

12 | The Chiying School of Taiwan: A Foreigner's Perspective

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My route to studying sign language in Taiwan was roundabout. I began learning American Sign Language (ASL) in 1977. In the mid-1980s, I spent a year in Beijing, China, teaching English as a foreign language. As a graduate student in linguistics several years later, I decided to write my doctoral dissertation on the phonology and phonetics of signed language in use in Beijing. But by 1989, the People's Republic of China was in political turmoil. The Tian An Men Square massacre made a return to China difficult. Searching for an alternative field site, I recalled the unique history of a school for the deaf in Kaohsiung, Taiwan.¹ The Chiying School, founded by Chiang Ssu Nung, a deaf man originally from mainland China, had used the Chinese Sign Language (CSL) as a medium of instruction for many years while Taiwan's other schools for the deaf used Taiwan Sign Language (TSL) (Yau 1977, 7; Chao, Chu and Liu 1988, 9–10; Smith 1989, 1–2). Circumstances seemed to have conspired to create a living archive of CSL in Taiwan.

Taiwan is an island that lies off the southeastern coast of mainland China. For the last 500 years, it has been populated by Chinese immigrants and by a long-standing local population. Taiwan was occupied by Japan from 1895 to 1945, returning to Chinese control after the Sino-Japanese War. Chinese Nationalist Party leaders and followers fled to Taiwan in 1949 when the Communists took over mainland China. Ever since, the island has been estranged from the mainland.

Kaohsiung is Taiwan's third largest city and is situated on its southwestern coast. It is the industrial center of Taiwan and, throughout the 1990s, had supported one of Taiwan's largest economies. In the Tsoying area of Kaohsiung is the Chiying Private Elementary School for the Deaf. Like many schools for the deaf, the Chiying School occupies a position of great importance in the history of the deaf community in Taiwan. To my delight, the Chiying School agreed that I could visit for nearly five months to gather Chinese Sign Language data. A dissertation grant from the American Council of Learned Societies financed the project.

During the course of gathering data for my work in linguistics at the Chiying

School, I enjoyed sustained contact with deaf children who boarded there and with deaf staff members. In addition, I came into frequent contact with the deaf and hearing friends, acquaintances, and family members of these people. My observations from this time form the basis of this chapter. Though some of what follows is based on actions or conversations caught on videotape, most of it is based on the notes I took as I came to know, sometimes through formal interviews and sometimes through more casual conversation, the people who were part of the Chiying School in the early 1990s. The period of time that I spent at the Chiying School might be described as a temporary fusion of individuals from disparate worlds: deaf people who had long been deeply connected to the Chiying School, to Kaohsiung, and to Taiwan and a curious stranger who was neither Taiwanese nor deaf.

THE CHIYING SCHOOL IN THE EARLY 1990S

THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF THE CHIYING SCHOOL

The two-story school was constructed largely of cement. It was roughly U-shaped, with classrooms, dining area, and dormitory space on two wings and the administrative offices on the other. There were a few air conditioners and fans in various locations, and an old automatic washer. Some of the classrooms were carpeted, and the teachers and students entered those classrooms without their “slippers”—plastic or rubber sandal-like footwear. Most of the classrooms had prominently placed televisions and VCRs. The school owned a computer, which one or two teachers used regularly.

The school had a well-worn appearance that bespoke a proud but difficult history. The privately controlled and funded Chiying School was indeed struggling, and this struggle was not the first financial challenge it had faced (Smith 1999). Its current travails, I learned, contrasted the situations of the better-funded government-run schools for the deaf in the other Taiwanese cities of Taipei, Tainan, and Taichung. The Chiying School somehow continued its work in the face of difficulties. The school was apparently known for accepting and attempting to educate some of the most unfortunate of Taiwan's children.

THE SETUP OF THE CLASSES

The Chiying School began as a school for the deaf, but over the years, enrollment of deaf students had declined, necessitating that the school also accept developmentally disabled students. Everyone in the school—members of the administration, staff members, and students themselves—perceived the deaf students as having very different educational needs from the developmentally disabled students, who, thus, were taught in separate classrooms and on separate floors. The deaf students were often scandalized by some of the behavior of the developmentally disabled children and were blunt about their disapproval. However, the deaf children seemed to take the view that the developmentally disabled children were not as responsible for their behavior as they themselves would have been.

Smith (1999) reports that about 100 students per year enrolled at Chiying in the 1970s. The school that I saw in the early 1990s greatly resembled his descrip-

tion of the school in the 1970s, except for the fact that, by the 1990s, enrollment had gone down to about 65–75. The Chiying School offered classes for deaf children and developmentally disabled children from first to sixth grade. Occasionally, students who were much older than the appropriate age for the grade appeared in the classrooms. Several of the deaf staff people told me about friends and acquaintances who had, for example, begun school at age 13 and graduated from sixth grade at age 19. Ten to 15 students boarded at the school during the time that I was there; perhaps another 55 to 60 children from the Kaohsiung area commuted to the Chiying School daily. Some students took a bus sent out by the school, and others arrived at the school by means of public buses and alternate means of transportation. Many of the people in the Tsoying area, such as shop owners, were familiar with the school, partially because over the years, the school had maintained a bakery that supplied baked goods to eating establishments in the area.

When I was at the Chiying School, both deaf and hearing teachers worked there, which, I was told, had been the case since the school's inception. In fact, the descriptions of the faculty compositions at not only the Chiying School but also the other schools that Chiang Ssu Nung established suggest that this situation was typical (Smith 1999).² The Chiying School apparently took care of its own, hiring some graduates for positions such as teachers and bakers. Over the weeks, as I met the people at the school, I observed that all of them had a conscious appreciation for Chiang Ssu Nung's contribution to deaf life with the establishment of the Chiying School. Although they did not see him regularly or often, they seemed to feel respect and fondness for him.

