

**Timothy G. Reagan: Language Policy and Planning for Sign Languages**  
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Researchers in the fields of applied linguistics and sign language studies have long been interested in a similar vein of inquiry: the role of language in education. At the center of the centuries--long deaf education debate is the question of which language(s) to use to teach deaf children (Erting 1978). Suggesting a transdisciplinary orientation, Hornberger and Hult (2006) call for research that emerges from real-world problems and draws on “multiple disciplines to create a holistic portrait of (the role of) language (in) teaching and learning” (p. 80). Reagan responds to this call by asking his subject the construction of deafness as a major factor in language policy and planning (LPP) for sign languages, while highlighting the impact of assistive listening technology on such efforts. Dovetailing principles from both fields, Reagan paints a vivid picture of the LPP landscape for sign languages. His target audiences include (1) readers familiar with LPP literature who are interested in sign languages and deaf communities and (2) members of the Deaf-World and those involved in sign language studies (and unfamiliar with LPP).

Chapter One begins with a brief introduction to sign languages and draws attention to the diversity that exists both *among* and *within* sign languages. Reagan explicates the fundamental differences between sign languages (e.g., American Sign Language, Australian Sign Language, Israeli Sign Language) and manual sign codes which are developed to represent a spoken language in a visual/gestural modality (e.g., Signing Exact English, Conceptually Accurate Signed English). This important distinction contextualizes Reagan’s ensuing discussion of competing constructions of deafness (e.g., medical view, sociocultural view) and sets the stage for presenting the history of LPP for sign languages in Chapters Three and Four.

Chapter Two is intended to orient sign language experts to the academic discipline of LPP and to language planning activities for spoken languages. Excluding the first few pages, the chapter seems written with LPP experts in mind as Reagan presents a historical overview of LPP studies and debates in the field. He makes a significant contribution to the LPP literature by proffering attitude planning, “efforts to change or alter the attitudes of individuals or groups either toward a particular language...or toward monolingualism, bilingualism, or multilingualism” (p. 51).

In Chapter Three, Reagan masterfully weaves together the history of American Sign Language (ASL) in deaf education with LPP. Drawing on Nover’s (2000) work, Reagan traces the status of ASL in deaf education from the early 1800s to the present. In 1880, educators of the deaf at the Congress of Milan voted to replace sign language as the dominant medium of instruction with oral/aural approaches, initiating a major shift in sign language status. A cascade of corpus and acquisition planning activities followed including the development of manual sign codes (MSCs) such as the Rochester Method. Reagan concludes the chapter by examining current LPP efforts centered on securing official recognition of ASL, promoting ASL-English bilingual education, and increasing the presence of ASL as a foreign language in secondary and post-secondary institutions.

Chapter Four examines the nature and development of MSCs for use in deaf education while illustrating how the development and use of these systems function as language planning. Reagan presents a careful analysis of MSCs in the United States demonstrating how they, unlike language creation efforts such as Esperanto, are artificial systems invented to represent spoken languages in visual form and therefore constitute varieties of spoken languages rather than sign languages. Next, Reagan achieves his objective of bringing attention to LPP issues unique to sign languages by critiquing the limitations of and objections to MSCs, which he concludes “constitute a series of efforts to impose language on a dominated and oppressed cultural and linguistic minority group” (p. 153).

Chapter Five explores the language planning efforts for sign languages across the globe. This chapter develops definitions of status, corpus, acquisition, and attitude planning for sign languages and provides examples of how these take shape in international contexts. The development of Gestuno, an international sign language, is briefly described followed by a case study of language planning for South African Sign Language.

In the final chapter, Reagan punctuates the themes of power and inequality in language planning for sign languages that undergird the previous chapters. He takes up Tollefson’s (1995) aim to “link ideology and the analysis of power relations to language policy in education” (p. 1). Reagan cautions against adopting the dominant paternalistic paradigm from which much of the language planning efforts for sign languages have emerged. He asserts that the key to achieving this type of hearing hegemony is for deaf communities to take an active role in language planning activities.

This pioneering hook measures up remarkably to the tall order of bringing together the work of scholars in two disciplines to explicate the concomitant links between sign language in deaf education and language planning for sign languages. If it falls short, perhaps it does so in the concluding chapter. Designed to “include[e] recommendations for future language planning efforts for sign languages” (p. xviii). Readers may wish for a more clearly defined path than what is presented. Nonetheless, with this book Reagan has laid a solid foundation upon which researchers and educators from an array of disciplines will find support for exploring and advancing LPP activities for sign languages.

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