APPLICATION OF

SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (SASL) IN A BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL APPROACH IN EDUCATION OF THE DEAF

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By

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, which is submitted to the University of Free State for the degree Philosophiae Doctor, is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me to another university or faculty. I hereby cede the copyright of the thesis to the University of Free State

Philemon A.O. Akach. **Date.**

To the deaf children of the continent of Africa; may you grow up using the mother tongue you don't acquire from your mother?

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I would like to say thank you to the University of the Free State for opening its doors to a doubly marginalized language; South African Sign Language to develop and grow not only an academic subject but as the fastest growing language learning area. Many thanks to my supervisors Dr. A. Lotriet and Dr. D. Aarons for guiding me throughout this study. My colleagues in the department of Afroasiatic Studies, Sign Language and Language Practice for their support. Thanks to my wife Wilkister Aluoch and children Sophie, Susan, Sylvia and Samuel for affording me space to be able to spend time on this study. Thanks to God for giving me life and good health without which I would not have managed to reach the fruitful end

Dedication

To my late mum Susan Auma and daughter Sunday Liisa-I wish you were both here to witness this achievement

As long as we have Deaf people we will have Sign Language

George Verndize 1904

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LIST OF ACCRONYMNS

AGM	**Annual General Meeting**
BSL	**British Sign language**
ASL	**American Sign Language**
CP	**Critical Period**
DeafSA	**Deaf Federation of South Africa**
DoE	**Department of Education**
DRC	**Democratic Republic of Congo**
ENT	**Ear, Nose and Throat**
FSL	**French Sign Language**
GNAD	**Ghana National Association of the Deaf**
GSL	**Ghanaian Sign Language**
ISL	**Irish Sign Language**
IT	**Information Technology**
JSL	**Japanese Sign Language**
KIE	**Kenya Institute of Education**
KNAD	**Kenya National Association of the Deaf**
KSL	**Kenya Sign Language**
KSLRP	**Kenya Sign Language Research Project**
L1	**First Language**
L2	**Second Language**
LoI	**Language of Instruction**
LSF	**Langue Signes Francoise**
MCE	**Manually Coded English**
MTE	**Mother Tongue Education**
MT	**Mother Tongue**
N-COURSES	**National Courses**
NSL	**Namibian Sign Language**
PANSALB	**Pan South African Language Board**
PSE	**Pidgin Sign English**
RSA	**Republic of South Africa**
SA	**South Africa**
SABC	**South African Broadcasting Corporation**
SASL	**South African Sign Language**
SDR	**Swedish Association of the Deaf**
SDPK	**Swedish Deaf Project in Kenya**
SEE1	**Signed Exact English**
SEE2	**Seeing Essential English**
SL	**Sign Language**
SimCom	**Simultaneous Communication**
TC	**Total Communication**

TV	**Television**
UK	**United Kingdom**
UNESCO	**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**
USA	**United States of America**
WFD	**World Federation of the Deaf**

INTRODUCTION

SIGN LANGUAGE: A BILINGUAL–BICULTURAL APPROACH TO DEAF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The field of language policy and its concomitant implementation in South Africa have been one of the sites of overt political, social and economic contestation for the past two hundred years. The last century in particular has borne witness to waves of intense debate; resistance to policies which entrenched unpopular languages in positions of vertical control followed by attempts to democratise language policy. The backdrop to these impulses has been the long-term effect of hundreds of years of colonial activity on the continent of Africa. Developments in South Africa are, therefore, not entirely different from those of its neighbours. During the last half of the 20th century (1948–1990); however, the particular features of apartheid took developments in South Africa along a route different from other African countries which were disengaging themselves from colonial overlords at the time. One of the differences is evidenced in separate and unequal language policy and planning, especially in the field of education (Heugh, 2003:1). This view is supported by De Kadt (2006:42), who observes that particularly in the realm of education language is causing serious problems in South Africa. Students are regularly examined in languages other than those in which they are taught and in which they generally have low proficiency. In many instances, teachers are also teaching in a language they barely know. The barriers that language is presenting for already disadvantaged students are clear, as is the fact that a concerted effort towards implementing mother-tongue education at higher educational levels. Also, a push towards the use of bilingual or multilingual teaching methods could go a long way towards resolving these problems. Nevertheless, the process of advocating and enabling change is never easy. As Reagan (2007:162) rightly observes, issues of language, language rights and language diversity in multilingual contexts are incredibly complex matters under the best of circumstances and most real-world settings are far from ideal for purposes of implementation. Set against this background, it also has to be realised that language policies have long been recognised to have the potential of being emancipatory or oppressive; empowering or disempowering.

One area in which language policies have repeatedly held the potential and indeed actualised oppressive and disempowering practices across polities, is in the field of Deaf education. South Africa is not an exception to this. Part of the policy problem is traceable to the complex debates in which South African Sign Language (SASL) has been entangled. However, as Reagan (2007:166–167) aptly points out, the status of SASL as a minority language, and of the deaf as a cultural minority, in many respects parallels the situation of many other languages and cultural groups in South Africa. In fact, it would not be inappropriate to suggest that because of its nature as signed rather than spoken language, and the many myths and controversies surrounding SASL, it has been subject to more debate than many of the other minority languages in the country. This debate has not only reflected the social and political forces affecting language and language policy, but has also mirrored ongoing discussions in the country about human rights, economic and social justice, education, and a host of other issues.

The study of language policy and language planning with respect to the deaf and their languages has also become an important topic internationally in recent years, and this has been especially true with respect to linguistic human rights. In the South African context, issues of education, language and culture, especially with respect to individual human rights in these areas, have also been of considerable concern to government, which is understandable, given the history of educational policy in South Africa.

Following the establishment of a democratic government in 1994, language planning and policy continued to play an important role in South African society. For SASL, the challenge of multilingualism has indeed been taken seriously and a great deal of significant work has been done at the policy level to both protect and promote the use of SASL. The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* identifies a total of eleven official languages. Although SASL is not among the eleven, it is nevertheless directly mentioned in the *Constitution*. In Chapter 1 (6)5, the *Constitution* created the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), which is empowered to “promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of (i) all official languages; (ii)

the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and (iii) sign language". Under the auspices of PanSALB, a specific National Language Board was created for SASL as well, with two specific objectives: initiating and implementing strategic projects aimed at creating awareness, identifying needs and promoting SASL, and identifying and funding projects aimed at developing SASL. The *National Language Policy Framework* (2002), issued by the Department of Arts and Culture, similarly includes mention of SASL (Reagan, 2007:167).

In the field of education, the *South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996* also includes specific mention of SASL in the section devoted to language policy in public schools. Chapter 2 of the *Constitution* (the "Bill of Rights") guarantees that "everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable" (29(2)). The *South African Schools Act* responds to this by elaborating on this right, noting that "a recognised Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a public school" (Chapter 2, 6(4)). This point is further elucidated and reinforced in the Department of Education's *Language in Education Policy* (1997), which is remarkably sympathetic to issues of the deaf community in South Africa and to SASL. The *Language in Education Policy* of 1997 begins with a "Preamble", which is intended to set the stage for the national approach to educational language policy. It states: "This Language-in-Education Policy Document should be seen as part of a continuous process by which policy for language in education is being developed as part of a national language plan encompassing all sectors of society, including the deaf community ... In terms of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the government ... recognises that our cultural diversity is a valuable national asset and hence is tasked ... to promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages, and respect for all languages used in the country, including South African Sign Language," (Preamble, *The Language in Education Policy*, 1997).

As Reagan (2007:167–168) also points out, the *Language in Education Policy* of 1997 also explicitly notes that one of the Department of Education's main aims is "to support the teaching and learning of all other languages required by learners or used by communities in

South Africa, including languages used for religious purposes, languages which are important for international trade and communication, and South African Sign Language," and furthermore defines "language" in the context of the policy to "mean all official languages recognised in the Constitution, and also South African Sign Language".

Set within the South African social, political, economic and policy developments of the early 1990s until the present, as sketched above, and in tandem with global trends in the education of the deaf, this collection of essays considers various aspects of the use of Sign Language in a bilingual/bicultural approach to deaf education in South Africa. For South Africa the stage was set by the end of apartheid and the first democratic government of 1994 but, as underscored by Mayer and Leigh (2010:175), the timeframe also aptly fit the emerging paradigm of deaf education globally: "the move to bilingual models of deaf education began more than two decades ago with natural signed languages being recognised for the first time as legitimate languages of instruction, and with expectations of improved educational outcomes, particularly in the areas of language and text-based literacy. As was the case with most forms of bilingual education for linguistic minority students, implementation of sign bilingual education for students with hearing loss was controversial in many respects and questions are ongoing as to the extent to which it has been successful in meeting its stated goals, with Cummins acknowledging that bilingual education for deaf children as being 'high stakes, complex and controversial'. Much of this controversy is bound up with issues of culture, identity, linguistic rights, and the marginalisation of sign languages that typified the field for the better part of the twentieth century." Mayer and Leigh (2010:176) continue: "… following the establishment of some of the first bilingual programmes for deaf learners in Sweden in the early 1980s, implementation was realised internationally (e.g. USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, The Netherlands, and South Africa) over the next two decades. In most cases, this represented a move from prevailing auditory-oral or total communication philosophies to bilingual approaches in which a natural signed language, seen as the first language (L1) of all deaf learners, would be the primary language of instruction. Common to all these programmes was a set of underlying principles which included a heightened valuing of the language and culture of

the Deaf community, a focus on equality of educational opportunity, the empowerment of Deaf people, and the recognition that deaf children have the same potential for language and learning as their hearing peers. The goal was to educate deaf children via a natural signed language – a language that is fully accessible without the use of amplification or specific intervention or training is appropriate learning conditions are in place. The premise was that this access would provide the basis for the development of age-appropriate language and cognition, and support the transition to text-based literacy in the majority spoken language."

This global trend signified a promise of improved educational outcomes with suggestions of academic attainment commensurating with hearing age peers, even in the areas of language and literacy – areas in which deaf education historically lagged. With respect to the development of language and literacy with a bilingual sign model, the underlying assertion was that literacy could be developed through reading and writing without exposure to, or proficiency in, the spoken or signed form of the majority language. This assertion was based principally on the theory of linguistic interdependence (cf. Cummins, 1989 & 1991), which proposes that a common proficiency underlying all languages allows for the transfer of cognitive-academic skills or literacy-related skills from L1 to related skills in L2. In applying this model to the deaf learner it was argued that, if a natural signed language was fully developed as L1 and used as the primary language of instruction, L2 literacy would develop as a result of the transfer of skills from L1 and engagement in text-based activities in L2 (Mayer & Leigh, 2010:176).

The paradigm shift in deaf education as described above was accompanied by another emerging paradigm in deaf education, biculturalism. Grosjean (2008) uses three traits to characterise biculturals:

1. They take part, to varying degrees, in the life of two or more cultures.
2. They adapt, at least in part, their attitudes, behaviours, values, languages, etc., to these cultures.

3. They combine and blend aspects of the cultures involved. Certain characteristics (attitudes, beliefs, values, behaviours, etc.) come from one or the other culture whereas other characteristics are blends based on these cultures.

Writing subsequently, Grosjean (2010:137–138) suggests that there is little doubt that many deaf people meet these three criteria: they live in two or more cultures (their family, friends, colleagues, etc., are either members of the deaf community or the hearing world); they adapt, at least in part, to these cultures; and they blend aspects of these cultures. Such factors as deafness in the family, age of deafness, degree of hearing loss, type of education, etc., may lead some deaf people to have fewer contacts with the hearing world while others have more (i.e., their bicultural dominance can differ), but it is nevertheless true that most deaf people are not only bilingual but also bicultural. Citing Ladd (2003:255), Grosjean (2010:138) further submits that even if Deaf communities have developed bona fide cultures, their existence inside majority cultures, together with the large numbers of deaf people being brought up within hearing families, has led to some degree of biculturalism. The bicultural deaf become adept at the process of adapting to the two worlds. When meeting with hearing people, Deaf people will shake their hand, instead of greeting them with a gesture; they will introduce themselves simply, and not refer to their life history (parents, schooling, etc.) as they would with other deaf people; to attract their attention, they will not touch them, unlike what they would do with other Deaf people; they will keep a greater physical distance between them than they would with other Deaf people, and they will not fixate them for too long; and when leaving, they will shorten their farewells. However, there are differences between the biculturalism of Deaf people and that of the hearing. Firstly, many Deaf people still acculturate into the Deaf culture (that which will become their dominant culture) relatively late - in adolescence or even adulthood. Their first years are mainly spent in the hearing world (90% of deaf people have hearing parents). For the hearing, acculturation usually takes place early into the bicultural's dominant culture and then into the second culture. A second difference relates to dominance. Most Deaf biculturals are usually dominant in one culture, the Deaf culture, whereas hearing

biculturals vary as to their dominance (Culture A, or Culture B, or a balance between the two cultures).