LANGUAGE AT THE CHIYING SCHOOL

A visitor to the Chiying School is struck immediately by the fact that signing is the preferred mode of communication there. Closer inspection also reveals linguistic diversity.

LANGUAGE USE DURING THE CHIYING SCHOOL'S DISTANT PAST

The Japanese are believed to be the first Asians to formally educate their deaf citizens (Hodgson 1953, 267). The 50-year Japanese occupation of Taiwan from 1895 to 1945 is important to deaf history in Taiwan because, during this time, the two schools for the deaf were established in Tainan and Taipei. The Tainan school was set up in 1915 and was staffed with teachers from Tokyo. The Taipei school, set up in 1917, was staffed with teachers from Osaka. The teachers from Japan "used their respective dialects of Japanese Sign Language in their classrooms" (Chao, Chu, and Liu 1988, 9; Smith 1989, 1). That language, which originated in Japan and which took hold in Taiwan through the schools for the deaf in Tainan and Taipei, is today known as TSL.

Chiang Ssu Nung left mainland China in 1949 (Smith 1999) when the communists took over and, like many refugees, he settled in Taiwan. When he arrived in Taiwan, he established a school for the deaf in Keelung, Taiwan, that lasted less than a year.³ Chiang then moved south to Kaohsiung and established the Chiying School (Chao, Chu, and Liu 1988, 9; Smith 1999).

TSL was entrenched in the schools for the deaf by the time Chiang Ssu Nung arrived in Taiwan. But Chiang, who was late-deafened and had learned to sign in the Shanghai area (Smith 1999), neither knew nor cared to know TSL.⁴ He preferred to use the Chinese signs as a medium of instruction in his schools.⁵ Deaf children in Tainan and Taipei learned TSL throughout their schooling, but the children who attended the Chiyung School used only CSL during their elementary school years. When they graduated, some went on to middle school in Tainan and learned TSL (Chao, Chu, and Liu 1988, 7). I met some of these former students at the Chiyung School during the early 1990s. To my knowledge, they always produced TSL, but they continued to understand CSL.⁶ I also met signers who did not attend middle school and, so, did not have to learn TSL in school. Some of them still sign CSL, and some learned TSL on their own.

In Taiwan, a high school education was the highest level to which most deaf people could aspire; higher education has always eluded deaf Taiwanese. A discussion I had with a consultant revealed her genuine shock that I had a Deaf American professor on my dissertation committee.

LANGUAGE USE DURING THE CHIYUNG SCHOOL'S RECENT PAST

The tradition of using CSL as a medium of instruction remained in place at the Chiyung School until sometime in the late 1970s or early 1980s when the school changed over to TSL. In a conversation I had with Wayne Smith in 1999, he recalled seeing teachers from the Chiyung School use CSL at a conference in Taipei in 1980. Neither Chiang Ssu Nung nor Jennifer, his daughter, elaborated on the reasons for the change with me. I sensed that the change was not a particularly welcome one. Although the Chiyung School was private, in 1991, Smith surmised that the school changed from CSL to TSL "under pressure from the provincial government."

By the time I arrived in Kaohsiung in the early 1990s, Chiang Ssu Nung had essentially retired and was living most of the time in Taipei. Although all the Chiyung deaf people whom I met had learned CSL at the school when they were young, the changing times and evolving deaf community in Kaohsiung and Tainan had dislodged CSL, and, in the 1990s, it was a somewhat distantly remembered part of their linguistic lives. Few of the people I knew used it exclusively or even mostly, but it was remembered somewhat affectionately.

Although I had come to Taiwan in search of CSL, these circumstances suggested that I would need to change my research focus to TSL. In principle, the CSL signers at Chiyung were willing to help me locate other CSL signers, but they conceded that the endeavor would be difficult. They told me that the few CSL signers in close proximity were older deaf people or people unaccustomed to and uninterested in the idea that they could serve as linguistic consultants for research on their language. Some of the Chiyung CSL signers were willing in spirit but, for various reasons, not able to serve as consultants for my research themselves. In the end, I did not push my original agenda of finding CSL signers, which seemed to be a great relief to the Chiyung CSL signers. In contrast, the Chiyung TSL signers were noticeably interested in and, perhaps, a bit bemused by the idea that I would ask them to serve as linguistic consultants.

TAIWAN'S LINGUISTIC VARIATION

Given the long tradition, indeed historical bias, of geographic region named as a major marker of linguistic variation (Wardhaugh 1998), it is not surprising that the literature reports two dialects of TSL, one centered around the school in Taipei and one centered around the school in Tainan. The literature contains little direct evidence to support this claim; the differences between the two dialects are reported to be lexical (Smith 1989, 1; Chao, Chu, and Liu 1988, 9–10). However, given the historical facts, we might expect to find morphological and syntactic differences between Chiying TSL and Taipei/Tainan TSL. In fact, there is some evidence that this is the case.

Smith's work on TSL is based on data he gathered largely from Taipei signers, with a few from Tainan (Wayne Smith, 1991, personal communication). My work is based on data I gathered at the Chiying School. I can report two pieces of evidence that suggest that Chiying signers use a slightly different system than the Taipei/Tainan signers Smith describes. First, Smith explains that the Taipei/Tainan signers have agreement verbs that mark gender of subject or object and number of subject or object (1989, 1990). Consider the following examples. In figure 12.1, the extended pinky on the weak hand serves as the object of the verb TELL. TELL is articulated with the strong hand. Figure 12.2 shows how the idea "tell the two of them" would be expressed. In figure 12.2, the weak hand assumes the handshape for the number two, while the strong hand articulates the verb TELL.

