because the people who wrote about deafness at the time were either themselves hearing or at least had access to spoken or written language before becoming deaf, it is safe to say that the early image of deafness as it appears in the written record is likely always one of lack, of illness, of infirmity. Unfortunately, this powerful metaphor of deafness as an isolated island tellingly lives on in the more recent writings of the postlingually deaf in Spain (for example, Inés Polo Merino’s *Isle of Silence*).

The rise of deaf education in sixteenth-century Spain did little to overturn this hearing-centered paradigm of deafness as infirmity. It is clear from what we know of the documented cases of deaf education that deaf people were largely valued by the hearing to the degree that they were able to communicate orally and that those deaf people who managed to receive such an education in articulation were initially of privileged families. While at the Monastery of San Salvador at Oña in Burgos, Pedro Ponce de León (1520–84), a Benedictine monk largely credited with the origins of deaf education in Europe, began teaching deaf people to speak. Undoubtedly, deaf people had been employing sign languages to communicate long before Ponce de León’s teachings,¹ and there is now substantial evidence to consider gesture and sign as predating spoken language in evolutionary terms, used by not only deaf but hearing people as well.² Nevertheless, the study of history in general has shown itself to be quite fond of origins, and the history of Spanish deaf education in particular, one largely written by hearing authors or deaf persons with access to spoken language, has more often than not assured that the values of an overwhelmingly hearing society have been reflected in the historical record. In this sense, Ponce de León’s students, Francisco and Pedro Fernández de Velasco y Tovar, have been afforded a special place in the history of deaf education precisely because they came from one of the most privileged families of the society of their

1. Plann takes up the issue of the teacher of El Mudo in the first chapter of her book.

2. See Armstrong 1999, 2008; Armstrong and Wilcox 2007; and Armstrong, Stokoe, and Wilcox 1995.

day and, moreover, because in learning to speak they came to embody the values of the colonizing hearing society in which they found themselves.

The question then becomes: Does Ponce de León deserve the credit that history has dealt him in this regard? Did the (largely posthumous) attention given to him by the hearing society of his time spark a chain of events that led to the recent official recognition of sign languages in Spain, or did his actions, and those of his successors, merely hold back and constrain developments in deaf education by imposing an oralist model on deaf people? There are reasons to consider both of these points of view (at the same time understanding that he has become the earliest *recognized* teacher of deaf students). I hope that through reading the selections I have collected in this section, the reader might come to reconcile the one with the other on his or her own terms.

Because of the assertion by some critics that Ponce de León never published a book detailing his method of instruction, or better still of the likelihood that said book, although written, has been lost,³ we must turn to other sources to read of his accomplishments. Luckily, such testimony is far from scarce. Many of the selections throughout this work mention his name, and even those that do not may be seen as implicitly indebted to his work at Oña. In one of the earliest translations included in this volume, Ponce's work is observed, praised, and built upon by the Spanish lawyer Licenciado Lasso. Lasso traveled from Madrid to Oña to witness Ponce's work on articulation (speech) with the brothers Velasco y Tovar and penned a legal treatise in the form of a letter to Francisco. In this treatise, he argues that those deaf people who come to be able to speak are immediately eligible to inherit estates. In his *A Legal Treatise on Deaf-mutes* (1550), which is a fundamentally audacious work with respect to both the legal and philosophical beliefs of the time, he proclaims of such mutes that "neither does the law consider them mutes nor in effect of truth may they be called mutes."

Because Ponce de León's method of instruction was never published and Lasso's text was largely unknown until it was republished in the early twentieth century by Alvaro López Núñez, many came to credit Juan Pablo Bonet with establishing deaf education in Spain. Bonet, who took over the teaching duties of Manuel Ramírez de Carrión, another instructor of deaf students, mentions neither Ramírez de Carrión nor Ponce in his work. However, his *Simplification of the Letters of the Alphabet and Method of Teaching Deaf-mutes to Speak* (1620) may possibly provide insight into the method used by Ponce and later Ramírez de Carrión.