The intersection of the two emergent paradigms in deaf education, namely bilingual education for the deaf and bicultural education for the Deaf, has led to the emergence of what has come to be referred to as the bilingual-bicultural approach to deaf education. Bilingual-bicultural programmes differ from other programmes, most notably in their approach to first-language acquisition. While bilingual-bicultural programmes have respect for both sign language and the dominant spoken language in an education system, these programmes advocate for sign language to be the first language of children who are deaf. Research has shown that effective language usage has to fulfil the requirements of speed and clarity. Sign language responds to this requirement as an efficient language for visual learning and it is easier for deaf children to acquire as first language than any form of the dominant spoken language in an educational system (Finnegan, 1992). Sign language is also the language of choice of adults who are deaf, and it has the potential to effectively offer access to its users to the school curriculum and other world knowledge. This is particularly true, given the fact that a solid foundation in a first language leads to better performance in the dominant spoken language of the education system over time, and skills transfer from one language to another. Teaching sign language as the first language for deaf children also has additional benefits. Sign language is a common denominator of deaf people, irrespective of background or social standing. Proficiency in sign language hence automatically allows membership in the Deaf community and in cultural events that occur in communities where Deaf people live. This membership is vital for deaf children because it promotes a healthy view of who they are as human beings and increases self-esteem and confidence in their ability to interact in a wide array of situations. The bilingual-bicultural approach recognises that sign language and the dominant spoken language of the education system are two distinct languages in the same way that various spoken languages are distinct. As such any sign language is recognised as a complete language with its own grammar, syntax, and rules of interaction. Proponents of the bilingual-bicultural approach believe that deaf children are not communicatively deficient in any respect: instead of being auditory learners,

they are visual learners. This approach therefore implies that deaf children do not per se require remedial teaching strategies, because the bilingual-bicultural programme provides a unique visual learning environment in which their linguistic, cultural and social needs are met. In such an environment, deaf teachers, administrators, and support staff are considered valuable components of the bilingual-bicultural programme. Importantly, the bilingual-bicultural approach therefore does not support mainstreaming deaf children in regular education programmes. On the contrary, many deaf adults have shared their stories of isolation and academic deprivation while attending schools for children who hear. The bilingual-bicultural approach as a result holds that cognitive, linguistic, and social competence are best achieved in environments that provide full communicative access to the curriculum (cf. Baker & Baker, 1997).

Proponents of the bilingual-bicultural approach believe that all children, no matter what their degree of hearing loss, would benefit from the approach. The benefits of bilingual-bicultural education are considered manifold. Early access to comprehensible language fosters early cognitive development which, in turn, promotes increased literacy and greater academic achievement. Students who attend bilingual-bicultural programmes develop functional skills in two languages. The emphasis on early language acquisition and establishing a first language (sign language) provides a base upon which the dominant spoken language is subsequently taught. Students in bilingual-bicultural programmes resultantly achieve greater self-esteem and confidence, due to the healthy view of deaf children, acceptance of who they are as human beings, and increased confidence to function in bilingual-bicultural environments. But in many polities, South Africa included, bilingual-bicultural programmes are still relatively new and limited data are available regarding student's achievements in these programmes. As schools initiate bilingual-bicultural programmes, schools experience difficulty recruiting native signers of sign languages because their numbers are limited. Further, while staff may have excellent skills in other signed exact languages, they may not be proficient in the sign languages of particular polities and therefore require additional training. Some opposition may result in this effort. Many programmes for the training of the teachers of the deaf continue to use the

philosophy of Total Communication, an approach that will receive further attention a number of the essays to follow. Also, lack of sign language classes for parents and/or caregivers, especially in rural areas, may severely restrict communication in the home. Without fluent language models, deaf children's language develop neither optimally nor naturally.

The above listed complexities are also attendant to the implementation of bilingual-bicultural education for the deaf in South Africa. These complexities form the basis of the collection of essays constituting this thesis. The discussion which follows summarises the main issues explored in each of the papers. Importantly, a common thread runs through all: the urgent need to entrench SASL in deaf education in South Africa within the framework of bilingual-bicultural approach to deaf education. This is set against the broader global backdrop of research on deaf education the world over.

2. A synopsis of the papers

2.1. Paper 1: A case of double linguistic imperialism: the dilemma of sign languages in Africa

This essay presents a simple argument, yet one that forms the basis of all the papers in the thesis – namely that sign languages, especially in the developing world of which South Africa is a part, are subject to double linguistic imperialism: sign languages are not only marginalised by the former colonial languages that have been adopted as official languages in many states in the developing world; they are also marginalised by the dominant indigenous languages in these polities. The paper begins by positing that this scenario is not accidental. Rather, this scenario is a product of centuries' old geopolitical and sociolinguistic dynamics that have played themselves out and continue to play themselves out in Africa and much of the developing world. Generally, these dynamics have involved the twin processes of exploitation and marginalisation – processes that constitute the core of a colonial and neo-colonial ethic. Specifically, these dynamics have involved the marginalisation of indigenous languages in the developing world from the core of social, political, economic and educational discourses and

processes in these regions. The argument in the paper advances the view that a majority of indigenous languages in the developing world are marginalised by the former colonial languages that have been adopted as the official languages in these regions. In this dialectic, the position of sign languages is even more precarious, because sign languages are further marginalised by the indigenous languages – a scenario that the paper refers to as *double linguistic imperialism.*

The paper is based on the experiences of the author that span 27 years of active involvement in deaf education in Africa. These experiences are augmented by an in-depth literature study. The paper is therefore a conceptual study that combines aspects of case study research and phenomenological research. The theory aspect of the paper is based on Tang's (2006) interpretation of linguistic imperialism. Tang (2006) traces the discourse on linguistic imperialism to Ansre (1979), who defines linguistic imperialism as any situation in which the speaker of one language is dominated by another language to a point where they believe they can and should use only that foreign language when it comes to transactions dealing with the more advanced aspects of life such as education, philosophy, literature, government, and the administration of justice. Tang (2006) also acknowledges the contribution made to the development of the concept by Galtung (1979), Pennycook (1994), Kachru (1990) and Phillipson (1992). The elaboration points out that language colonisation is not a new phenomenon. It has happened in various manners: i) languages colonised one another as they vied for dominance while being used in the same place (superstrata or substrata) or next to one another at the borders between regions for purposes of trade and so forth; ii) countries go to war and the consequences of conquest often imply that the conquerors force their language onto the new subjects; iii) missionaries and traders force their language onto unsuspecting person for purposes of establishing a common good (the inculcation of Christianity, the establishment of trade centres, etc.); and iv) fellow countrymen, after stints in a foreign land, bring with them the language and culture of the foreign land in, and force the new language and culture onto the indigenous. In Europe, the nature and success of language colonisation depended largely on who conquered whom, thus the influence of Latin is directly related to the spread of the Roman

Empire as is the case for the success of Arabic in relation to the spreading of Islam. In more recent times, it is on the African continent that the notion of language colonisation has become most apparent. This is not a result of mere accident, but a combination of geopolitical, cultural and technological factors that became accelerated after the end of the Second World War; a time during which Africa has become more of a recipient of ideas, culture and technology and most often thus a bystander in major global developments. For the better part of the last century, colonialism was defined by politics. Within this perspective, colonialism refers to the political control of the people of a given territory by a foreign state, whether accompanied by permanent settlement or not (Allen & Thomas, 2000:242). Yet, the closing decade of the twentieth century witnessed a shift from this politically oriented definition of colonialism to what can be characterised as a culturally oriented one. Inherent in the cultural definition of colonialism is the notion of the heritage and worldview of African peoples and how these were made subservient to a heritage and worldview defined and constructed by Eurocentric ethos (Said, 1993). Cultural colonisation includes the domination of African indigenous languages.

The discussion in the paper then relates the above insights to the South African situation: In South Africa, the process was and remains more complex than in many African countries and societies. Over the last three and a half centuries, the political battles that have been fought in South Africa have always been linked in some way to language, a phenomenon that led Du Plessis (1999) to observe that there is a tendency in South Africa to convert political victories to linguistic victories. This phenomenon has ensured that English and subsequently Afrikaans in the middle of the last century have always enjoyed privileged status in the Republic through successive political transitions and transformations. Over the same period this phenomenon has solidified the diminished status of African indigenous languages in South Africa. The late twentieth-century transitional constitutions of South Africa (the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200 of 1993* and the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996*) have sought to correct this anomaly by first acknowledging the diminished status of African indigenous languages and secondly, attempting to redress this. However, deep into the second decade after South Africa's transition to democracy, African indigenous languages

remain at the fringes of core social, political, economic, and educational discourses. As such, the situation in South Africa mirrors the negative hierarchy of languages described in other African countries. In this hierarchy, and despite the fact that Sign Language is singled out in the 1996 Constitution as deserving promotion by the Pan South African Language Board; and the fact that it is recognised as a language of education by the *South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996*, sign language in South Africa suffers the fate of sign languages in Africa: marginalisation by the two dominant languages, i.e. Afrikaans and English; and marginalisation by the nine indigenous languages recognised as official languages of South Africa by the Constitution. The paper roots for the central role of the education system in rectifying this situation.

To contextualise the discussion on the potential role of the education system in redressing the marginalisation of sign language in South Africa, the paper discusses the evolution of sign language and its use in education systems. With this background, and taking cognisance of the fact that there has been limited use of sign languages in the developing world, South Africa included, the paper presents case studies on the education of the deaf in Africa. The case studies cover South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Namibia. In consolidating the discussion, several critical issues arising from the case studies are presented. These include:

1. The stigma associated with being deaf in many African societies.
2. Lack of recognition of sign languages as official languages in Africa, save for Uganda and Swaziland. In South Africa, sign language has the status of an official language for the purposes of learning at public schools although it is not one of the official languages.
3. The negation of the use of sign languages as medium of instruction in a majority of African countries.
4. Lack of instructional and learning materials in sign languages in Africa.
5. Lack of trained teachers to teach indigenised sign languages as a language and as a medium of instruction.
6. The displacement of sign languages by other indigenous African languages in social, political, economic, cultural and educational discourses in Africa.

7. The displacement of African sign languages by other Western-based sign languages.
8. The negation of sign languages at higher education institutions in Africa.
9. Lack of research into the dynamics attendant to sign languages in Africa.

As a way of conclusion, the paper retaliates the view posited at the beginning of the discussion that the status of sign languages in Africa remains precarious, even as the first decade of the 21st century draws to a close, pointing out that the root cause of this state of affairs is what the discussion has characterised as double linguistic imperialism. The paper identifies policy generally, and educational systems in particular as some of the mechanisms that can be deployed to redress this situation.

2.2. Paper 2: Signed languages acquisition and deaf education: the state of affairs in Africa in light of contemporary trends in the literature

Drawing from the background presented in the first paper, this paper discourses on sign language acquisition and deaf education in Africa through a review of contemporary trends in the literature. As a way of introduction, the paper posits that children's language acquisition has always been a subject of great interest to linguists and other researchers interested in the development of children. For linguists generally, and educational linguists in particular, research into children's language acquisition is important in facilitating the design of appropriate instructional materials and pedagogical approaches. At another level, an understanding of children's language acquisition is important in informing educational policy formulation. However, the discussion points out that sign language acquisition and deaf education are generally neglected in mainstream literature, especially in African and South African contexts.

The paper adopts Critical Period (CP) theory to contextualise the discussion. According to Lenneberg (1967), CP represents the developmental period for optimum acquisition of

language, from age two until the onset of puberty. Puberty is what Lenneberg (1967:142) posits as the point at which the lateralisation process of the brain is complete. With reference to second-language language acquisition, Lenneberg (1967:176) further asserts that after puberty the incidence of language learning blocks rapidly increases. With this background, the discussion reviews language acquisition in deaf children. This is contrasted with language acquisition in hearing children.

The discussion then presents a comparison between the acquisition of signed language in deaf children with the acquisition of spoken language in hearing children. The discussion points out that the language development of deaf children growing up in a signing environment from birth is much the same as when a spoken language is acquired (Jacobs, 1974). First signs appear at a similar time to first words, albeit a little earlier. Small, but accurate muscle movements are needed for this. This agility develops at different rates in different body parts. Coordinated hand movements generally develop before coordinated mouth movements. Based on this, a deaf child should be able to produce a sign earlier than a hearing child can produce a spoken word. Drawing from the literature, the comparison brings to the fore that many factors influence the successful second-language acquisition for a deaf child, for example motivation, intelligence, aptitude, personality, attitude and learning styles. However, the author makes the unequivocal assertion that the most important factors influencing the acquisition of second language by deaf children are the “critical period” and the complete entrenchment of a first language (in this instance, sign language), just like a first spoken language (mother tongue) should be acquired and entrenched, thus providing the base from which a second language can subsequently be learnt.