The Chiying signers mark the gender of subject and object on verbs the same way that other TSL signers do, so the sign in figure 12.1 was acceptable to them. However, the Chiying signers rejected expressions like that in figure 12.2. Though other TSL signers can inflect the weak hand's handshape for number, the Chiying signers cannot. For them, the way to express the idea "tell the two of them" is for the strong hand to articulate the verb twice while the weak hand maintains a handshape not marked for number.

Second, TSL has been analyzed as having three auxiliaries called Aux 1, Aux 2 and Aux 11 (Smith 1989, Smith 1990). Aux 1, the most frequent, looks like a point from location *x* to location *y*. Aux 2 looks like the TSL sign KAN (SEE). Aux 11 looks like the TSL sign DUI YU (MEET) (Smith 1989, Smith 1990).⁷ Although the



FIGURE 12.1 TELL HER (Smith 1989, 175)



FIGURE 12.2 TELL THE TWO OF THEM (Smith 1989, 194)

Chiying signers regularly used Aux 2 and Aux 11, I did not observe nor could I elicit Aux 1. When I asked directly if Aux 1 was possible, all of the Chiying TSL signers were certain that it was not (Ann 1998). Clearly many questions remain about TSL dialects.

ATTITUDES TOWARD LANGUAGE: WRITTEN CHINESE, SIGNED MANDARIN, AND TSL

As a signer of ASL as a second language, I had a sense of what communicating in a visual language is like, how my hearing interferes with aspects of learning a sign language, and how I might best learn a new sign language. Armed with this knowledge, I was a ready student of TSL. But the Chiying deaf people, who hold the Chinese language in high esteem, seemed convinced that I had come to the school to interact in some way with the hearing people there, for example, as an English teacher. My real purpose was not understood until later and was always regarded, I sensed, to be a bit absurd. After all, as the Chiying deaf people asked me point blank, who would come halfway around the world to learn TSL and interact with them? In the beginning, then, as I would try to engage the Chiying deaf adults and children in TSL conversation, they would try to help me with my written Chinese characters. For example, if I asked about a particular sign, people seemed to think I was asking them to show me the Chinese characters for the word. But I showed little interest and less promise in practicing my characters, and day by day, I was learning to articulate my thoughts more clearly in signs, so the Chiying deaf people eventually gave up using written characters with me.

Although linguistic and cultural issues occupy a central place in the lives of many Deaf Americans, the same could not be said about the situation among Taiwanese deaf people, according to what I saw at the Chiying School. The Chiying deaf people considered the views and preferences of the hearing world to be important and certainly dominant. Despite this view, the tacit understanding was that deaf people also had their own needs and concerns. These needs would simply not be addressed by society, but that issue seemed to be an entirely different matter to them.

The notion of Signed Mandarin was expressed in TSL by a one-handed sign that could be roughly described as placing Chinese characters in space one by one from top to bottom. Because of the way the Chiying deaf people defined the sign for me, I eventually glossed it as SIGNING-THE-CHARACTERS-IN-ORDER. TSL signers sometimes rolled their eyes when they mentioned SIGNING-THE-CHARACTERS-IN-ORDER, but they did not seem to resent it. SIGNING-THE-CHARACTERS-IN-ORDER was not positive or negative in an ideological sense. Rather, people's slight impatience with it had to do with it being "slow" and "tiring." I rarely saw more than stock phrases expressed in Signed Mandarin among the Chiying signers. The Mandarin phrase "return home" (*hù jiā*) was one of these expressions. The Chiying signers signed it with two signs: one that meant "return" and a second that meant "home." The only other use of Signed Mandarin that I encountered was when the children were taught to perform a signed song. The Chiying deaf people never used SIGNING-THE-CHARACTERS-IN-ORDER with me.

As would be expected, the Chiying deaf people had no understanding of the ASL fingerspelled expression T-S-L. They referred to their way of signing with one another using two different ways. One was a two-handed sign that I glossed as SIGNING-THE-CHARACTERS-OUT-OF-ORDER, based on the way they explained the meaning of the sign to me. I glossed the other as CONDENSE. They considered SIGNING-THE-CHARACTERS-OUT-OF-ORDER to be clear and fast from the standpoint of both production and perception. They did not seem particularly enamored of their language or loyal to it in a philosophical sense. Rather, SIGNING-THE-CHARACTERS-OUT-OF-ORDER was simply the most economical way to communicate and was the agreed-on way in the community.

One might question how much agreement exists with respect to sign use. The Chiying signers could often come up with as many as four to seven signs for the same referent without trouble. In fact, deaf people from both Kaohsiung and Taipei told me that an abundance of synonymous signs was in use.⁸ Smith (1976, revised 1988) discusses the same phenomenon. The Ministry of Education in Taiwan is aware of the proliferation of local signs throughout Taiwan, and through the years, the government has attempted to standardize TSL. The Chiying deaf people seemed to feel a need for standardization and wanted, at least in principle, to cooperate with the government's attempts. On several occasions, I observed deaf teachers advise the students to use a sign in one of the sign language manuals compiled by the government rather than a sign the child picked up from one of the teachers.

Perhaps in some deaf communities, hearing people and foreigners would be looked at with some suspicion. I did not perceive this to be the case at the Chiying School. In fact, my circumstances were certainly a language learner's paradise, although the challenge of communicating with a well-intentioned but foreign guest did affect the conversations that the Chiying deaf people had with me. At some point during my stay there, they began to consider me an actual participant in some conversations, despite my obvious inability to be completely independent in my signed discourse. And often, they seemed to feel a responsibility to include me as much as I wanted to be included. They checked to see whether or not I had understood and were often willing to rephrase what was said in ways they knew I would understand better. Fast and fluent conversation sometimes slowed appreciably on my behalf.