Reading Bonet's work from today's perspective, one gains an appreciation of how arduous and time-consuming the activity is, even for those students who were most favorably disposed to it. At the time, the self-proclaimed achievement

3. A page of it is mentioned by Plann (1997), Gascón y Ricao (2006), and Sacks (1994).

of the oralists—that the deaf students could come to speak—was considered to be almost miraculous, garnering widespread attention. Bonet’s book was even praised by legendary Spanish playwright and poet Lope de Vega Carpio, whose admiration was anything but modest. In fact, Lope wrote a dedication for Bonet’s volume (1620), penned a letter to Bonet in verse (circa 1620), and later dedicated his play *Jorge Toledano* to the teacher (circa 1621; all three are magnificently translated for inclusion in this volume by Sonja Musser Golladay). Although Carrión’s teachings predated Bonet’s, documentation of his method is elusive. Nevertheless, a brief excerpt from his encyclopedic work on *Marvels of Nature* (1629), which addresses the topic of deafness, is included here.

Bonet’s fame was great, perhaps even surpassing Ponce’s for a short while, and it was not until interest in deaf education waned that a critic stepped forward to assert that the idea was Ponce’s and, in the context of the diminishing/decadent Spanish empire, characterize it as a uniquely Spanish contribution to scholarly work. A Spanish scholar and Benedictine monk named Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro, today regarded by some as the Spanish counterpart of Enlightenment thinker and philosopher Immanuel Kant, undertook this very effort. First in 1730 as part of his epic *Theatro crítico universal* (*Universal Critical Theater*, 1730) and later in his *Cartas eruditas* (*Erudite Letters*, 1759), he proclaimed the genius and originality evidenced by Ponce de León in his work with deaf-mutes, lamenting that such inventions as Ponce’s “have been enjoyed by foreigners rather than by Spaniards themselves.”

Feijóo took care to establish the proper chronology of the passing of the method—from Ponce de León to Bonet rather than the other way around: “Thus, if one derived the knowledge from the other, it was necessarily Bonet from Ponce and not Ponce from Bonet. Consequently, if one of the two was a plagiarist, it was Bonet and not Ponce.” In this way, Ponce de León’s work, now recovered by one of Spain’s foremost critics, explicitly came to form part of the national imagination of Spain. Yet lamentably, as the Benedictine monk and scholar explores in the writings included here, deaf education had spread to other nations where it was more supported and where its “Spanishness” was all but erased. Many years would pass before Feijóo’s call to recognize the importance of instructing deaf students would produce results and invite further inquiry.

The selection that brings a close to this first section of the volume is a superb overview of this early period of deaf education in the form of the “Historical Introduction” written for A. Farrar’s 1890 British English translation of Bonet’s book (originally published in 1620). The author astutely divides the history of deaf education into two periods, the first ending and the second beginning with the signed method practiced by the Abbé l’Epée. He states, “De l’Epée was the first to develop and raise signs to the dignity of an independent language, which, in his

opinion, if not equal, was at any rate sufficient to serve the same purpose to deaf-mutes as speech to those who hear.” Farrar treats the period before l’Epée’s work in detail, tracing perspectives on deafness through numerous philosophers, jurists, physicians, and the like.

Part II: The Return to Deaf Education

In 1793, Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro, a Spanish ex-Jesuit living in Italy, wrote a book that would be published two years later in Madrid titled *The Spanish School of Deaf-mutes, or Method of Teaching Them to Write and Speak the Spanish Language* (1795). In this work, he appeals to the whole of society and seeks to engage “the politician, the physicist, the philosopher, and the theologian.” As noted by Susan Plann (1997), he emphasizes that the lack of public schools that were engaging in a more formalized instruction of deaf people reflects poorly on Spain. In my view, although perhaps mitigated by the beliefs of his day, Hervás’s two-volume book seeks to provide philosophical and even linguistic reasons to dispense with the oralist bias toward spoken language. Although he makes the statement that he considers vocal language to be “certainly superior for the human mind,” this explicit opinion (can we understand it as a rhetorical device to strengthen his persuasive argument?) needs to be read against the grain of his recuperation of the “natural languages” of visual character. In this sense, this selection may be of particular interest to readers familiar with recent advances regarding the gestural origins of language.