The discussion however, points out that the case may be different for deaf children of Deaf parents because at the age of three their sign language is fully established. This means that they can be introduced to a second language much earlier. This makes one question the propriety of subjecting deaf learners to a bilingual-bicultural approach right from the first day of entering school at six or seven years of age if such first-language entrenchment may not be guaranteed

for approximately 90% of the deaf population of learners who have hearing parents. In light of this, the discussion submits that deaf learners should be taught only sign language during the first few years of schooling until the first language (sign language) is fully entrenched. Only after this has happened should the other language preferred as the second language by the education system be introduced. In this way, greater success in academic achievement may therefore be achieved by deaf learners because they will have the full ability to function in both the first language (sign language) and the second language (the preferred second language of the education system).

As a way of conclusion, the discussion observes that the deaf child, in order to fully integrate into a predominantly hearing world, is faced with a particular challenge of adapting to an education system that provides for bilingual education. In such a situation, sign language should feature as first language or mother tongue and language of instruction under ideal circumstances, but for purposes of reading and writing, the deaf child should also be exposed to a second spoken language. This approach should be based on the "critical period" of the child's development. However, this relatively obvious solution to the challenges that bedevil deaf education poses a particular challenge given the ill-informed preconceptions of parents and society at large regarding the Deaf, Deaf culture and sign language and its status as a natural language and thus is appropriateness as medium of instruction.

2.3. Paper 3: Parents' attitudes towards Sign Language as a medium of instruction: an empirical study of two schools for the deaf in Free State Province of South Africa

The third paper tackles one of the core issues in educational linguistics, i.e. language attitudes. The discussion proceeds from the perspective of language acquisition. While language and language acquisition are taken for granted for the hearing child, they pose a seemingly insurmountable challenge for the deaf child born to hearing parents. Part of this perception is based on the unfamiliarity of hearing parents to the condition of deafness and sign language. The other part of this perception is based on statistics. Prevalent statistics from the Western

world indicate that 90% of Deaf children in any country are born to hearing parents and a mere 10% are born to Deaf parents. The empirical research reported in this paper sought to ascertain whether these statistics also hold true for South Africa. Further, taking cognisance of these statistics and the documented fact that parents play a critical role in language acquisition and the choice of language of instruction for their children, the study also sought to determine parents' attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction in schools for the Deaf in South Africa. Two schools in the Free State Province of the Republic of South Africa were used for the purposes of the study.

The discussion begins by pointing out that the impact that parents have on their children's educational aspirations and occupational success has long occupied the centre stage in sociological literature. This body of research, consisting mostly of large-scale surveys, suggests that parents' attitudes toward education have a significant effect on their children's educational aspirations (Gorman, 1998). Further, the discussion submits that the increased conscientisation of society in the last century has also led to the emergence and entrenchment of the notion of active citizenship: the combination of rights and obligations that link individuals to the state and which come with inherent benefits, including granting citizens a voice in deciding their own destiny (Green, 2009). The role of parents in educational systems has thus moved from the periphery to the centre stage of critical discourses in education. One key aspect of the role of parents in educational systems is the importance of parents' attitudes. The centrality of parental attitudes is explainable by a convergence of reasons. Fundamentally, parents, as active citizens, have the power to privilege their attitudes in major policy debates, either through community mobilisation or by voting for those political actors that reflect their preferences and policy positions with regard to the education system. This is both a waking nightmare and a goldmine for any politician and/or policy maker. Either way, parents' attitudes towards the education of their children always find their way to the centre of political and/or policy debates. Further, as primary care-givers and the key decision makers regarding the education of their children, parents' attitudes toward the education of their children cannot be ignored. The fundamental importance of parents' attitude towards the education of their

children is amplified when the child under consideration has special needs, as would be the case for a Deaf child. However, there are but a few studies that have sought to establish the link between parents' attitudes and the nature of education for children with special needs. Importantly, all these studies have all been carried out outside South Africa. In seeking to fill the hiatus in the research and in the literature with regard to parents' attitude towards the education of children with special needs in South Africa, the research reported in this paper sought to determine parents' attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction in two schools for the Deaf in the Free State Province of South Africa.

To contextualise the discussion, the paper presents a review of the literature on Deaf children born to hearing families and the challenges that they face in communication. The literature review establishes that the challenges that these children face in communication are daunting. The discussion then presents a review of the literature on the role of parental attitudes in the education of a Deaf child. This review reveals that parental attitudes are critical in determining the success or otherwise of any educational intervention that seeks to improve the educational environment of Deaf children. The use of sign language as a medium of instruction for Deaf children is considered such an educational intervention. Its ultimate success or otherwise will depend to a great extent on the support of parents. The support of parents, in turn, is informed and based on the parents' attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction.

Against the preceding backdrop, the discussion documents the research questions that guided the study as:

1. What communication methods do parents use with their deaf children?
2. What expectations do the parents have about the level of education and occupation for their children?
3. What attitudes do parents of deaf children have towards different communication methods?
4. Do age, sex and socio-economic status of parents have any relationship to attitudes?

In seeking to collect data to answer the above set of questions the researcher employed a combination of two research methods: the collection of data through questionnaires and collection of data through structured interviews. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse and present the results. The results indicate that a majority of the parents (76,6%) acknowledged the existence of SASL and that it is the preferred language of their children, even for those (21,4%) who conceded that they did not use it with their offspring. Further, parents who showed ambivalence and/or confusion regarding speech and language agreed that sign language was the first language of the Deaf. The results, however, indicate that 53% of parents are still in favour of the teaching of speech to their children. The study also revealed that the ultimate parental aspiration for their deaf children is for a child to grow up, get a good education, find employment, marry and eventually have children of their own, thus perpetuating the family structure. The parents in the study seem to associate the kind of partner they would want for their child with the obvious concerns regarding communication and marriage. 37% indicated that they would prefer deaf partners for their children; 15% indicated that they would prefer hearing partners for their children; and 34% indicated that the preference of the type of partner does not matter. The reasons provided for these preferences ranged from the opportunity for good communication between two people and the ability to speak to the children. A general preoccupation with “communication”, “hearing” and “speaking” underlined all responses.

In sum, the study revealed that parents’ attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction were at variance with particular situations, conditions and circumstances prevalent at the time of study. Thus, on the issue of sign language being used as language of instruction, 76,5% of the parents agreed that signed language should be used in instructing the Deaf child at school. They further agreed that signed language holds the key to a deaf learner achieving higher levels of education. These results indicate that parents of deaf learners would prefer signed languages to be the languages of instruction for their children.

2.4. Paper 4: Teachers' attitudes towards Sign Language as a medium of instruction: an empirical study

The paper locates the discussion on teachers' attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction within the Constitutional and legislative framework in South Africa. The Constitution, together with the *South African Schools Act, no. 84 of 1996,* which recognises SASL as an official language for the purposes of education, provides a legal and legislative framework for the use and propagation of SASL as a medium of instruction for the schools for the Deaf. This includes the development of SASL as a school subject and as a medium of communication. The discussion submits that despite the good intentions of the Constitution and the Act, their provisions are not being implemented, a situation that has led to Deaf children in South Africa to continue experiencing monumental challenges in educational and information access. Among the many factors that contribute to this scenario, teachers' attitudes toward sign language as a medium of instruction play a central role.

The study reported in the paper was guided by an overall aim and a set of objectives and research questions.

The aim of the study was to investigate the attitudes of teachers towards SASL as a medium of instruction.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate teachers' attitudes towards deaf pupils and SASL.
2. To investigate teachers' attitudes towards oralism and deaf pupils' communication.
3. To investigate how teachers communicate with deaf learners outside the classroom and how deaf learners communicate with fellow learners at play, in the classroom and in social settings.

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What communication methods do teachers use in teaching deaf learners?
2. What expectations do teachers have about the level of education and the future professional career progression of deaf learners?
3. What attitudes do teachers have towards different communication options open to teaching the deaf?
4. Do age and gender play a role in teachers' attitudes and predispositions towards different communication options?

The study used a combination of research methods, namely questionnaires and unstructured interviews.

After presenting a detailed overview of the literature on language attitudes in deaf education and a historical overview of deaf education in Europe, America, other parts of the world and South Africa, the discussion presents the results from the empirical study and their discussion. The results indicate that most of the teachers in the sample are very experienced, with the majority (76,8%) having at least ten years' or more teaching experience. Most are well qualified, with 72,1% holding a qualification equivalent to or above a diploma – a finding that was interpreted to mean that overall the teachers are qualified to teach, but not necessarily deaf learners. This became evident when the majority of the teachers (74,4%) indicated that they had experience teaching hearing learners in mainstream schools before moving to a school for the Deaf. There was a high non-response rate to the question whether the teachers had additional training before joining a school for the Deaf. This result most likely indicates that the teachers did not have formal qualifications to teach the Deaf. Even though the teachers think the Deaf should use signed language only to communicate and that they (teachers) should use signed language too, they still think amplification of sound/speech by a hearing aid helps in the acquisition of speech. In general, 51,2% think amplification does not help. However, asked whether it helps specific, medically labelled categories or degrees of deafness, 65% think that amplification helps the hard of hearing; 47% say it helps the partially deaf to some extent; and none of the teachers thinks it helps the profoundly deaf. Given that the majority of teachers

indicated they used signed language only, the responses here are startling. It seems the teachers want to be politically, if not constitutionally correct by saying that they use SASL, even if they don't, thereby confusing the issue.

The teachers seem to have a positive attitude towards the deaf pupils they teach regarding their language, signed language and level of expectation in view of level of education. 95,3% agree that SASL is the first language of the Deaf and in support of this they urge the parents to learn and use SASL at home with a similar margin (95,3%). 65,1% agree that signed language is easy to use in teaching (statement 3) but at the same time they contradict this by disagreeing that it is easy to learn by almost the same percentage (69,8%). About 74,5% seem to think that SASL can enable deaf learners to achieve a higher level of education. This is in accord with statement whereby the respondents agree by 76,8% that the Deaf should have unlimited education as do their hearing counterparts.

There seems to be agreement (79,0%) that signed language is a language like any language with linguistic rules. This is further supported by the majority agreeing that SASL should be one of the official languages in South Africa (95,3%), as opposed to its current status of being recognised only for development and officially only for educational purposes (*Constitution of SA,* 1996). To cap the overwhelming positive attitudes toward Deaf learners and their language, 86,1% agree that signed language should be incorporated within the teacher training curriculum at South African colleges of teacher education or faculties of education at the universities. This statement provides a contrast to the current situation as is the case on the ground. The teachers are trained and posted to schools for the Deaf without being linguistically equipped to even communicate with the deaf learner, let alone impart knowledge, which they quite rightfully agree can be only be achieved with the use of signed language. Yet they are not trained in it. Most of the teachers (88,4%) agreed that the Deaf have a culture and 85,2% agreed that SASL is based on cultural values of the Deaf. As for statement 15, 90,7% agreed that SASL is easily understood by the Deaf in SA. The respondents agreed that SASL was the best communication method at close range and at a distance (65,2%), and at the same time, 90,7% agreed that signed language was the best language for the Deaf.

In contrast to the positive attitude towards SASL in teaching, in general communication and culture of the Deaf, oralism (speech) was clearly relegated to the negative side. To the statement that the Deaf needed speech only to survive in the hearing world, 83,8% disagreed. In continuance, they disagreed that oralism was the easiest way to teach the Deaf (86,1%). For statement 4, they disagreed with the belief that speech was the key to success in the Deaf learner's life. This is in agreement with statement 28 in which 65,1% disagreed that acquisition of lip-reading skills is a prerequisite to entry into high school. Likewise, they disagreed that speech was the key to joining high school (statement 4). In contrast, though, 48,8% disagreed that Deaf learners should be taught other spoken languages besides Afrikaans and English. Speculation ensued with the foregoing finding as to whether this is incongruent with the general belief that indigenous black languages cannot be used at an institution of learning, especially at institutions of higher learning. However, SASL can be used (69,7%) supported by statement 17. Statement 16 (69,8%), 18 (58,2 %,), 19 (72%) and 30 (69,8%) all put to rest the belief that Signed Exact Spoken languages, e.g. Total Communication and Manually Coded Languages to be better (or superior). There was agreement that, irrespective of the degree of hearing loss and the onset of deafness, SASL should be used.

Oralism, just like other unnatural communication modes, was dismissed by the respondents. They disagreed that oralism is the best method of instruction (86,1%). 72,1% disagreed that the Deaf use speech when communicating with the hearing people. In statement 14 (79,1%) disagreed that the Deaf use speech amongst themselves. 76,7% disagreed that oralism is only useful in a one-to-one situation or in a classroom of maximally 12 Deaf learners. However, the respondents agree that lips can be read from a distance (76,7%) after having agreed that it is impossible even in a one-to-one situation.