Many deaf people at the school were adept at more than one language and were observant about linguistic matters. For example, after seeing several ASL name signs, including mine, the Chiying deaf signers decided that name signs in ASL often involved the fingerspelled letter that represented the initial. Then, they explained to me that name signs in TSL often referred to physical characteristics of a person such as "eyes that wander" or "tall woman" or "scar on the head" (see Yau and He, 1989, for similar observations about name signs in a school for the deaf in southern China).

And although the Chiying deaf people acknowledged that SIGNING-THE-CHARACTERS-IN-ORDER and SIGNING-THE-CHARACTERS-OUT-OF-ORDER were two very different ways of signing, they sometimes would claim they were using Signed Mandarin when they were actually using TSL but signing slowly. Similarly, fast signing was labeled as TSL even if it was Signed Mandarin. The Chiying deaf people sometimes claimed that Signed Mandarin and TSL were distributed according to geography. They might assert, for example, that signers from Tainan "signed the characters in order" whereas Kaohsiung signers "signed the characters out of order." Out of all Taiwan's signers, I was once told, Taipei signers were the best at "signing the characters out of order." They also shared other similar theories. These statements were rarely consistent and reflected fleeting impressions rather than reasoned generalizations that were based on data analysis. However, as research continues on TSL, we might find truths about regional variation beyond Smith's (1989) claims.

THE PEOPLE AT THE CHIYING SCHOOL

This section describes both the children and the adults I came to know the best. To protect the privacy of the people I write about, each person's name has been rendered as a single letter followed by a long dash, and some identifying characteristics have been changed.

THE CHIYING STUDENTS

The children, mostly boys, except one girl who was developmentally disabled, ranged in age from about 7 to 16. The older deaf boys were the clear leaders whereas the younger deaf boys and all the developmentally disabled children were the followers. A few of the students had a deaf parent, but most were the only deaf member of hearing families. During the time that I was there, one deaf boy's hearing father removed him from the school for 30 days in an attempt to cure his deafness with Chinese medicine. When the boy returned to school, he was still deaf. A few students had strong hearing or deaf families who cared deeply for them. But a significant number came to attend the Chiying School through circumstances that seemed reflective of relations between deaf and hearing people in general, ranging from benign neglect to abuse. Some had been dropped off years before by unstable families who rarely, if ever, visited. Others were found abandoned and brought to the Chiying School.

All of the children had energy to spare, and almost all were boisterous. Their lives, from my perspective, revolved around playing. Playing involved forming a group of eight to ten, a great deal of physical contact among those in the group,

and the constant movement of the group around school premises. Although the boys tickled one another mercilessly, tackled one another to the floor on a regular basis, and seemed to infuriate one another often, they rarely hurt one another intentionally. A hard of hearing child who wore a hearing aid, was not a fluent signer, and had negative attitudes toward signing was more of a target than any of the deaf boys. The deaf boys called the hard of hearing child by the sign TING REN (hearing person).⁹

THE CHIYING STAFF

Both deaf and hearing teachers and staff members worked at the Chiyung School. A hearing woman called “*obasan*” (aunt) prepared breakfast and dinner for the boarders as well as lunch for all the children. She also laundered the boarders’ clothes. Her title was one of the many signs of Japanese influence in Taiwan; *obasan* is a Japanese word used to refer to a housekeeper. Obasan clearly cared about the deaf students, and her conversation with them was sparsely peppered with signs.

T——’s precise job at the school was unclear to me, but he seemed to serve as an all-around caretaker and administrator. He became deaf at age 7 and began first grade at the Chiyung School at age 14. After graduation, he continued to work for the school and had worked there ever since. When I met him, he was in his early 50s, animated, and fun. His life up till then had spanned a number of hard years in Taiwan. As a child, he had known poverty, and when I met him, he talked of younger people (who had grown up in a richer, more modern Taiwan) not understanding his struggles to survive back then as a poor man and as a deaf man. The toil of his young adulthood yielded better times. He eventually became reasonably financially secure, married, and had children.

T——’s linguistic repertoire included both sign and spoken languages. He subscribed to the belief that CSL was preferable to TSL. He seemed to be a fluent signer of CSL, and though he understood TSL, he did not produce it. The TSL signers and T—— conversed often. A frequent observer of these interactions, I thought that TSL signers produced TSL and understood CSL, and that T—— produced CSL and understood TSL. All of the Chiyung deaf people said this method was exactly how T—— and the TSL signers communicated. (Things were a bit different when the Chiyung TSL signers saw Chiang Ssu Nung. Despite the fact that CSL had essentially fallen into disuse in the community at large, the Chiyung TSL signers said they either had to remember their CSL signs or simply not communicate with Chiang.)

In addition, before T—— became deaf, he was a speaker of Taiwanese and also knew some Japanese. I saw him use both languages in a few circumstances, for example, with hearing people who could not sign, when he had not established eye contact with a hearing person, or when he believed a hearing person would not understand his signing. Several times, after sessions with me lasting more than an hour, he spoke with Jennifer in Taiwanese. A patient and excellent communicator, he seemed determined to establish a channel of communication with whomever he pleased regardless of any differences in linguistic backgrounds. When his interlocutor was less energetic or creative than he was, he took on the burden of the extra work enthusiastically—freely making use of mime,

gesture, CSL, some TSL, and his spoken languages. The consequence was that nonsigners and signers who were not fluent understood what he was saying almost in spite of themselves. Though T—— was the first deaf person to spend a significant amount of time with me, I saw him regularly only at the beginning of my stay at the school. When his responsibilities beckoned him elsewhere, I turned toward other members of the Chiyung School's deaf community.