Also in 1795, José Miguel Alea composed an eloquent and intriguing letter to the editor of the *Diario de Madrid* titled “In Support of Deaf-mutes” (1795). In it, he also laments that the Spanish “art” has fallen into disuse and seeks to demonstrate to the public that such support befits those who would work for the common good. Ultimately he concludes that “the issue of the art of teaching deaf and mute people to speak is a cause worthy of the pen of a man of goodwill, and if Your Lordship or any other learned man finds stronger reasons than my own for persuading the Spanish public of the importance of this invention, please do so without delay, for I will be the first to champion it.” As Plann (1997) relates, the pleas by Hervás y Panduro and Alea were situated in the context of a decline of interest in deaf education in Spain—public classes in both Madrid and Barcelona were shut down in 1802.

Nevertheless, Madrid’s Royal School for Deaf-mutes was opened in 1805 and became an important institution. Instead of basing its instruction in the Spanish tradition of oral articulation (as documented in part I of this volume), the Royal School explicitly embraced a French model of instruction that was based not on speech but on the methodical signs of the Frenchman Abbé l’Epée. Although from today’s perspective l’Epée’s methodical signs would be the equivalent of such

systems as Signed English (or manually coded English), where the grammar of the spoken language is represented visually, this in itself constituted a sharp turn away from the oralist method popular at the time. The methodical (manual/visual) signs fundamentally underscored the validity of the visual modality, even if they were inflected with the grammar of spoken language. This method of visual, and not oral, instruction, was to form the basis also for instruction in the United States, when Laurent Clerc, a student of l'Épée's method (through Sicard, l'Épée's successor) would come with Gallaudet from France to help found the first American school for deaf students in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817.

Tiburcio Hernández's "Speech Delivered on the Opening of the Royal School of Deaf-mutes, the Afternoon of the Sixteenth of October of 1814" (1814) returns once again to the controversy surrounding Ponce de León and Bonet, and, in my estimation, does well in clearly acknowledging that Ponce de León was not the origin of the Spanish "art." The speech seeks to clarify the nature of deafness and muteness and also produces some prescient remarks, such as the following, which acknowledges the arbitrary/conventional nature of both spoken and signed language: "Convention produces signs, and there is no articulation that is natural, to which may be added that even those articulations held to be natural, like lowering the head as a sign of consent, or moving it for negation, are in fact conventional signs." In another place, he underscores that the "natural" language of deaf people, visual language, should be the first used by the deaf person, and that only through it may a deaf person come to know another language—advice that unfortunately went unheeded in Spain for quite a while.

The next selection in this volume is perhaps the most intriguing, even if it is one of the most straightforward and also one of the most brief. The excerpts from Ramón de la Sagra's *Five Months in the United States of North America from the Tenth of April to the Twenty-third of September of 1835* (1836) describe his visits to three American schools for deaf students in New York, Philadelphia, and Hartford. His observations are somewhat ordinary and quantitative, detailing his impressions of the schools and more often their objective measures such as numbers of students, budgets, and so forth. However, context is everything: Ramón de la Sagra was a Spaniard then living in Cuba, which remained a Spanish colony until the end of Cuba's *Guerra de Independencia* (War of Independence; in America known as the Spanish-American War) in 1898. Particularly when read against the documents included in the first section of the present work, la Sagra's account of the French influence present in American schools seems to be the nail in the coffin of the underrecognized Spanishness of the "art," whose Peninsular origins are (lamentably, in la Sagra's opinion) now condemned to the dustbin of history because they are unknown not only in France and throughout Europe but also on another continent, North America. This point of contact, the observations documented by the eyes

of a Spaniard in America, may also be taken as foretelling the more recent explicit importation of the values of a strong American Deaf culture back into Spain toward the end of the twentieth century (explored in part IV of this book).⁴