The paper concludes by submitting that it is clear from the findings of this study that the teachers do not know whether they are using SASL or something else, even though they call it SASL. This is evinced by the performance of their learners most who go home after school and

those who still go on to study for N courses. The learners, on the other hand, know what they want from school and know that SASL can make them achieve that. The majority who go home straight after school as shown and indicated by the teachers themselves is proof enough. The learners in the two schools have shown their eagerness to learn and demanded to be taught in SASL. The abundance of experience the teachers have, plus the fact that they believe they have acquired the right signed language without any structured course are detrimental to the learners. The teachers need to register for a proper course to appreciate the complexity of signed language and in extension realise what the learners miss. Most of the teachers (60,5%) indicated their desire and intention to study further and that such study should inter alia include the study of SASL.

2.5. Paper 5: From policies and laws to the implementation of Sign Language in deaf education: what went wrong?

Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) declaration on the primacy of mother tongue in educational systems in the 1953 Report entitled *The use of vernacular languages in education: the report of the* UNESCO *meeting of specialists, 1951*, mother-tongue education has been topical in many a country's education systems. Intermittent research since 1953 has served to confirm UNESCO's premise of the primacy of mother-tongue education. Despite UNESCO's declaration and empirical research that have established the importance of mother-tongue education, many countries continue to struggle implementing mother-tongue education. In this non-implementation dilemma, the implementation of mother-tongue education for the Deaf using sign language has been an even greater victim. The paper is a critique of the principles, policies and laws that have guided the implementation of mother-tongue education for the Deaf using sign language. The discussion in the paper ultimately seeks to establish the inconsistencies in the principles, policies and laws that have guided Deaf education and that have contributed to the non-implementation of mother-tongue education (MTE) for the Deaf using Sign Language.

MTE has been a contentious issue in many education systems across polities, especially in the developing world. The contention has largely been premised on the pervasive nature of ideologies that support and seek to entrench the view that a *proper* education can only be attained through the use of western languages, variously referred to as the languages of the former colonial masters. Paradoxically, it has never occurred to educators and policy makers in the developing world that in the developed world, education in western languages is essentially mother-tongue education. Arguments to support the use of western languages in the education system of the developing world have been proffered and in the main they hinge on the hegemonic pervasiveness of western ideological and technological advancement – a position that makes an education in these western languages a precondition for participation in the emerging globalised economy. However, these arguments do not distract from the empirical position that MTE is vital for any education system.

From an in-depth review of the literature in the paper, it is evident that MTE, inasmuch as its legitimacy in education systems is by and large unchallenged, remains an elusive policy and educational goal to achieve. This is more apparent when the principles of MTE are applied to the education of Deaf children who have to rely on sign language as their mother tongue. While the use of sign language in the education of Deaf children may well make sense both educationally and linguistically, this does not mean that it is common, let alone universal, practice. For the most part, sign languages are still rarely used in formal educational settings; rather, where signing is employed, either a form of contact sign language or artificially constructed manual sign codes for a spoken language are most likely to be utilised. The paper also presents a critical review of the development of deaf education from a historical perspective, covering aspects such as the oral approach to deaf education, the manual approach to deaf education, and the inclusive, mainstreaming and/or integration policy to deaf education.

With regard to policy, the paper points out that, irrespective of the progressive nature of the kind of policy in place for sign language, the historic status quo in terms of policies, oralism

and/or Total Communication (TC) is preferred. As a way of conclusion, the paper posits that it is evident that Deaf education is a victim of the same fate that has been visited upon MTE in the developing world. There is an apparent non-recognition of the primacy of sign language as the mother tongue of the Deaf and therefore the failure to use sign language in education. There are glaring failures that the principles, policies and legislation on Deaf education have certainly not remedied. Furthermore, it can be posited that some of the failures in Deaf education are attributable to the principles, policies and legislation that have guided Deaf education over time. Policies setting out the requirement that the Deaf are taught through the medium of signed language have not been heeded or not implemented.

The discussion finally presents some recommendations. With regard to the South African situation, the paper concurs with the recommendations of Reagan (2008) that:

(a) SASL should be utilised as a recognised medium of instruction in deaf education. In many instances, this will ensure that students have a solid foundation in SASL. It also means that all teachers of the Deaf should be required to demonstrate communicative competence in SASL. Further, it is also obviously desirable that Deaf individuals be recruited for teaching positions in deaf education, as well as in other educational settings, and appropriate action should be taken to encourage such efforts.

(b) There should be provision for the teaching of SASL for hearing groups and individuals. Special provisions should be made for hearing parents of Deaf children, as well as for future teachers of the Deaf and for other professionals likely to come into contact with the Deaf. Furthermore, SASL should be offered as a second/additional language option for students in both government school and university settings.

(c) SASL should be added as one of the official languages of South Africa, and should be accorded the same status as any other official language.

(d) Language planning and policy efforts targeted at SASL by the Pan South African Language Board and other appropriate governmental agencies should be increased, and

support should be provided especially for the teaching and learning of SASL and for its use in public settings (including in the media).

When applied to other countries the above recommendations point towards a situation whereby:

(a) Sign languages should be utilised as a recognised medium of instruction in deaf education. To facilitate the use of sign languages as medium of instruction in deaf education it is important that sign languages are introduced to Deaf learners during the earliest stages of schooling. It is also important that all teachers of the Deaf be required to demonstrate proficiency in sign language(s). This can only be achieved if teacher training programmes for teachers to be deployed in the schools for the Deaf have proficiency in sign language as an inherent qualification requirement.

(b) Sign languages should be made widely available in education systems so that even hearing persons can acquire them. However, special attention should be paid to hearing parents of Deaf children and other professionals likely to come into contact with the Deaf.

(c) Associations of the Deaf in each country should lobby respective governments so that sign language becomes an official language in all countries.

(d) Language policy and planning efforts by language planning agencies in respective countries should target the sign languages for special promotion.

However, it is important to remain cognisant of the fact that principles, policies and legislation are but signposts towards implementation. In practice, implementation is fraught with hesitation, uncertainties, fear of societal stigma, ignorance and laziness. Principles, policies and legislation require hard work, full attention and commitment in the form of human and economic resources, but most importantly, the persistent demand from parents, which should be coupled with political will on the part of the government.

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Paper 1.

A CASE OF DOUBLE LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM: THE DILEMMA OF SIGN LANGUAGES IN AFRICA

A Case of Double Linguistic Imperialism:
The Dilemma of Sign Languages in Africa

Abstract

This paper relates the discourse relating to linguistic imperialism and sign languages in Africa. The argument advances the point of view that a majority of African indigenous languages are marginalised by the former colonial languages that have been adopted as official languages in most post-independence African nations. In this dialectic, the position of sign languages in Africa is even more precarious than those of African indigenous languages, because sign languages are even further marginalised by African indigenous languages. Based on an experiential account by the author that spans more than 27 years of active involvement in Deaf education in Africa, this paper presents a critique of the state of sign languages in Africa through a detailed literature review of the discourse of linguistic imperialism and a critical appraisal of the state of sign language(s) in South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Namibia. The paper points out the dilemma attendant to the development of sign languages in Africa because they are victims of double linguistic imperialism – from the dominant former colonial languages which have been adopted as official languages in many African countries, and from African indigenous languages.

Key Terms: Linguistic imperialism, Sign languages in Africa, African indigenous languages, Former colonial languages, Deaf education in Africa.

Contents

A Case of Double Linguistic Imperialism:

The Dilemma of Sign Languages in Africa

1. Introduction

> *Given limited education and skills training, South Africa's deaf population struggles mightily to find work in a country where the national unemployment rate is 22 percent and nearly 10 million people are out of work. Those who provide services to the deaf community estimate that of the half million or so people who use sign language as their first language, two of every three are jobless. Most live in informal settlements outside the cities, often in poverty... South Africa's deaf community has been marginalised further by limited access to education. This is especially true for the 80 percent of the country's 47 million people who are black. The most glaring example is the generation of adults who received an unequal education before apartheid was abolished in 1991. Educational disparities persist today. Of the 44 schools for the deaf in South Africa, only 10 are academically focused; the rest focus on practical skills* – Microsoft Corporation 2009.

The scenario described above could as well be true for any number of African countries. However, it is instructive to note that if the life of the Deaf population in Africa's largest economy is marked by such dire challenges, the life of the deaf population in most of Africa must be marked by even greater challenges. That this is the case is not accidental. This scenario is the product of a centuries' old geopolitical and sociolinguistic dynamics that has played themselves out in Africa and much of the developing world. Generally, these dynamics have involved the twin processes of exploitation and marginalisation – processes that constitute the core of a colonial and neo-colonial ethic. Specifically, these dynamics have involved the marginalisation of African indigenous languages from the core of social, political and economic discourses and processes on the continent. The discussion in the current paper is anchored on this premise. The argument advances from the point of view that a majority of African

indigenous languages are marginalised by the former colonial languages that have been adopted as official languages in post-independence Africa. In this dialectic the position of sign languages is more precarious than those of African indigenous languages because sign languages are further marginalised by being neglected at the expense of other African indigenous languages – a scenario that is paper referred to as *double linguistic imperialism*.

The paper is organised into five sections. The first section briefly outlines the methodology that was used to consolidate the insights discussed in the paper. The second section presents a synopsis of what linguistic imperialism is. This section serves to contextualise the entire discussion. The third section presents a brief account of the evolution of signed language, whilst the fourth section presents case studies on the education of the Deaf from South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Namibia. The case studies serve to ground and advance the thesis of the paper that sign languages in Africa are in a situation of double linguistic imperialism. The fifth section presents a number of critical issues derived from the case studies as well as some final conclusions.

2. A Note on Methodology

The paper is based on the experiences of the author that span 27 years of active involvement in Deaf education in Africa. These experiences are augmented by an in-depth literature study. The paper is therefore a conceptual study that combines aspects of case study research and phenomenological research. These aspects of the methodology are elaborated on in the following subsections.

2.1. A Conceptual Study

According to Nieuwenhuis (2009: 71–72), the defining characteristics of a conceptual study are that it is largely based on secondary sources, that it critically engages with the understanding of concepts, and that it aims to add to our existing body of knowledge and understanding. In short, it generates knowledge. By and large, concepts are central to the quest for knowledge since they are the building blocks from which theories are constructed. Conceptual studies

therefore tend to be abstract, philosophical and rich in their theoretical underpinning. An in-depth critical analysis of the literature is intrinsic to concept analysis, more so even for studies that deal with a concept that has displayed a variety of contending meanings on which the literature is almost infinite. *Linguistic imperialism* is such a concept.

The classical concept analysis-type studies approach their work in a "step-by-step" fashion. Concept analysis follows seven steps: selecting the concept; identifying the aims or purpose of the analysis; analysing the concept's range of meanings; determining the critical attributes of the concept; constructing a paradigm case [one case that encapsulates the critical attributes of the concept]; constructing additional cases; and identifying antecedents and consequences (Nieuwenhuis, 2009: 72). The conceptual study in this current paper follows the seven steps identified above. It also incorporates aspects of case study research and phenomenological research. These two research methods are elaborated on in the following subsections.

2.2. Case Study Research

According to Yin (1984: 23, cited in Nieuwenhuis, 2010: 75) the case study research method is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. From an interpretivist perspective the typical characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a comprehensive or holistic understanding of how participants relate and interact with one another in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon. Case studies offer a multi-perspective analysis in which the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of one or two participants in a situation, but also the views of other relevant actors and the interaction between them. It opens the possibility of giving a voice to the powerless and the voiceless, such as children or marginalised groups. This is essential for researchers to come to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the situation and thus is a salient feature of many case studies. The unit of analysis is a critical factor in case study research. It is often focused on a system of action rather than an individual or group of individuals, but case studies can also be selective, focusing on one or two

issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined. The key strength of the case study method is the use of multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. The researcher determines in advance what evidence to gather and which techniques of analysis to use on the existing data in order to respond to the research question. Data gathered is largely qualitative, but it may also include quantitative data. Tools to collect such data may include surveys, interviews, documentation review and even observation (Nieuwenhuis, 2009: 75–76). Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2009: 41) support the above by submitting that a case study as a format for research design is characterised by the focus on a phenomenon that has identifiable boundaries. Data that are not applicable to the case are not utilised unless they indirectly reflect the nature of the case. The process is therefore more important than the outcome. In other words, a description of *how, where, when* and *why* things happen in the case are noted and form an essential part of the study. The context is also more than just a part of the case. It is both the case and the interaction between the context and action that usually represent the *unit of analysis*.

The preceding elucidations on the case study research method are in line with Babbie and Mouton (2009), who submit that the case study is an intensive investigation of a single unit. Most case studies involve the examination of multiple variables and the interaction of the unit of study with its context that signifies a significant part of the investigation. Thickly described case studies take multiple perspectives into account and attempt to understand the influences of multilevel social systems on subjects' perspectives and behaviours. Thus the general design principles in case study research include the role of conceptualisation; the importance of contextual detail and in-depth description; the use of multiple sources of data; and analytical strategies including how to organise findings, the question of whether generalisation is appropriate to case study data, and the issue of theory development (Babbie and Mouton, 2009: 281–283).