When I met him, F—— was a teacher at the school in his early 30s. He had been born deaf into a family with only one other deaf relative. He had been educated at the Chiyung School and then attended middle school and high school in Tainan, so he had learned CSL first and then TSL. He said that both languages were part of him but that he regularly used TSL and not CSL because not many people understood CSL. By all accounts, he read and wrote Chinese well. He seemed to be a successful student of languages; he had learned some written Japanese in childhood, which he used when the occasion called for it.¹⁰ F—— seemed endlessly interested when I used a fingerspelled word or a sign from ASL. On these occasions, he often learned the sign and signed it back to me in other contexts, assuming I would be amused. I never heard F—— speak a word of any language.

Though I was able to chat one on one with the deaf people around the school, it was difficult or impossible to participate in discussions in which people were signing but not directly to me. However, I wanted to take advantage of every chance to learn as much TSL as possible, so when I lost the thread of the conversation, I would get someone's attention and ask for help. In so doing, I routinely tried to focus my questions on a specific sign rather than a general topic. Further, I decided not to depend on one person all the time. I intuited from my experience at the school that doing so might suggest that I was more confident in a particular person than in the community at large and that this would not be acceptable. Apparently I was wrong; most of the deaf people seemed to feel that it took special talents to deal with me. For weeks, everyone I questioned would hesitate a moment before beginning to answer and then suddenly turn to or summon F——. "She doesn't understand GONG (public)," they'd say. "Explain to her." F—— was able, effortlessly it seemed, to construct the perfect canonical scenario to make the meaning of the sign obvious to me. So it came to be that for most of my stay at Chiyung, F—— was considered the person who could get through to me, no matter what.

F—— radiated a confidence in himself as a deaf person that was unique among the people I met. He never talked of being hearing or what life might be like if he were a hearing person. He seemed not only to accept but also to cherish his deafness, to have the sense that it was not a bit regrettable to be deaf. He appeared to attach no great importance to the fact that, as a deaf person, he was a member of a minority. F—— talked of opportunities as though he had access to them and not at all as though they were unattainable. I had the sense that, although F—— knew perfectly well what the world would offer him as a deaf man, in small ways each day, he simply refused to accept it. F——'s attitudes were neither motivated nor reinforced by a politically active deaf community around him. They seemed simply to be a part of his nature. And, in fact, he was relatively successful in gaining some of society's advantages.

As a linguistic consultant, F—— was superior. He had intuitions about TSL

that he discussed easily with me. More than any other person I worked with, he seemed after a short time to know what I wanted when I asked him "linguist" questions. When he taught, the children were rapt. They asked questions and participated fully in their lessons. F——— seemed well suited for the job of teacher because he understood what his students (including me) knew and pushed them forward from there.

W——— was a baker at the school. Intelligent, reserved and hard working, he did not bring too much attention to himself. He had learned CSL at the Chiying School as a child and then had acquired TSL as a middle school student in Tainan. If at first W——— was somewhat hesitant to deal with me, he quickly became both an expert at that task and one of the people who greatly supported my work while I was at Chiying. For example, when other deaf people would want a chance to sign on videotape but were not sure how to do so, W——— would patiently explain what I wanted and stay around long enough to make sure the person truly understood and got off to a good start.

The community I came to know at the Chiying School was larger. However, these descriptions introduce some of the people with whom I interacted at the Chiying School and provide a sense of the key people who contributed to my research.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF DEAFNESS AND HEARING

In many societies, "disabilities" such as deafness are hidden from view because they are not the norm and are, therefore, negative (see Tsuchiya 1994, 65). In Taiwanese society, young deaf adults (and people with other "disabilities") who have never been to school are still sometimes discovered.¹¹ At worst, hearing society in Taiwan seems to view deaf people as lawless and uneducable; at best, pitiful and incompetent. Certainly, I sensed that nearly every Taiwanese person believed on some significant level that deafness is at least a somewhat negative attribute. In this section, I focus on how the deaf and hearing people in the Chiying School saw deafness and hearing.

DEAF PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES ABOUT DEAFNESS

Although deafness often "creates unique social groupings and identities," the mere fact that deaf people have a particular audiological status does not necessarily cause them to cohere into a social unit (Johnson 1994, 102). Although many sorts of relationships could be found among the Chiying deaf people, they did not seem to primarily help or socialize with other deaf people. Hearing family members were often involved with supporting deaf people. Deaf people probably socialized as much with hearing people as with other deaf people.

Although the Chiying deaf people were not explicit about this, they believe that to be born deaf is less desirable than to be born hearing and become deaf later. Certainly, someone who was born deaf would prefer to marry a hearing person, a hard of hearing person, or a deaf person who had been born hearing. This preference was related to the fear that deafness might be passed on to one's children if one were born deaf. Most of the deaf people I met described themselves as "born hearing and became deaf in childhood because of a fever."

Despite the oppressive treatment of society, the Chiyung deaf people seem to regard their deafness more as an inconvenience that could be dealt with than as a tragedy. But I sensed that the views of deaf children and deaf adults were different. If asked directly whether deafness was a positive or negative thing, the children's faces registered surprise—apparently, at the question. "Of course it's bad!" they signed. Although the children permitted me, with great enthusiasm, to videotape them playing, they unequivocally refused my requests to videotape them signing. I wondered why they did not want to appear on videotape answering my off-camera questions or even having signed conversations with each other.

I asked one of the teachers whether the children would consider their signing on videotape to be a display of a disability and, therefore, an embarrassment. The teacher laughed off this suggestion and offered another explanation. Taiwanese children are not used to being experts, he said. For them, adults are experts. The idea that I might ask them something that they might not know how to answer would involve a great loss of face. Even assuming that I left them to talk with one another while taping them, knowing what to talk about presented problems, particularly if I were to ask them about something they said. It was safer for them to avoid the whole issue by not getting involved at all.