The two readings that close this section are related to the formation of the Deaf Association in Madrid. Alvaro López Núñez, the same López Núñez who was to publish Licenciado Lasso's legal treatise on deaf-mutes ([1550] 1919), was active in the formation and development of the association in 1906 and published a book titled *The Silent World: Essays to Disseminate the Problems of Deaf-muteness* (1914). From today's perspective, and as shown in the first excerpt of his work included here, López Núñez is somewhat of a contradictory figure. In "The Hand That Speaks," he eloquently expresses a respect for the medium of sign and visual language—which he finds beautiful, natural, and even transcendent—and yet, as a strict oralist, he closes even this piece with an admonition that deaf people, instead of being encouraged to use visual language, must be taught to speak. Miguel Gómez Cano's *The Deaf-mutes of Madrid* (1914), more of a pamphlet than a book (it is included here in its entirety), narrates the author's impressions upon visiting the association and interviewing its then-president, López Núñez. The strict oralist character of these readings, which should be read as a direct result of the unfortunate Milan Conference of 1880 that established oralism as the official method to be used in educating deaf students, may seem to be at odds with the benefits provided by the association in the realms of social life and work. Sadly, as we see in the part III of the present work, the obstacles faced by deaf people at the turn of the century in terms of work had changed very little even by the 1970s and 1980s.

Part III: The Contemporary Deaf Experience

In the United States during the late 1950s and 1960s, the research communities began a concerted effort to officially recognize what deaf people had known all along—that sign languages were natural languages capable of expressing abstract thought. The direction of this movement in research, largely attributed to hearing researcher William Stokoe of Gallaudet University, began to make inroads not only in linguistics but also in anthropological and sociological accounts of the lives of deaf people. The effect of this movement was to more clearly show that, contrary to what was largely thought by the hearing society of the time (and to a great degree is still prevalent today), the problems faced by deaf people were not merely caused by their own deficits but rather by the inability of hearing society to appropriately approach deafness and visual language on deaf people's terms.

4. Interestingly, in 1839 la Sagra delivered a lecture at the Royal School for the Deaf in Madrid.

The movement gave scientific and academic support to deafness not as a disability but instead as the sign of a minority culture. By 1988, students at Gallaudet University had expressed their discontent with a long tradition of hearing university presidents in the form of the Deaf President Now! movement, which successfully brought a deaf president to the head seat of the school. Although I. King Jordan was not born deaf (he became deaf in his twenties as a result of a motorcycle accident), he nevertheless embodied a spirit of change, an attempt to throw off the colonizing pattern that Harlan Lane has called the *Mask of Benevolence* (1992) and to claim for deaf people the power to dictate their own social lives, education, and social representation.

The scientific and academic legitimization of sign language and deafness as a cultural rather than merely physical trait was nowhere near as prevalent in Spain. Of course, one might argue that the Spanish tradition of oralism going back to Pedro Ponce de León and even further left no room for visual models of communication. The oralist character of instruction in Spain and its reinforcement by the Milan Conference of 1880 has undoubtedly had the effect of strengthening an assimilating perspective on deafness. One could say also that the issue of deafness was eclipsed by and even subjugated to the problem of the progressive decline in power of Spanish nationhood by that nation's most noted thinkers. This focus on deafness as a mere springboard for the national problem may have reinforced the ingrained idea of deafness as a metaphor (appearing in Teresa de Cartagena's work, for example) and may have distracted from deafness as a social issue. Likewise, one could also argue that the fortuitous circumstances of a newly forged nation in North America with no rooted educational paradigms of any kind, let alone an established history of educating deaf people, allowed the more rapid and more extensive spread of a visual paradigm for deaf education.

These ideas are useful in thinking about the problematic history of the deaf population in Spain, but I do not believe that they can completely explain such a history. History is necessarily incomplete, and even at its best is quite reductive. In lieu of a complete record, what this section presents, then, is a selection of notable voices, events, and information from the past quarter century in Spain. I use the word "notable" because in no way is this section representative of the totality of deaf experiences unfolding in Spain. However, I do think these readings are particularly important in that they are all contemporary attempts at a public dialogue on the nature of deafness and the social lives and problems of deaf people in a largely hearing Spanish society that had not yet officially recognized the validity of visual communication. Both Inés Polo Merino and Félix-Jesús Pinedo Peydró are influential deaf Spaniards of this period, even though this may be precisely because they were exposed to the Spanish language before becoming deaf. They both identify as postlingually deaf people and, as becomes clear from the readings included here,

see themselves as better able to negotiate the divide between the hearing and deaf populations in Spanish society. Both deserve recognition for their practical efforts to improve the social conditions awaiting the deaf child and most of all for pushing the boundaries of the social norms regarding deaf people in Spain. Among many others, their early efforts have been absolutely crucial in terms of moving toward the recognition of sign language and deaf culture.