The study reported in this paper represents aspects of a case study. It sought to investigate sign languages in Africa with specific attention to the status quo of sign languages vis-à-vis the

former colonial languages that have been adopted as official languages in many African countries, as well as the African indigenous languages within real-life contexts in South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Namibia. To achieve this objective, multiple sources of evidence were used. The motivation was to seek a comprehensive understanding of how the Deaf communities of Africa perceive the state of sign languages in Africa, and how they understand the notion of marginalisation of sign languages in the African context. To achieve comprehensive understanding, the researcher also sought and included in the research the voice and perspective of other participants outside the constituency of the Deaf population, namely, policy makers, activists, hearing teachers of the Deaf and international agencies working with organisations of the Deaf in Africa. Recognising that the Deaf constitutes a marginalised group in Africa and that case studies can serve to give a voice to the powerless and voiceless, one of the goals of the case study was to give a voice to the Deaf population in Africa, especially in terms of the current marginalised status of sign languages on the continent. The case study reported here remains faithful to a foregrounding of conceptualisation (the question of whether sign languages in Africa are subject to the dynamics of linguistic imperialism and if so, then a need to determine the extent of the impact of linguistic imperialism on sign languages in Africa); the importance of contextual detail and in-depth description (the analysis provides contextual details and an in-depth description of the four countries that constitute the case study, cognisant of the fact that circumstances in the four countries differ); the use of multiple sources of data (apart from an in-depth literature study, the study relies on the experiences of the author – discussed in detail in the following subsection, insights from a study of the Deaf population in the four countries, as well as insights from policy makers, activists, teachers and personnel of international agencies working with organisations of the Deaf in Africa).

In line with case study research, another goal of the case study reported in the paper is theory development. The case study approach used here serves to extend the theoretical premises of linguistic imperialism by demonstrating that linguistic imperialism is a far more complex phenomenon than otherwise documented in the literature. It is the basis of the claim that the

African continent (and probably elsewhere) certain indigenous languages serve to marginalise other indigenous languages occasioning the phenomenon of double linguistic imperialism.

3. Phenomenological research

The phenomenological or interpretivist approach has as its point of departure a predominantly mental analogy: the human mind or consciousness forms the basis of the presumed analogy between the study of human beings and the study of society. The aim of the human sciences is therefore to *understand* (not explain or analyse) human beings. However, the focus is on the human subject conceived first and foremost as a conscious, self-directing, rational human being, and not as a biological organism. The phenomenologist emphasises that human beings are continuously engaged in the process of making sense of their worlds: they interpret, give meaning to, define, explain, justify, and rationalise their actions. According to the phenomenological position, the fact that people are continuously constructing, developing, and changing their worlds, and simultaneously also their common sense interpretations, should be taken into account in any understanding of what social science research should be (Mouton, 2001: 19).

Mouton (2001: 20) observes that a central element in the phenomenological paradigm is the role of human consciousness. This implies that any understanding of social practices must of necessity also be couched into categories of consciousness: intentionality, rationality, meaning, and subjectivity. The aim of the social sciences is therefore defined as primarily directed towards understanding: understanding human actors in terms of their own interpretations of reality and understanding society in terms of the meanings which people ascribe to the social practices in that society. Such a formulation of the aim of social science research has an inherent concern for power. The primary goal of social inquiry is thus to produce knowledge and truth with the intention of eliminating all forms of ignorance, superstition, and prejudice.

Mouton (2001: 20) further observes that the aim of the phenomenological paradigm is to give people a better understanding of themselves and greater insight into their life situations. With

regard to methodology, phenomenology has traditionally been associated with the qualitative approach. Again, the reasons for this marriage between phenomenology and qualitative methodology seem quite logical given the importance accorded to the cognitive metaphor. The insistence on an interpretive understanding of the meanings and self descriptions of the individual requires a methodology that emphasises the following: unstructured observation and open interviewing; idiographic and "thick" descriptions (detailed in-depth descriptions of small numbers of cases); qualitative analysis; and objectivity defined as the intersubjective and emphatic attitude of the "insider". The phenomenologist therefore favours data collection methods like participant observation and unstructured interviewing, life history methodologies, qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis; as well as techniques such as the grounded theory approach and analytic induction for the analysis of data.

The author's involvement with Deaf education in Africa over the past 27 years constitutes the phenomenological research component of the study reported in this paper. The fact that the author is a fluent user of sign language, a professional interpreter, as well as researcher and lecturer in sign language, assisted him in identifying with the lived experiences of the Deaf population in the four countries represented in this study.

4. Tang's (2006) interpretation of linguistic Imperialism – a Synopsis

Tang (2006) most recently offered a comprehensive interpretation of "Linguistic Imperialism" which will form the backbone of the discussion to follow. In this section a synopsis of this interpretation is offered for purposes of elucidation. Tang (2006: 5) traces the discourse on linguistic imperialism to Gilbert Ansre (1979) the Ghanaian sociolinguist who defines *linguistic imperialism* as any situation in which the speaker of one language is dominated by another language to a point where they believe they can and should use only that foreign language when it comes to transactions dealing with the more advanced aspects of life such as education, philosophy, literature, government, and the administration of justice. Tang (2006: 5–7) also acknowledges the contribution made to the development of the concept by Robert

Phillipson (1992) by referring to Phillipson's working definition of English linguistic imperialism. He also acknowledges the work of Alistair Pennycook and Braj Kachru (1990) in this regard, but first some elaboration on Phillipson (1992).

Phillipson (1992) according to Tang (2006: 5), puts the emphasis on the dominance of English asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequities between English and other languages. *Structural inequity* in this context refers broadly to inequality related to material properties such as institutions and finance. In turn, the term *cultural inequality* refers to immaterial or ideological properties such as attitudes and pedagogic principles. English linguistic imperialism thus features as a subtype of *linguicism* (linguicism can be defined as ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources [both material and non-material] between groups which are defined on the basis of language [on the basis of their mother-tongues] Skutnabb-Kangas 1988: 13) where linguicism ensures the continued allowance of more resources, materials, and benefits to those who are proficient in English.

Tang (2006: 5) also points to the strong influence of Johan Galtung (1979) on Phillipson's theory of linguistic imperialism. According to Galtung (1979), six aspects of imperialism can be identified: economic, political, military, communicational, cultural and social. Although linguistic imperialism is most closely related to communicational imperialism, Phillipson (1992) considers linguistic imperialism also as pervasive to all six aspects of imperialism. Thus Galtung divides the world governed by imperialism into the Centre (the colonisers), which consists of powerful Western countries, and the Periphery (the colonised), which consists of countries dominated by the Centre. The Centre and the Periphery are in turn constituted of other Centres and Peripheries. A pattern of imperialism is established when the Centre one-sidedly provides the teachers and the definitions of what is worthy of being taught, and the Periphery supplies the learners.

Galtung's theory of imperialism (Galtung 1979) is furthermore to be understood in a threefold manner to include the phases of colonialism, neo-colonialism and neo-neocolonialism. *Colonialism* in this context comes to feature when expatriates from the Centre physically occupy the country of the Periphery. When the expatriates are replaced by local elites, who are typically educated in the tradition of the colonisers, the status quo becomes representative of *neocolonialism*. The Centre interacts with the Periphery via international organisations and *neo-neocolonialism* comes into play when the colonisers are no longer physically there because they are able to exert their influence through other means, such as through international communication, or media and technology. Phillipson (1992) in turn, argues that linguistic imperialism of the English language can follow one or all of these phases.

As mentioned earlier, Tang (2006) also identifies Alistair Pennycook, apart from Phillipson, as important in the definition of linguistic imperialism. Pennycook (1994) for example, questions the passive acceptance of "international English" as the natural order of things. He points to the economic and political forces of international capitalism that have imposed international English as responsible for the domination of cultures. English thus comes to function as the gatekeeper to power and prestige and Anglicism (policies favouring English) imposes English as the medium of communication. When both are at work in colonialism, the English language ultimately becomes the disseminator of inequality.

According to Kachru's (1990) extended interpretation of linguistic imperialism, the coloniser also controls international power in three different ways; firstly, by displacing the native language and replacing it with English. In other situations, English does not displace the native language; rather it establishes itself as an important official language. The third kind of control is when English becomes so accepted by the colonised that they transform it into a local variety of English (cf. also Tang, 2006: 7).

According to Tang (2006), Joseph Boyle in his 1997 work has become one of the important synthesisers of the various perspectives of the discourse on linguistic imperialism. Tang (2006:

7) observes that when Boyle combines the three aspects of Kachru's definition with those of Phillipson and Galtung, the result is an explication by means of three phases of linguistic imperialism, although the fact that the "phases" are not necessarily serial in occurrence implies that they function more like types of linguistic imperialism. The first is represented by Compulsion or Coercion, whereby the colonisers impose their language. This is also known as the Stick or Displacement phase. Manipulation or Clever Compromise comprises the second phase: the local elite are proficient in the coloniser's language and acts as bridging for politics and business. Others (cf Bailey 1992, Dissanayake 1993) refer to this as the Carrot phase, or the Accommodation phase. The third phase is Covert Control through ideological persuasion, which can come in the form of media or computer technology. Ideology and the purifying of varieties characterise this phase.

In light of the background, it is possible to relate the concept of linguistic imperialism to the language situation in Africa, with specific reference to the status quo of sign languages on the continent.

It should firstly be pointed out that language colonisation is not a new phenomenon. It has happened in various manners: i) languages colonised one another as they vied for dominance while being used in the same place (super-strata or substrata) or next to one another at the borders between regions for purposes of trade and so forth; ii) countries go to war and the consequences of conquest often imply that the conquerors force their language onto the new subjects; iii) missionaries and traders force their language onto the unsuspecting for purposes of establishing a common good (the inculcation of Christianity, the establishment of trade centres, etc.); and iv) fellow countrymen, after stints in a foreign land, bring with them the language and culture of the foreign in and force the new language and culture onto the indigenous people. In Europe, the nature and success of language colonisation depended largely on who conquered whom, thus the influence of Latin is directly related to the spread of the Roman Empire as is the case for the success of Arabic in relation to the spread of Islam.

In more recent times, it is on the African continent that the notion of language colonisation has become most apparent. This is not the result of mere accident, but a combination of geopolitical, cultural and technological factors that accelerated after the end of the Second World War, a time during which Africa has became a recipient of ideas, culture and technology and most often a bystander in major global developments. For the better part of the last 20th. Century, colonialism was defined by politics. In this perspective, colonialism refers to the political control of the people of a given territory by a foreign state, whether accompanied by permanent settlement or not (Allen & Thomas, 2000: 242). Yet the closing decade of the twentieth century witnessed a shift from this politically oriented definition of colonialism to what can be characterised as a culturally oriented one. Inherent in the cultural definition of colonialism is the notion of the heritage and worldview of African peoples and how this were made subservient to a heritage and worldview defined and constructed by a Eurocentric ethos (Said 1993). Cultural colonisation includes the domination of African indigenous languages by European languages. However, before discussing the domination of African indigenous languages by European languages, a general overview of the colonisation process in Africa will be provided (cf. e.g. Said 1993, Giliomee 2003)

The colonisation of Africa was a systematic and gradual process that commenced with the European explorers of the middle ages who claimed to have "discovered" the peoples of the "Dark Continent". As to whether the term"darkness" was derived from the pigmentation of the people or the unknown nature of the continent is not known. The idea of discovery in itself is contentious. The contention hinges on the problematic notion of "how does one discover what already exists"? However, within the dominant Western-centric construction of reality, the European explorers went on to "discover" places, rivers, mountains and other aspects of the African terrain and way of life and name them with little regard for the indigenous names of natural and physical features. Thus 'Nam Lolwe' – the *Dholuo* (the language of the Luo; a Nilotic community living around Lake Victoria) name for the largest fresh-water lake in Africa became Lake Victoria, named after the Queen of England. This process of the claiming of key landmarks of the African landscape by awarding them names of Western origin is indicative of the right to

possession that the explorers appropriated to themselves. The description of this process and its effects may seem pedantic, but it became the signifier for a systemic marginalisation of African indigenous languages from major social, political, economic and cultural discourses on the continent and in some instances their complete replacement as vehicles of communication and knowledge transfer. Thus, colonization symbolically marks the advent of linguistic imperialism on the continent.

As European “discovery” of various aspects of the African landscape and socio-cultural way of life accelerated, another process was underway on the continent. This was the process of the European explorers opening up the continent to the economic reach of the developed world. The face of this process was the Arab traders who scoured the African hinterland for slaves, ivory, salt, gold and diamonds. This trade was sustained by the Western markets it fed. It is worth noting that this period, at least in part, came to coincide with the industrial revolution in the Western world. The industries in the West needed raw materials. Also, the prosperity created by the industrial revolution in Western societies meant that these societies developed an ever-expanding need for more goods, especially exotic goods from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to satisfy an emerging luxury market. It is noteworthy that the Arab traders only acted as middlemen in this emerging economic web. Essentially, they were facilitators for the evolution and entrenchment of a world economic system that was and still is dominated by Western powers.