The adults had somewhat contradictory attitudes about their deafness. A few deaf people said they deeply regretted not being able to speak. One man, visibly moved, told me that only some students, those who had residual hearing, had opportunities for speech training in childhood. He had not been among them. Throughout his whole education, no one had attempted at any time to teach him to speak; he had signed from the beginning at the Chiyung School. But most deaf people seemed to have no particular interest in hearing or speech. Its utility as a means of communication notwithstanding, it simply had nothing to do with their lives. It had long been recognized and accepted that, for some deaf people, speech training served no practical purpose; it was simply too much effort for scanty results. According to a conversation I had with Yau Shun Chiu in 1991, this view is also prevalent in mainland China.

With the onus of learning to speak lifted from the shoulders of deaf students, one might imagine that the Chiyung School, if not the educational system, would have actually fostered a cohesive and strong deaf community, intended or not. That community, we might imagine, might have great pride in its own natural sign language and even, perhaps, not much regard for what was going on in the hearing world. In fact, I did not observe this. The educational system, set up for hearing children and merely adapted to the needs of deaf children, and the constant contact with hearing families ensure that hearing people and their concerns are always a factor in deaf life in Taiwan. In general, deaf people seemed to defer their own communicative needs to the needs or perceived needs of the hearing people around them.

One of the deaf people with whom I shared a collegial and friendly relationship invited me to visit his hearing family. At their home, his nonsigning family members and I communicated in a mixture of spoken English and spoken Mandarin. I felt the need to try to sign at least the gist of what I was saying so I would not exclude my deaf consultant. He seemed content enough to read my signs and know approximately what was being said. However, with my unequal abilities in English, Mandarin, and TSL, he knew that the communicative burden quickly

became too much for me. I thought he might then begin to communicate with me in TSL and leave his family to fend for themselves. But he seemed to want me to talk with his family rather than with him. He readily walked away or looked away, clearly indicating that he was content not to be included.

The deaf people and I were invited out one evening by some hearing people who were closely involved with the school. Some of them could sign. We sat at a large round table, intermixed, deaf and hearing. All were Taiwanese but me. The hearing people spoke Taiwanese, and those of us who could not were quickly left in the dark. I felt uncomfortable eating in silence while people were speaking around me, and I looked for ways to be part of a conversation.

I began to sign with the deaf man across the table, and we held a brief and tenuous conversation. When it ended, I turned to the deaf woman seated beside me. Although we began what turned out to be a long interchange, when I compared her signing style and demeanor in this instance to that of conversations we had had in other settings, she seemed restrained and self-conscious. I concluded that something about this setting made them feel awkward to sign.

When I later asked some deaf and hearing people about my impressions of the evening, all said it was perfectly acceptable—even normal—for the deaf people to sit silently, whether seated together or apart, in mixed social groups with hearing people while spoken conversation buzzed around them. I had the impression from both deaf and hearing people around the school that mixed gatherings were not infrequent and that the deaf people were not excluded in that sense when “everyone” went out to dinner. Still, signing at the table in mixed groups seemed marked. However, I could detect no discomfort among the deaf or hearing people with respect to this arrangement.

One Chiying deaf person whose linguistic prowess was clear once remarked, “It’s hard to be deaf because I can’t talk easily to you.” This remark reflects her assumption that it is her responsibility to bridge the gap in our linguistic abilities and that I had no responsibility for our successful communication. I did not clearly understand how my status as a foreigner and as a hearing person might have interacted to produce this result.

One might assume that the deaf Taiwanese, by constantly deferring their communicative needs, bore a great burden of oppression without being aware of it or angered by it, but I do not think that assumption explains the whole picture. Although I never heard a deaf person raise concern about any of the communicative matters, deaf people openly revealed among themselves and, many times, in my presence profound dissatisfaction with their economic situation. They believe that their lives have been harder because they are deaf. They believe that the government should do something to help them, and indeed, in recent years, policies have been put in place to ensure that deaf (and other “disabled”) people are charged a lower fee for amenities such as public transportation and admission to parks. Deaf people do not mind paying less because, I was told, they are acutely aware of the fact that they routinely work with hearing people who are paid higher salaries for the same work. Apparently, this pay differential goes without saying in Taiwanese society. Deaf people will work for less, and so they are paid less, which puts them at a distinct disadvantage given Taiwan’s rather high cost of living.

Many deaf people consider themselves to be loyal and hardworking, less be-

cause they are endeared to their employers than because they have few choices in employment. Even a job at which they are exploited is better than no job. People or organizations that are perceived as culprits in wronging deaf people are said to be "in cahoots with each other." To express this idea, they use the sign *GUAN XI* (relationship), inflected to indicate a group of them. And all the deaf adults said that, in their lifetimes, things for deaf people had greatly improved in Taiwan.

One day during a long and spirited conversation, one Chiyung deaf person asked me whether I was aware that deaf people often engaged in socially deviant behavior. I nodded. "People say deaf people steal, and that is sometimes true," he went on. "I myself stole when I was younger. But do you know why they steal?"

I had a few ideas. I responded that, during my stay in Kaohsiung, I had noticed many negative attitudes about deafness in conversations with deaf and hearing people alike. I suggested that, as children, deaf people learn to have low self-esteem. In addition, cultural and linguistic barriers are placed in the way of their success. They experience enormous frustrations associated with being deaf in an unfriendly society. Why shouldn't they steal?

"That is only part of it," the man said. "They steal because they work for little money. If they don't steal, they go hungry."

DEAF PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES ABOUT HEARING PEOPLE

If deafness is an inconvenience, then the ability to hear is a profound convenience and a great gift. In the minds of Chiyung deaf people, being hearing was related to literacy, perhaps to intelligence, and ultimately to success in life. They seemed to feel that their only impediment to success is their deafness and that hearing people's success in their society is entirely because of their hearing. I found out soon after my arrival that the children saw my hearing status as utterly incongruent with the fact that I could not write Chinese characters very well. My obvious racial and cultural differences did not excuse me in any way. To them, it was preposterous that I was not literate in Chinese because I was hearing. Indeed, particularly at the beginning, even the adults seemed surprised that I could not be counted on to read the simplest of sentences written in Chinese characters. Over the months, in casual discussions that mentioned one hearing person or another who found the perfect spouse, wrote a book, or made a lot of money, the unsurprised response was, "Of course. She (or he) is hearing."