The excerpts of Polo Merino's narrative included here are quite personal: she describes how she came to be deafened at an early age and uses her own life experiences as a starting point for denouncing the current state of options for deaf people living in Spain regarding language, education, work, and more. Pinedo Peydró, a former president of the Confederación Nacional de Sordos de España (National Confederation of Spanish Deaf Persons, CNSE), continues to be one of the most influential figures in the cultural realm. In the selections included here, he attempts to clarify the divisions among deaf people themselves at the same time that he points to a better future for all deaf people. As a figurehead of the deaf world at this time in Spain, he is in a position to disseminate the advances in signed television programming (1984) and interpreting services (1986) made by the government in Madrid, advances that followed on the heels of similar developments in the United States.⁵

This section also includes the work of an English-speaking, hearing scholar of deafness. Oliver Sacks (1994), although well-known for readable works in neuropsychology such as *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, has also lent his voice to the support of deaf population as a cultural community in *Seeing Voices* (1989). When the latter was translated for a Spanish readership in 1994, Sacks wrote a new prologue, which is published here for the first time in English. This selection documents the context of a Spain poised to once again take strides on behalf of deaf people. Sacks writes that "this is a crucial time for deaf people in Spain [. . .] now there is a possibility of radical change."

José Gabriel Storch de Gracia y Asensio, an accomplished author and law professor at Madrid's Universidad Complutense, adds to the palpable feeling of change in the air in Spain through his short pieces included here. These pieces are directed to a general audience and advocate rights that at the time had not yet been sufficiently secured in Spanish society: "On the Right of Deaf Persons to an Accessible Television, 1" (1997), "The Fundamental Right to Communication" (1999), and "The

5. Leah Hager Cohen (1995) notes in her memoir that "although the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) was first proposed in 1964, it did not begin certifying interpreters until 1972. Even then, the idea of treating interpreting as a profession caught on gradually. Until 1972, no official standards or code of ethics had ever existed; few interpreters ever received remuneration for their work, and the quality of service varied dramatically from interpreter to interpreter" (249).

Right to Our Sign Language” (1999). His reminder that “rights are not freely given, rather they are won through struggle” serves also, in the context of the present volume, as a cue to view the history of deaf people in Spain not as an unavoidable progressive enlightenment but rather in terms of a struggle over different conceptions of deafness that have been advocated by individuals and subsequently enforced through systems of power. Together, these selections document the contemporary struggle of deaf people in Spain and, by way of underscoring the significance of deaf experiences, contribute to the pending explicit recognition of deaf culture.

Part IV: The Recognition of Deaf Language and Culture

In the 1990s—that is, at the same time that the public dialogue on deafness in Spanish society was gaining ground—the research communities in Spain were turning to sign language much as those in the United States had in the late 1950s and 1960s. The firsthand experiences and social issues confronted by deaf people, about which such figures as Polo Merino and Pinedo Peydró had written so cogently in the late 1970s and 1980s, were now being supported and legitimized by more scientific and academic research. This research sought to establish that deaf people not merely deserve the same rights, education, and work opportunities as hearing people but moreover possess a language and a culture. Many of the essays in this section make explicit reference to the scholarly tradition in the United States, and all are arguably indebted to it implicitly.

Perhaps the most significant document of this period is the doctoral dissertation of a hearing researcher named María Ángeles Rodríguez González, titled simply *Sign Language* (1992), that undoubtedly establishes LSE properly as an object worthy of linguistic study. In the conclusion to her volume, which forms the last part of the excerpts included here, she lists her own twenty-six contributions to the study of signed languages, contextualizing them explicitly within the tradition of scholarship initiated by Stokoe. However, this excerpt’s historical importance overshadows neither the author’s clear style nor her insights into the linguistic dimension of sign language.