The role of European languages such as Portuguese, French, Spanish, English and German in this process may not have been as apparent at first, but as Western powers gradually sought to remove the middlemen through the process of colonisation, the role of these Western languages in the ultimate control of the economic resources of Africa and much of what would become the colonised world became apparent. The emergent colonial economies came to be structured in such a way as to allow the language of the coloniser to dominate at the top of the economic pyramid, with the African indigenous languages serving as feeder languages to an economy operated on the basis of the language of the coloniser. In this dynamic, especially

during the colonial period and the formative years of African statehood, sign language(s) received little to no attention. It is this systematic creation of a functional hierarchy of the languages on the African continent, with sign language(s) at the bottom of the language pyramid in terms of status and development, which set the precedent for what, has become an example of systematic double linguistic imperialism with sign languages on the continent as subject.

Apart from what may be characterised as the intellectual cum economic imperatives of the Western explorers, merchants and their Arab middlemen, as elaborated earlier, there was also a third dynamic in play. This can loosely be referred to as the dynamic of "evangelisation". Western Christian missionaries came to Africa to spread the gospel to a Dark Continent which, according to them, did not know Jesus and/or God. Two major strains of religious discourse came to predominate in Africa: Catholicism (mostly from Italy, the Netherlands and Ireland) and the Anglican version of Protestantism (the Church of England). Missionaries set up missions along the coasts and in the hinterland. The missions were built to accommodate a school, a hospital and a church.

Apart from preaching by word of mouth, the missionaries sought to spread literacy to the native populations with the express purpose of allowing them to read the Bible. The spread of literacy to the local populations was a double-pronged strategy. The first involved the teaching of Western languages to the local population so that they could read the Bible in this language. This strategy in itself ensured that the Western language being taught enjoyed a higher status than the languages of the local populations. The second strategy involved the translation of the Bible into the local indigenous languages. The impact of this process on African indigenous languages is always understated, but it set the stage for the manipulation of the phonetic, morphological, syntactic, discourse and orthographic systems of African indigenous languages because the Western missionaries who sought to codify these languages used their native Western languages as the basis of codifying the phonetic, morphological, syntactic, discourse and orthographic systems of African languages. The results of these efforts were always strange to the native speakers of the languages concerned. So, for example, it is reported that when the

Bible translation from English into Dholuo was read to the congregation in church, the old people would comment, “that is not the way we speak”. The spoken Luo was different from the written one because the structure of the translation was guided mainly by the English grammar. The negative effects of this process of codification of African indigenous languages using the phonetic, morphological, syntactic, discourse and orthographic systems of Western languages endure to the present day. The process did not only alter the intrinsic attributes of these languages; it also made these languages subservient to the languages on which their codification was based (Landau 2005).

In this entire process, sign languages did not even feature. However, when later sign languages became languages worth considering for codification, it came as no surprise that they were not considered as independent systems, their description based either on Western languages, or on the already “distorted” African indigenous languages. This represents a classic case of double linguistic imperialism. (cf e.g. Landau 2005, Stanley 1990)

It must be mentioned here briefly that the French colonised what is today known as francophone Africa, but because of the French policy of assimilation, the French did not exhibit the same enthusiasm for translating French into African indigenous languages but instead insisted on the indigenous people speaking French at the cost of the detriment of their former mother tongues (Quartararo 1995). Hence in places like the DRC, Congo Brazzaville, the Central African Republic, French Cameroon and Senegal, people speak French as mother tongue. The practice of assimilation was replicated by the Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique It must be observed that the practice of language of assimilation posed greater threats to the viability of African indigenous languages than the process of codification discussed above. This is due to the fact that the process of language assimilation, if sustained over time, can effectively result in language death for African indigenous languages under threat. Inasmuch as this did not happen in francophone and lusophone Africa, the process of language assimilation led to the creation of a marked hierarchy of languages in these societies, with Western languages at the top of the language pyramid in terms of status and development and African indigenous

languages at the bottom. Again, sign languages became the victim of both the dominant Western languages and the African indigenous languages struggling for survival.

In South Africa the process was and remains more complex than in many African countries and societies. Over the last three and a half centuries the political battles that have been fought in South Africa have always been linked in some way to language, a phenomenon that led Du Plessis (1999) to observe that there is a tendency in South Africa to convert political victories into linguistic victories. Without belabouring the point by delving into the contentious history of the politics of language in South Africa, this phenomenon has ensured that English and subsequently Afrikaans in the middle to late twentieth century have always enjoyed privileged status in the Republic through successive political transitions and transformations. Over the same period this phenomenon has solidified the diminished status of African indigenous languages in South Africa. The late twentieth-century transitional constitutions of South Africa (the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200 of 1993* and *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act no. 108 of 1996*) have sought to correct this anomaly by first of all acknowledging the diminished status of African indigenous languages and secondly, attempting to address this. However, deep into the second decade after South Africa's transition to a democracy, African indigenous languages in South Africa remain at the fringes of core social, political and economic discourses. As such, the situation in South Africa mirrors the negative hierarchy of languages described in other African countries. In this hierarchy, and despite the fact that sign language is singled out in the 1996 South African Constitution as deserving promotion and development by the Pan South African Language Board; and the fact that it is recognised as a language of education by the *South African Schools Act, no. 84 of 1996*, sign language in South Africa suffers the fate of sign languages all over Africa: marginalisation by the two dominant languages, in this case Afrikaans and English being given more prominence, (Giliomee 2003) and marginalisation as a result of the nine indigenous languages recognised as official languages of South Africa by the Constitution. To rectify this situation, it is proposed that education is of the utmost importance. The following section presents a brief background

on the evolution of signed language and the integral part played by education in its conception and execution.

5. The Evolution of Signed Language

Groce (1985: 101) quotes a 1648 comment by Bulwer on the social status of Deaf people which most acutely describes their precarious recognition as human beings by society at large: “The life of the average deaf person seems to have been difficult. The conditions that they are in who are born deafe and dumbe, is indeed very sad and lamentable: for they are looked upon as misprisions in nature, and wanting speech are reckoned little better than Dumbe Animals.”

This illustrates to what extent speech, or communication in general, is considered crucial as indication of the Deaf people’s status as human beings within society. It also follows that communication by and with the Deaf is considered important in the context of Deaf education. However, a crucial choice is also to be made as to the medium of education. In the early recorded history on how the Deaf were educated, the choice was between speech (or oral communication, which was idealised and became known as ”oralism”) and sign language (also called “manualism” by the proponents of “oralism”). Although not much is known about countries that taught the Deaf in both these mediums, the same trend emerged as to who took responsibility for mooting this idea of simultaneous use of medium. For most it was based on a prescriptive view of what others believed to work for the Deaf.

In 1610 Pedro Ponce de Leone, a Spanish monk, was employed by the scions of noble Spanish families to teach their Deaf children to speak, read and write (Lane *et al.*, 1996: 59). This sparked the development of the method referred to as oralism. This method was subsequently emulated in Germany and later became the pervasive method for teaching deaf children in continental Europe. Inasmuch as the method originated in Spain, it became more accepted and entrenched in Germany and that is why it later came to be referred to as the “German method” with Samuel Heinicke taking a leading role in its further development. In the UK, where the Braidwood family took centre stage as promoters of education of the Deaf, oralism was again

the method of instruction of choice, a development that was possibly influenced by the German example.

Elsewhere, Abbé de l'Epée, a French priest who founded the first school for the Deaf in France in the late 1760s, taught the deaf by using the manual method - later known as Sign Language (Langue des Signes Françoise, LSF). While l'Epée is said to have learned the manual language (LSF) of the Parisian Deaf community from two sisters he offered to teach, he did not recognise LSF's independent status as language and was misled by the grammar of his own language into reorganising the signs he had learned according to the grammar of spoken French (Lane *et al.,* 1996: 51–52). In doing this, he imposed the linguistic system of French onto LSF; again, a very good example of linguistic imperialism.

Likewise, an American Protestant minister from Hartford (Connecticut) USA, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, was sent by philanthropists to London to acquire knowledge into the art of instructing the Deaf (Lane et al 1996:54). The aim was to gain knowledge of teaching deaf children so as to establish a school for the Deaf children in the United States. He was turned away by the Braidwood family who held their teaching method (oralism) to be a secret. After this disappointing experience, Gallaudet went to the Abbé de l'Epée's school where he was welcomed. After understudying with the Abbé de l'Epée he returned to the United States accompanied by Laurent Clerc (a deaf teacher from Abbé de l'Epée's school) to start a school for the Deaf in the United States. The school was founded in Hartford, Connecticut. The school came to be known as the *American Asylum School for the Deaf (Baynton 1996).* They taught the modified signed language (LSF) which followed the spoken French grammar, only this time the English grammar was followed instead (Lane *et al.,* 1996: 56).

It can be argued that the two controversial methods of teaching the Deaf in Europe marked the beginning of linguistic oppression of the Deaf. On the one hand, the Deaf were expected to "oralise" sign language so that they could master and use language like the hearing population. On the other hand, in instances when sign language was accepted as the communication

method of choice to be taught and used by the Deaf, it was modified to suit the grammar of a dominant spoken language.

The radical break in sign language linguistics away from this subordination came only in 1960 when William Stokoe published his scientific research on SL linguistics. Stokoe showed that sign language was as much a language as any other spoken language with its own grammar independent of any particular spoken language grammar (Stokoe, 1960). This, unfortunately, led the staunch proponents of oralism (speech) to only in part accept the consequences of the research by proposing that if signs had to be used, the person should speak and sign at the same time. This approach became known variously as Simultaneous Communication (SimCom) or Total Communication (TC) (Aarons & Akach, 2002: 160). This postulation gave strength to those who thought that the grammar of sign language as used by the Deaf was primitive and therefore had to be adapted to spoken language grammar as was done by De l'Epée (for French) and Hopkins and Clerc (for English). This development gave rise to a myriad of invented sign systems for representing English on the hands, which are generically called *manually coded English* (MCE). These include Signed English, Signed Exact English (SEE 2), Seeing Essential English (SEE 1) and Pidgin Sign English (PSE), which were all systems used simultaneously with speech. This view of sign languages as based on the grammar of spoken languages is again clearly an indication of linguistic imperialism.

In Africa, the situation of sign language can be referred to as *double linguistic imperialism* because sign languages in Africa were not only marginalised by Western languages that formed the basis of the linguistic system upon which they were developed, but they were also marginalised by the preference for other African indigenous languages. In the following section, the discussion turns to the developments around sign languages in Africa vis-à-vis the European and American situation in Deaf education. The discussion also presents case studies from four African countries in this study.

6. Education of the Deaf in Africa – Selected Case Studies

While the situation described above was happening in Europe, little of comparison was happening in Africa south of the Sahara, except in South Africa, where the first school for the Deaf was built in 1863 (Aarons & Akach 1999). It is important to mention that the teaching method for deaf children in South Africa was imported from Europe and, depending on which country the missionaries or teachers were from and which method was used in such a country, the same was duplicated in South Africa and adapted accordingly. The first school in South Africa was established by the Catholic missionaries of the Dominican Order from Ireland in 1863 in Cape Town. They taught using Irish sign language until the infamous Milan conference of 1880: a congress at which a resolution was passed to ban the use of manualism (sign language) altogether in the world (Lane *et al*., 1996: 61). After the congress, the school switched to oralism as the preferred method of instruction. The remnants of Irish Sign Language can still be found in use amongst the signing community of the Western Cape.

South Africa has the earliest record of Deaf education in Africa south of Sahara, according to literature at our disposal (Aarons & Akach 1998, Aarons & Reynolds 2003). For the rest of Africa, Deaf education seems to have come with political independence. For example, in 1957, when Ghana became independent, the first school for the Deaf was built (Akach & Trier, 1996). This school also followed an oralist approach. In the wake of the ever increasing move towards independence in Africa in the 1960s, schools for the Deaf were built in Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, Chad, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC]), Congo Brazzaville, for example. Many of these schools were built by an African American missionary, Rev. Dr Andrew Forster. Forster focused on missionary outreach to the Deaf and combined this, as elsewhere, with education in signed language. For Forster this took the form of what is known as American Sign Language (ASL), while in actuality it was nothing but Signed Exact English (SEE) or an attempt at that. He was known to have recruited Deaf adults from the countries mentioned and beyond, including East and Central Africa, to train them as priests or “Deaf Ministers”, as they were called. In this way ASL/SEE spread beyond the countries where he had first established schools (Akach & Trier 1996).

It is a peculiar situation that ASL (SEE) could be used in francophone Africa and even in Ethiopia where Amharic is spoken and not English. In Namibia it was not so much the Andrew Forster influences but that there were Deaf people who were in exile in the States. While in exile, 6 members of the Namibian Deaf community, worked on the first Namibian Sign Language dictionary with indigenous Namibian Sign Language signs. This was guided by Dr Ruth Morgan, a South African who was studying in the US at the time. This, however, did not stop the spread of SEE with the ASL vocabulary despite the exiles' return to Namibia (Akach 1998). It is also worth mentioning that these Deaf people clearly used proper SL among themselves. It is not a surprise, given that there were only six of them and that they had not power or influence.