Although the deaf people seemed to envy and admire the ease with which a hearing life may be lived, they were a little "afraid of" or put off by hearing people. On an outing one day, two of the children and I attracted a great deal of attention from hearing people who saw us walking and signing together. Five or six people began to gather and stare. They seemed to be talking about us, but they spoke in Taiwanese, so neither the children nor I understood what they were saying. I was extremely uncomfortable with the attention; it was a great shock after being inside the gates of the Chiyung School where signing was not only accepted but also expected and was certainly nothing special. In my annoyance, I realized that, outside the school, signing was fair game for this sort of attention, as are many behaviors that the local community thought of as odd in some way. I tried to ignore the attention, as did the children—or so it seemed. But after we

had managed to catch a bus and leave the interested crowd, one of the children told me, "I'm glad to be out of there. I'm afraid of hearing people."

No one I knew admitted to disliking or liking hearing people simply because they were hearing. Most of the deaf people I talked with seemed to hold hearing people in general in high regard; some said they had a number of tolerant hearing friends. Some deaf people thought deaf people were kinder and easier to get to know whereas hearing people were stiffer and harder to talk with. Others seemed to want to have hearing friends but did not know quite where to begin to cultivate any. Other deaf people did not much care whether their friends were deaf or hearing as long as they had some of the same beliefs and attitudes. In a memorable conversation, one deaf man said, "If a hearing person's heart and my heart are going the same way, fine, but otherwise, I'm not interested in hearing people."

HEARING PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES ABOUT DEAFNESS AND DEAF PEOPLE

In many parts of the world, a signed language seems to hold a certain attraction for hearing people, and Taiwan is no exception. These days, ample evidence indicates that hearing Taiwanese are attracted to and interested in TSL. According to a conversation with Smith in 1991, sign language classes available in Taipei in the 1970s were full as soon as they were offered (Chao 1994, 347). Interpreters appear in boxes on Taiwanese television, and Taiwanese airlines feature interpreted safety announcements. Many hearing people accept the abstract idea that deaf people are valuable citizens and should be treated and thought of well, all things being equal. However, some hearing people harbor a deep disdain for deaf people, including some hearing people who are intimately tied to deaf people.

A hearing child of deaf parents told me a painful story of eating in a restaurant with his parents as a young child. The waiters made fun of his parents' signing, and he retaliated by throwing food on the floor. During his later childhood years, children from hearing families teased him because of his deaf parents. Classmates treated him in this manner until he reached college age. Deaf parents reported again and again that their hearing children wanted little to do with them. Deafness flags possible social problems, and few would want to marry someone whose parents do not have advantages of money and position needed in Taiwanese society.

Whether or not deaf people deserve the judgment, hearing people do not necessarily consider deaf people to be competent workers or desirable colleagues. One Chiying deaf man described a setting in which he worked with hearing people. He felt his hearing coworkers looked down on him, and he resolved to change their opinions of him. He made it a point to sit down and talk with each one about the job and his qualifications for it. He told me that they respected him after that.

Perhaps nowhere is the disdain for deaf people more evident than in the lack of services for them. It is probably not surprising that interpreting services for hearing people wanting to talk with deaf people or deaf people wanting to talk with hearing people did not seem available with any certainty in Kaohsiung in the early 1990s. As far as I knew, none of the Chiying staff members, deaf or hearing, knew of any service like that, although arrangements might be made among individuals for particular events to be interpreted.

A hearing person deeply involved with the deaf community once explained to me that an interpreter was someone who “explained for the deaf people at the police station.” When I asked whether interpreters served other functions, he seemed surprised and said that that was the usual task. Although he was admittedly untrained and not confident as an interpreter, he nevertheless functioned as one from time to time. He refused payment for his services, saying deaf people would be angry with him if he accepted payment. Hearing people who sometimes functioned as interpreters and knew personal details of deaf people’s lives routinely revealed them to me. The mere fact that someone was the interpreter for an event was not necessarily enough to prevent that person from assuming other roles. For example, at a large, formal event, the interpreter on stage stopped functioning as interpreter to help someone with a mobility impairment up the stairs as the spoken parts of the event continued. The interpreter resumed the task of interpreting once the mobility-impaired woman reached her destination, and many minutes of interpretation were lost.

A deaf woman from a hearing family came to the Chiyung School one day looking for an interpreter. Although she had engaged in antisocial behavior as a young girl, she had finally married. But her deaf husband committed petty crimes to provide for them and wound up in jail. Now, she wanted to see a lawyer about a divorce. An interpreter I knew refused to interpret for the deaf woman because the interpreter disapproved of the woman’s desire to divorce her jailed husband.

In the most jarring of interpreting-related experiences I had, I observed a court hearing at which an interpreter was present. The proceedings dealt with a deaf person accused of an extremely serious crime. The accused deaf person and spouse would begin to sign as if to question the interpreter (not the lawyers), and the interpreter would sign (not interpret) *DENG, DENG* (“wait, wait”) and convince them to stay silent while the tense court proceedings continued. To my knowledge, the accused person was found guilty and received the harshest of sentences.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Chiyung School in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, has existed for nearly 50 years. The description of the school in this chapter suggests that there were always “many ways to be deaf” at Chiyung. Linguistic diversity has always been a feature of deaf life at Chiyung, with both spoken and signed languages as part of the environment. Spoken and written Japanese and Chinese have been and still are significant in aspects of deaf life there. The Chinese language continues to be held in very high esteem by deaf Taiwanese. Signed languages have occupied an important place in life at Chiyung: for many years, CSL was Chiyung’s medium of instruction, and now, TSL serves that role. TSL conversation outside of classes is abundant while remnants of CSL remain in everyday life for many people. TSL was not viewed as superior to Signed Mandarin by the Chiyung deaf community. However, most people seemed to consider it much more efficient than Signed Mandarin. ASL signs were a curiosity to the Chiyung signers, and without exception, they admired ASL fingerspelling.