In my estimation, Félix-Jesús Pinedo Peydró’s contribution to this section represents the growing acceptance of the linguistic and cultural legitimation of sign language in Spain. When read against his previous writings (in part III), his speech titled “Spanish Sign Language (LSE): A True Language” (1995) continues his emphasis on the public dissemination of knowledge just as before and yet does so newly invigorated by an engagement with American linguistic arguments in support of sign language as well as explicit mention of Gallaudet and an American deaf poet.

The discussion of visual culture taken from Amparo Minguet Soto’s *Sociological and Cultural Traits of Deaf People* (2000) reads as an apt transposition of works such

as Padden and Humphries's *Deaf in America* (1988) and Susan Rutherford's *A Study of American Deaf Folklore* (1993), arguing for the existence of cultural practices that are unique to the deaf cultures in Spain. Quite interesting also is the inclusion of the story of the childhood realization by American Deaf researcher Samuel J. Supalla (author of the foreword to the present volume) that not everyone was deaf. This story, recounted as an archetypal and even mythic event, testifies to the powerful modeling capacity exercised by the strong Deaf identity in America on the developing Spanish context of the 1990s.

Ángel Herrero Blanco's essay "Sign Languages, Signs of Culture" (2000) is perhaps the most difficult reading in the book because of his precise and in-depth use of linguistic terminology, but for the same reason it is one of the most important. Herrero Blanco dialogues with Stokoe and Chomsky to work toward an answer to the question, "What implications does the recognition of SLs [Signed Languages] have for our conception of language?" This article appropriately closes the gap that existed between Spain and other nations, as pointed out by many of the authors included in this book. Research communities in Spain have recognized sign language not only as an object of investigation in itself but also as indicative of more general issues of language unfolding in the discipline of linguistics. Of course, from the time of this essay's publication (2000), several years passed before the Spanish government officially recognized sign languages. Just as happened in the United States, what deaf people have known all along is now supported and legitimized by research communities in Spain—a necessary step in the process of improving the position of deaf people within a largely hearing society.

Part V: A Selection of Deaf Poetry

In an earlier publication that led to the idea for this book ("Deaf Cultural Production in Twentieth-Century Madrid" in *Sign Language Studies* 7, no.4 [2007]), I also pointed out that it is important that researchers pay more attention to the literary production occurring naturally through signed languages in Spain. Here, however, because of the present volume's focus on printed matter, I have only included written poetry composed through the modality of spoken language. It is necessary to point out that today, poetry originally written by deaf individuals in English is far from being a marker of identity for the American deaf community. Given a context where deafness as a mere physical trait is strongly contrasted with the idea of the Deaf community as a social group possessing a natural language (ASL) and cultural forms all their own, the poetic form that best expresses this Deaf (capital D) identity is signed/visual poetry originally composed in ASL. Although poetry of this nature (visual poetry composed in signed language) undoubtedly exists in Spain, poems composed in the written forms of oral languages (Castilian Spanish,

Catalán, etc.) likely enjoy a cultural status and acceptance that they lack in the United States. The CNSE has routinely held poetry competitions that have served as a forum for such poems, and some of the most respected postlingually deaf poets (Polo Merino, Pinedo Peydró) have chosen to compose directly in the written form of oral language. These poems, although composed through the written form of oral language and often presenting a questionable understanding of deafness as the lack of sound (as established, for example, by Teresa de Cartagena), nevertheless still need to be understood as reflecting the initial process of development of a culturally Deaf identity. The authors whose poems are included here, José Luis Marroquín, Daniel Alvarez Reyes, Manuel Gamez Quintana, Pablo Jesús Sesma Valles, Inés Polo Merino, Pablo Jesús Sesma Valles, Rakel Rodríguez Castrejón, and Dopin, express a variety of emotions and perspectives on tensions with the larger hearing society and ultimately argue for an inclusive notion of community.

It is my hope that the readings that follow will encourage readers to further investigate the figures and issues associated with deaf history and culture in Spain. Ultimately, however, disseminating documents of this type is crucial to broadening our understanding of the nature and history of the struggles faced by deaf people today—no matter where that struggle unfolds.

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