The teachers in the Forster schools were trained in the use of SEE. This was also the case in Kenya, where, in 1995 the author was among six teachers who were selected to undergo the training (a brief explanation follows below when the Kenyan case study is discussed). There was a belief in Kenya that teaching the Deaf in SEE would enhance the possibilities of the Deaf learners achieving hitherto elusive literacy in English. We, who were lucky to be trained in this system, were also told it was universal. As educators, little did we appreciate the fact that SEE as actualised and learnt in England would not be the same when actualised and learnt in the United States, Australia, or Kenya. Different SLs have a life of their own, subject to local contexts, conditions and developments

6.1. South Africa

Since the first school for the Deaf was built in South Africa in 1863, approximately 44 schools for the Deaf have been established in the country. After 1880 (the date of the Milan Conference), those schools used oral method of communication. Until the enactment of the *Group Areas Act* in 1948 (cf. Aarons & Akach, 2002), these schools were racially mixed. Thereafter, learners were redistributed and split according to the colour of their skin. Schools established after 1948 were organized based on the language of the area and therefore Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, Zulu, Afrikaans, English (including Indians) and Venda, "speaking" Deaf people

had their own schools. This state of affairs was a repeat of the colonisation of the black/indigenous people by whites. Deaf people were colonised by the hearing people but at a completely different level and in many ways unique because it was a colonisation of the Deaf by hearing as well. The schools for white learners practiced the Oralism while the schools for black learners were left less monitored since they were regarded as less important and as a result had more freedom and more likely to follow their own approaches. The teachers in those schools used the Paget Gorman System alongside the spoken language of the area to teach the deaf learners. This system was developed to augment and enhance lip-reading so as to make visibility of speech (sounds) on the lips easier to read and therefore understand. A number of hand shapes were placed in positions around the mouth when certain sounds were uttered and these combined to form words (Paget & Gorman 1969). Over time, and largely unknown to teachers, in a process that reflects the intrinsic creativity of human language(s), the learners adapted these hand shapes and incorporated them into their already rich naturally occurring lexicon without the "mouth-pattern" as was expected in oralism. It is important to bear in mind that hand-forms constitute the foundation on which signed languages are based. In the school situation described above the teachers sought to use hand forms to augment oralism. But oralism, by its very nature sought to map a spoken language onto the linguistic repertoire of Deaf children, thereby ignoring or even seeking to suppress the child's intrinsic capabilities to acquire and master sign language as L1. This oralist approach to the learning of sign language, and later to the using of manual language as a medium of instruction, is yet again a clear manifestation of linguistic imperialism because signed languages have their own grammar and this system has no grammar at all, certainly not a naturally known one.

In 1988, a new school for Indian Deaf learners was built in Durban. The principal, not realising that the learners were using some form of sign language (manualism) among themselves, declared there was no signed language (at least a structured one) in South Africa and therefore went to the USA to "bring" a "real" Sign Language to South Africa which could be used in the classroom. It is important to note that the principal was not an American "exporting" ASL to South Africa, but rather a South African "importing" ASL into South Africa. This instead, is

therefore a clear case of neo-colonialism within the framework of linguistic imperialism. It should be remembered, however, that the "ASL" mentioned in this context was not ASL, the language used by the Deaf in USA but Signed English. Again, the teachers used Signing Exact English (SEE) in the classroom but out of the classroom the learners did not. Yet the influence of this experiment should not be underestimated, particularly in the influence of new lexical items, as the school leavers from that school in Durban have since redistributed themselves across South Africa and in the process have mingled with the rest of the Deaf community, spreading a huge amount of ASL vocabulary. This is limited to lexicon, however not the grammar of the local SA signed language. However, this was not the only way ASL vocabulary found its way into South Africa. A handful of South African Deaf people went to study in the USA and brought back not only the ASL vocabulary, but used the SEE or SimCom.

Returning to the broader outcomes of the Group Areas Act, it should be pointed out that the establishment of schools for the Deaf in SA after 1948 led earlier researchers on signed language in SA to draw the conclusion that there were 11 different signed languages as these reflected the 11 language groups in SA after apartheid era in 1994 (cf. Penn, 1992). When author was hired as Sign Language and Interpreting Development director at the Deaf Federation South Africa (DeafSA) in 1996, he had to address this perception as a matter of urgency. Whenever meetings of the Management Committee or Provincial Council or Annual General Meeting (AGM) were held, there were 11 pairs of Sign Language interpreters in the meeting venue. As an interpreter, the author after sufficient exposure to signed language used in SA to give him the confidence that he could operate at interpreting level, made a decision at the subsequent meetings that there would only be one pair of SASL/English interpreters. This decision made the MEC of DeafSA, including the director and chairperson extremely uneasy at first because it was as if the author was preparing the ground for his dismissal: the author's decision was contrary to what was established practice. The first time the author interpreted as a lone interpreter and thus replaced the system of a sign language interpreter for each of the official South African languages, the atmosphere was extremely tense. At the end of the interpreting session, the chairperson asked the Deaf audience whether there were any

questions and many hands went up – a gesture which the chairman construed as protest. To the surprise of the chairperson, the raised hands were for questions, comments and suggestions by the Deaf people, all of which pointed to the fact that using a single interpreter was not only feasible, but also more coherent to the audience than using 11. This act, in its spontaneity and simplicity, marked the beginning of recognising and later codifying sign language in South Africa, not as previously thought into 11 separate languages, but as one language – what would later emerge as South African Sign Language (SASL). This development was followed by some strategic re-organisation at the management level of DeafSA in which staff (Deaf and hearing) had to start using SASL as opposed the practice of lip-reading or depending on interpreting. The author offered weekly SASL classes in the office to meet this strategic imperative. Since then, there has been progress with the development of SASL as an L1 for the Deaf population in South Africa, as a language as well as a medium of instruction in the South African education system. SASL, has been offered as a language major at tertiary level at the University of Free State since 1999 and at the University of the Witwatersrand since 2001 (cf. Akach & Naudé, 2009). Interpreters trained both at postgraduate level and by means of short courses at the University of Free State, are offering interpreting services in various communicative domains including meetings, at conferences, on the TV news and, more importantly, rendering service to the few Deaf learners at the University of Free State (cf. Akach & Naudé, 2009). However, it is important to note that even with these developments, the position of SASL remains subservient to that of Afrikaans and English as the dominant languages in the public sphere. SASL is also still regarded as subordinate to the African indigenous languages which have gained more status prominence since the end of apartheid.

The discussion now turns to various other countries in Africa. The similarities/dissimilarities to one another in each case are reviewed.

6.2. Kenya

In 1958 the need to educate the Deaf in Kenya arose out of Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) statistics which showed the alarming rate at which deafness occurred among infants in Kenya.

Dr Clifford, the ENT specialist at the King George Hospital, since renamed Kenyatta National Hospital, asked a legislator by the name of Dorothy Hughes to start a school to instruct the deaf infants to speak (i.e. using oralism, hence a good example of linguistic colonisation). In 1958, Ms Hughes asked the Aga Khan Foundation to build a school for the Deaf but ended up only with a sponsorship of a unit within the existing school in Nairobi and later also in Mombasa (Mwangiri 1985). While this development indicated some movement towards change in the urban areas, few knew or cared about what was happening in rural Kenya. To compound matters, an impasse occurred from 1958 (when the first school or a unit was established) to 1961 when a Catholic order from the Netherlands set up a second school within a mission and later moved on to a larger campus in 1963, giving Kenya its first fully fledged school for the Deaf, Nyang'oma School for the Deaf in Bondo, western Kenya. The medium of instruction was oralism (cf. Mwangiri, 1988).

Teachers at the Bondo school were sent for training as teachers for the Deaf at Moray House College in Dublin Ireland. This was an expensive exercise and so training was moved to Kenya in 1964 with the use of a trainer from the UK. This training was done by allowing trainees to enrol and exit (cafeteria system Mwangiri (1985) called it)) at any time during the year. A fully fledged training programme was established in 1970 when a University of Manchester (a well-known centre for training oralists) trained a war veteran who was in turn sent to Kenya by the Commonwealth Society for the Deaf in United Kingdom. This resulted in oralism being entrenched and institutionalised in Kenya. It was only in 1982 that, for the first time, signing was mentioned officially in Kenyan government documents. An American-trained Kenyan Deaf graduate, Dr Michael Ndurumo, proposed the introduction of sign language in Deaf education (Ndurumo, 1982). On arrival back from the US, he was hired in to a high position in the government-run Kenya Institute of Education (KIE). Among other programmes, this institute was charged with curriculum development for all subjects at all schools for the Deaf in Kenya. The proposal was accepted by the government and as it emanated from a governmental institution and was proposed by a knowledgeable Deaf government officer, it was assumed that the officer knew what was beneficial for Deaf learners in Kenya. Unfortunately, the officer did

not seek to develop Kenyan sign language but rather chose the easy option of importing Signed Exact English into the Kenyan education system. The acceptance of the proposal coincided with the opening of a new school for the Deaf which was built by means of the support of the Swedish Government in a district that until then had no school for the Deaf, the Machakos District in eastern Kenya. The school was earmarked as the pilot site for sign language as medium of instruction (the sign language that was piloted was Signed Exact English, not the local language used by Deaf people in Kenya). Deaf learners who attended the new school were selected from the existing 42 schools. They were generally chosen to attend as they were considered "oral failures" in their schools of origin. Teachers for the new school, in turn, were also identified from existing schools for the Deaf. This cohort of teachers was trained in readiness for the completion of the school by means of a two-month intensive course in Signed Exact English, supplemented by training in how to use this form of communication in the teaching of the Deaf learners. The author was one of the teachers to undergo this training.

This training, although informative, still did not provide pose a solution even though the training marked a radical departure from the government policy on oralism; it was still based on an *alien* non-language, ASL in SEE form. The training therefore did not capture the peculiarities particulars nature of Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) the language used by local Deaf people.

The establishment of the Machakos School for the Deaf in 1986 coincided with the mooting of the idea to establish the Kenyan National Association of the Deaf (KNAD). The idea for the establishment of KNAD was supported by the Swedish Association of the Deaf (SDR) which sent volunteers to set up a Swedish Deaf Project in Kenya (SDPK). The author became part of this as he was among the local personnel hired as counterparts to the Swedish volunteers. Ultimately, the efforts of the volunteers from the SDR, working under the auspices of the SDPK, led to the establishment of the Kenya National Association of the Deaf (KNAD). KNAD opposed the use of signed Exact English or any alien sign languages in Kenyan schools for the Deaf. It happened that since KNAD opposed the use of SEE in Kenya, the KIE personnel made use of Kenyan Deaf people who supported the move to edit the SEE resource book, *Joy of Signing*, by means of

Kenyan models and changing parts of the core vocabulary to typically Kenyan vocabulary. The rest nevertheless remained SEE (KIE 1989).

Even before the results of the pilot phase of the project (which started in Jan 1986) could be condensed into official policy, the SEE resource book *Joy of Signing* was adapted by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) in 1988. It had been disseminated to all the other schools for the Deaf in the country. This move was based on the promised success rate in the pilot school, which never came to fruition. To counter this fallacy in the interpretation of the results of the pilot phase of the project, the author guided lexicography research that culminated in the production of the first KSL dictionary. However this was dismissed as "primitive" compared to the American version, mostly by teachers in schools for the Deaf who dismissed the KSL dictionary as "Akach and his Deaf people language" – a language that did not meet the structure of English language grammar (cf. Akach, 1991a).

The production of the KSL dictionary (Akach 1991a) was followed by his MA thesis, entitled, *Kenya Sign Language (KSL): Sentence Types (Akach 1991b)*. This was an attempt at a description of the sentence grammar of KSL. Using primary data collected from the Kenyan Deaf population, the study established that KSL was a natural language that existed independent of other languages and had its own linguistic structure. However, teachers continued to dismiss the existence of KSL claiming it could not be used in teaching in the classroom situation because it lacked English grammar. Over the last three decades, there has been a gradual shift in the Kenyan education system away from SEE. The proposed new Constitution of Kenya (draft) recognizes the role of state in promoting and developing indigenous languages including Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) cf. Chapter 2 Section 7 Sub section 3b. The proposed constitution further states that it recognizes KSL as one of the languages of parliament (Chapter 8 Section 129 Sub section 1) it is hoped that this development will further entrench the shift from SEE to KSL (Draft Constitution of Kenya. Referendum August 2010).