Apart from linguistic issues, the Chiyung deaf people have a range of opinions and attitudes where deafness is concerned. Most of the people with whom I came in frequent contact had very early ties to a signed language. A majority of them

learned CSL first at the Chiying School, and when they went off to middle school in Tainan, they learned TSL, which had long been the medium of instruction in the public schools for the deaf in Taiwan. Their early contact with a signed language notwithstanding, many of the Chiying deaf group hold hearing people and their values as an ever present concern. A statement made to me by Chiang Ssu Nung captured this idea. I had heard that Chiang believed that CSL was a better language than JSL, and I was anxious to hear him articulate this position. But my question seemed to bore him. "The best sign language," he said, "is the sign language which hearing people can easily understand."

In contrast, many deaf people are indignant about some of the social and economic issues they face. Indeed, some of the Chiying deaf people seem to have developed a secure sense of themselves as human beings with every right to inhabit the largely hearing world around them and to be beneficiaries of all it has to offer.

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NOTES

1. The common orthographic convention, especially in the United States, is to use uppercase *D* and lowercase *d* to signify different worldviews and attitudes of people with a particular audiological status. The usefulness of the terms *deaf* and *Deaf* for describing communities in American society seems clear; Padden and Humphries (1988, 2) remark on the terms' complexity and interrelatedness. However, it seems inappropriate to assume that the Taiwan deaf community need necessarily fit this model. In fact, as far as I can tell, Taiwanese deaf people possess both deaf and Deaf characteristics, as well, perhaps, as others that do not fall neatly into either category. Because neither the orthographic convention nor the philosophical positions that the words are meant to express were familiar to my consultants, I refer to Taiwan deaf people as "deaf." When I discuss the American Deaf community, I use "Deaf."

Also, throughout this chapter, I use the word *community* to signify that the people I refer to live in a particular geographic area and share some experiences as well as some political and social conditions. One cannot necessarily assume that they see themselves as a cultural or linguistic community.

2. In mainland China, Chiang had worked in several schools for the deaf. In fact, he himself founded one in the Shanghai area, “but before the school ever got on its feet, Chiang was forced to flee Shanghai” (Smith 1999). Later, in Taiwan, Chiang founded a school in Keelung before he established the Chiyung School (Smith 1999). In all of these schools, at least some of the teachers were deaf.

3. On this point, sources disagree. Chao, Chu, and Liu (1988, 9) claim that Chiang Ssu Nung worked with another man, Lu Chun-ou and that, together, they established the school in Keelung.

4. In my contacts with Chiang during the early 1990s, he regularly used either speech or what would be called “sign supported speech” (Johnson, Liddell, and Erting 1989) to communicate with me and with the people around him. He spoke Shanghainese and signed the Chinese signs.

5. On this point, Chiang never expressed any reason for his preference when I met him in the early 1990s. Chao Chien-Min expresses his preference for CSL by saying, “Japanese Sign Language is not suited for the thoughts, concepts and characters of our country” (Chao, Chu, and Liu 1988, 9–10).

6. I showed some of the deaf staff members one authoritative work titled *Long Ya Ren Shou Yu Tu* (Deaf-Mute People’s Sign Language Manual) published in Shanghai, China. Each volume has illustrations of the signs of mainland China and written explanations of how to form each sign. The Chiyung deaf people said they had never seen the manual before, but they were immediately familiar with 80%–95% of what they saw. As they examined the book, some confirmed with smiles that they had indeed learned particular signs in the book but had not used or thought of them in a long time.

7. In this chapter, I follow the orthographic convention of using small capital letters to write the glosses for signs. In the case of TSL signs, I provide a Mandarin gloss and an English translation in parentheses. Where possible, I refer to the Mandarin gloss in Smith and Ting (1979, 1984). However, because Smith and Ting (1979, 1984) do not use Roman letters to provide a gloss, I gloss signs in Mandarin using Chinese pinyin, a romanization system not much used in Taiwan but standardly used in the linguistic literature on Mandarin.

8. I became aware of these multiple signs because I would often point to an object or perform an action and ask for the sign. I once commented that my inquiries must be tiresome for my consultants, but they brushed off my concern, saying that my effort was similar in kind, if not in quantity, to that of Taiwanese deaf people from different parts of Taiwan, who often used this strategy to learn the local signs.

9. Reilly (1995) finds the same pattern in a Thai school for the deaf.

10. Once, I wanted F—— to use the sign RI BEN (Japan). To that end, I showed him a written Japanese ad I had found in a magazine. Though I recognized one or two kanji, I had no idea what the ad said in total; for me, it was only an example of Japanese writing. I asked F—— where the writing was from, assuming his response would be RI BEN and that would start us off. But F——’s answer was more than just the sign RI BEN, and he launched into a discussion I had not predicted. I quickly got lost. It turned out that he had read the ad and made a comment about its content. When he realized that his assumption that I could read Japanese was incorrect, he explained meticulously what each character meant and also deconstructed his comment about it.

11. Indeed, to be kept isolated at home is part of many deaf Taiwanese young people’s lives, even if they are educated. Sometimes as a punishment for misbehavior, they are

kept home by their parents. In such cases, their friends sadly say that so-and-so is "at home."

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