

Reaction paper to deaf culture and or issues



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Sociolinguistics and Sign Language In the article d “ Regional, Cultural, and Sociolinguistic Variation of ASL in the United States” that appeared in the Life Print Library of American Sign Language University, Rogelio Contreras explores the sociolinguistic aspects of Sign Language. The influence of social and cultural factors in language and linguistic behavior are what comes under the purview of sociolinguistics. Contreras interviewed two deaf people and a hearing level-four interpreter and has made use of their insightful views in connection with the existing positions and propositions of sign language and sociolinguistics.

The ethnical diversity of Deaf Americans, like the general American population, is what makes the concept of sociolinguistics relevant in sign language. Contreras points out that Deaf Americans differ in various aspects based on “ degree, age, and extent of hearing loss” and also, “ etiology, gender, geographic location, country of birth, communication preference, language use, educational level, occupation, and social economic background”. Statistics show that the majority of Deaf Americans are white, while Black, Hispanic and Asian Deaf Americans are also on the rise in recent years. This portends many contact zones for the diverse deaf communities for various purposes.

Referring to the book *Orchids of the Bayou* by Catherine Hoffpaur Fisher, Contreras reveals regional variations of American Sign Language (ASL). The protagonist of the book, a deaf woman, is educated at Louisiana and when she arrives at Gallaudet, she comes across New Yorkers who “ did everything

fast including signing and how they mocked the slow signs that flowed from the Southern signers". The phonological and morphological differences can be attributed to the social and cultural differences among the American peoples. A. Smith, the American deaf person interviewed by Contreras, observes that the Southerners use a sign language that suits their rural existence and slow pace of life. In New York, the social existence is very different, and like the fast pace of life there, sign language too has become swift and functional, interspersed with the elements of city life.

Contreras observes that the variations of sign language that deaf people have among them are similar to the various dialects of different ethnic groups in the United States. Y. Li, the Chinese deaf who was interviewed, states that there was a difference in the "accent" of White Deaf and Black Deaf people. Smith points out that the Southern Black deaf use certain signs that are not used by other deaf ethnic groups and that more body shifting and movement is involved in their signs. The power relations involved in their existence in the black, deaf and white cultures make the study of their sign language a special and challenging one. There are also instances like the Mexican deaf students code switching and mixing ASL with LSM (Lengua Senales de Mexico, or Mexican Sign Language) just like the Hispanic hearing students who mix English and Spanish to create Spanglish.

There are variations in the use of sign language based on the educational status of people, and also on their class, age, gender, and economic status. J. Bruce, the interpreter interviewed by Contreras, observes that educated deaf people tend to sign more English, in contrast to the working class people.

The relevance of sociolinguistics in sign language is in no way smaller than that in general languages. The attempt by the author to emphasize on the

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need to pursue research and analysis on this topic is timely and constructive.

References

Contreras, Rogelio. (Fall, 2002). " Regional, Cultural, and Sociolinguistic Variation of ASL in the United States" in Life Print Library. Retrieved April 22, 2007 from < [http://www. lifeprint. com/asl101/pages-layout/sociolinguisticvariationofasl. htm](http://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/pages-layout/sociolinguisticvariationofasl.htm)>