6.3. Ghana

In 1996, Marian Trier (Denmark) and the author were sent to Ghana by UNESCO as consultants. The brief for the mission included amongst others an assessment and report on the status quo in Deaf education in that country. The method of communication, as in schools for the Deaf, was mostly Signed Exact English (SEE), referred to in various contexts as Total Communication (TC). After the visits to the schools at which some UK-trained teachers and a principal still strongly advocated Oralism, the two consultants held a two-week seminar: a week with teachers and a week devoted to interpreters. Parents' organisation members attended both, together with the ministry of education officials. The report for UNESCO was also sent to Ghana with recommendations for further training of teachers on how to use Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) in teaching and as interpreters. Unknown to the authors of this report was not well received (Akach & Trier 1996). The accusation was made that the authors were making an attempt to change the language and therefore ultimately disrupt Deaf education in Ghana. An ASL educator from the US visited Ghana in 1998. On his visits to the schools, he heard these complaints and this prompted him to read the report. The result was that he started to support the report as correct in its conclusions. The following year, 1999 the author received an invitation from UNESCO to revisit Ghana to initiate a programme of training for teachers, interpreters and Deaf instructors as recommended in the UNESCO report of 1996 (cf. Akach & Trier, 1996). It was during this visit that the Deaf organisation (GNAD) told me in a special meeting about the controversy after the authors had left in 1996. Apparently this author was castigated most severely because he was seen as an African who had joined foreign forces to oppress his fellow Africans.

During the subsequent training session with interpreters, any number of them pleaded with the author not to change the way they signed hymns in church. In turn this allowed him the opportunity to assure them that my mission was not to change things. Rather, we were only restoring what was supposed to exist, namely, Ghanaian Sign Language in its own right as a language independent of any spoken language.

Part of the problem in clarifying this important distinction is the entrenched difficulties for people who use SEE to distinguish whether they are signing Signed English or Signed Exact English (both are not languages). In the former only nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so forth are signed and not all of what the English grammar requires. In the latter, one is supposed to properly represent English on the hands with all the required endings (such as ...ed, ...ing, ...s [plural], ...es [plural – cf. houses], ...s [tense], ...'s [possession], ...ly [tense]); contractions (such as ...n't); the invention of a sign for irregular plurals (such as mice); the creation of signs for "is", "was", "were", "are", "be", "am"; etc.

Since 1996, much has transpired in the education of the Deaf in Ghana. GNAD has since established a project geared towards the production of the Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) dictionary to replace the American Sign Language Dictionary, *Joy of Signing*. GSL books that have been produced for use in the teaching of the language to children and beginners. In 2010 GSL for the first time was introduced as an academic course at the University of Ghana. Although only an elective, this is nevertheless an extremely positive step in the direction of teaching GSL at tertiary level, which would entails the generation of research. This in turn will give GSL the elevated status that universities give to scientific endeavours, and the analysis of natural languages.

6.4. Namibia

In 1998 the author was sent by UNESCO to Namibia as consultant. He required to assess the state of affairs in Deaf education. After visiting the two schools for the Deaf, several churches, a hospital (ENT), centres that catered for disabled people including the Deaf, Vocational Training Centres, and the Namibia Institute of Special Education, the author interviewed Deaf school leavers about their experiences at school and on whether they managed to secure employment after school. In terms of education there was little difference between Namibia and what was observed in Kenya and Ghana. SEE was being used extensively.

The author submitted a report detailing the status of Deaf education in Namibia following the criteria set by UNESCO (cf. Akach, 1998). The report faulted Deaf education in Namibia and

again Namibian teachers of the Deaf did not receive this well. The author was *persona non grata*. This is underscored by a disclaimer that accompanies UNESCO reports: "[T]he statements made in this report are not those of UNESCO but the author". However, not satisfied with the author's report, the Government of Namibia, at its own cost, invited a Deaf professional consultant from Zambia by the name of Euphrasia Mbewe. Ms Mbewe's report confirmed the author's earlier findings as contained in the UNESCO report. Given this set of circumstances, those who stood by the author's report, gained confidence in the validity of their language, Namibian Signed Language (NSL). This was further cemented by training organised for interpreters and focusing on NSL, by the Finnish Association of the Deaf (Kuurojen Liitto). The Namibian case, serves to underscore the intricate nature of linguistic imperialism. In certain instances, linguistic imperialism is not perpetuated by Western actors, but by indigenous elites in charge of policy decisions in Africa.

7. Some Critical Issues Arising from the Case Studies

From the preceding case studies, several critical issues emerge that underscore the phenomenon of double linguistic imperialism with regard to sign languages in Africa. These issues are:

(a) The stigma associated with being Deaf in many African societies

(b) Lack of recognition of sign languages as official languages in Africa, save for Uganda and Swaziland. In South Africa Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at public school (Department of Education DOE) 1996, 6(4)) although it is not one of the 11 SA official languages

(c) The non-use of the sign languages as medium of instruction in schools in a majority of countries in Africa.

(d) Lack of reading and learning materials about sign languages for Africa.

(e) Lack of trained teachers to teach indigenised sign languages as a language and for use as a medium of instruction. A case in point is Kenya: when the government of Kenya finally decided to implement a policy catering for the teaching of the Deaf in sign language in the

Kenyan education system in 1983, it built a brand-new school, i.e. the Machakos School for the Deaf. In August 1985, the teachers selected to teach at this school were trained in American Sign Language and not Kenyan Sign Language.

(f) The displacement of sign languages by other indigenous African languages in social, political, economic and cultural discourses in Africa.

(g) The displacement of African sign languages by other Western-based sign languages. A case in point is Ethiopia where the University of Addis Ababa has introduced a sign language course that teaches American Sign Language and not Ethiopian Sign Language (DILING Bulletin 2009: 18-19)

(h) The non-use of sign languages at higher education institutions in Africa. The exception to this is the University of the Free State and the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, and recently the University of Ghana which has introduced teaching Ghanaian Sign Language as an elective course.

(i) Lack of research into the dynamics attendant on sign languages in Africa save for the University of Nairobi in Kenya that has been involved in Kenyan Sign Language research since 1992.

8. Conclusion

The status of sign languages in Africa remains precarious, even as the first decade of the 21st century draws to a close. As illustrated in the preceding discussion, the main reason for the predicament facing sign languages in Africa may be referred to as "double linguistic imperialism". Sign languages in Africa are not only displaced from core social, political, economic and cultural discourses by the erstwhile colonial languages that have been adopted as official languages in many countries of post-independence Africa; they are also displaced by the African indigenous languages which occupy a second tier of importance in the social, political, economic and cultural discourses on the continent. Apart from domination of sign languages in Africa by the former colonial languages and African indigenous languages, there is another form of domination of sign languages in Africa (and supposedly elsewhere), albeit more

subtly: domination at the level of the linguistic system. In this respect, the domination is in the imposition of principles of linguistic analysis developed by using spoken language. Specific expectations, derived from spoken languages have been imposed on sign languages, without appreciating the fact that sign languages are naturally occurring human languages like any other human language and subject to modality effects This derivative approach to sign language linguistics is contrary to the principles of Universal Grammar; which accounts for commonalities among human languages, but also for the fact that each human language is unique in particular ways.

At a practical level, one area that needs urgent intervention so as to save sign languages in Africa from further marginalisation is the education system. Of particular importance will be addressing what can be referred to as the *teacher dilemma* in Deaf education in Africa, i.e. (1) since many teachers involved in Deaf education are not Deaf or educated about the nature of sign language; they erroneously think that sign language is an add-on to spoken language; (2) this approach leads to the misconception that SEE will increase literacy. However, studies in this respect (cf. Aarons & Akach, 1998; Aarons & Reynolds, 2003; Aarons, 1999) indicate that the Deaf school leaver has the reading age of fourth graders. This is attributed to the use of Manually Coded English (MCE) also adopted for other spoken languages, in teaching the Deaf which have been shown, locally and internationally, to fail woefully (Aarons & Akach, 1998; Ahlgren, 1994; Drasgow, 1993; Johnson, Liddell & Earting, 1989); and (3) there is a chronic lack of consistency in policy when it comes to addressing sign language issues in Africa, especially as they apply to the education system. Until these issues are addressed, the phenomenon of double linguistic imperialism with regard to sign languages in Africa will continue to persist to the detriment of sign language development and the Deaf community at large.

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Paper 2.

SIGNED LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND DEAF EDUCATION:

THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN AFRICA IN LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN THE LITERATURE

Signed Language Acquisition and Deaf Education:

The State of Affairs in Africa in Light of Contemporary Trends in the Literature

Abstract

The paper is an overview of the trends in the literature on signed language acquisition and deaf education with the view to contextualizing the African state of affairs. The overview highlights the similarities and the differences between signed language acquisition and spoken language acquisition. The review also highlights the challenges associated with signed language acquisition as it applies to Deaf education. The paper concludes by observing the critical role of the parents of Deaf children in the language acquisition of their children during the Critical Period, irrespective of institutional and policy challenges in later educational development.

Key Terms: Sign languages, Language acquisition, Critical Period (CP), Milestones, Mabbling/Babbling, Innateness, Motherese

Contents

9. Conclusion

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Signed Language Acquisition and Deaf Education:

The State of Affairs in Africa in Light of Contemporary Trends in the Literature

1. Introduction

Children's language acquisition has always been a subject of great concern to linguists and other researchers interested in the development of children. For linguists generally, and educational linguists and psycholinguists specifically, research into children's language acquisition is important in facilitating the design of appropriate instructional materials and pedagogical approaches. At another level, an understanding of children's language acquisition is important in informing educational policy formulation. A combination of these factors makes research about the language acquisition especially worthwhile in the present context. What is an intriguing and worthwhile endeavour in the case of the Deaf because signed language acquisition and Deaf education are generally neglected in mainstream literature and even more so in the African and South African context.

The acquisition of a spoken language is largely taken for granted. Such acquisition will be discussed in this paper in order to align with what has to date been presented for signed language acquisition and will be embedded within the Critical Period (CP) theory. According to Lenneberg (1967) the CP represents the developmental period for optimum acquisition of language, from birth until the onset of puberty. Puberty is what Lenneberg (1967: 142) posits as the approximate point at which the lateralization process of the brain is complete. With reference to second-language (L2) acquisition, Lenneberg further asserts (1967: 176) that after puberty the incident of language learning-blocks rapidly increases: "foreign languages have to be ... learned through a conscious and laboured effort, and (f)oreign accents cannot be overcome easily." This has important implications for signed language acquisition by deaf children, as shall be discussed shortly.

If the access CP is crucial to L2 acquisition, then the many largely multilingual African countries, provide a scenario whereby CP has to be observed critically and with caution given the later impact of the entrenchment of first-language acquisition during the CP on educational success. South Africa is such a multilingual society with eleven official languages enshrined by the constitution (Republic of South Africa Constitution 1996) and South African Sign Language (SASL) is offered special status along with other so-called heritage language. Kenya, with 47 indigenous languages, in turn offers a foreign language (English) as the official language, with Kiswahili serving as national language. The draft constitution of Kenya has added Kenyan Sign language as an indigenous language and as one of the languages of parliament. In Tanzania, the government managed to make Kiswahili the Language of Instruction (LOI) in schools during the period 1961-1967 (Qorro, 2009). The list goes on with many countries using a foreign language (most often of a former colonial overlord) as official language, thus giving rise to Anglophone, francophone, lusophone Africa and Arabic-phone North Africa. In these cases, it is implied that the LOI is a foreign language, thus children must conceivably acquire L1 and L2 simultaneously long before puberty, as posited by Lenneberg (1967) as school begins formally at the age of six or seven, while crèche or nursery school entry starts much earlier. As a result, Mother Tongue (MT), declared of paramount importance by UNESCO (1953), is at risk on the entire continent of Africa given that the use of MT is not foregrounded by educational structures beyond the age of six or seven, albeit a prerequisite at most for L2, and in this role a LOI in most of Africa.

In considering a deaf child, the issue of MT acquisition and the CP is confusing. Approximately 10% of any given Deaf population is born of Deaf parents. The majority (90%) of the Deaf have hearing/speaking parents. Early detection of deafness and intervention is also limited, especially in the developing world, due to ignorance, shame and fear of stigmatization. Once the child is identified as deaf, the parents (hearing) often do not consider learning signed language themselves a priority. This is largely the result of ignorance as to the status of signed language as a natural language on par with any other and therefore, preferable primary language of the deaf child despite the fact that the “mother” of such a child might often not

speak this language as a first-language. To exacerbate this set of circumstances, and as elaborated upon attention towards the South African circumstances where, in the few schools for the Deaf, teachers - like the parents – often also do not sign for various reasons. The reason for this may vary from a lack of institutional will on the part of governments in order to apply language policy to safeguard the teaching of sign language, to a belief that medical intervention might be preferable to a basic lack of experience and educational support for teachers in such schools.

As a result, the majority of deaf children and adults are exposed to these countries' signed languages (e.g., South African Sign Language [SASL], Kenyan Sign Language [KSL], American Sign Language [ASL], etc.) only when they enter residential schools for the deaf and associate with other deaf individuals. This may be as early as age four or as late as early adulthood (cf, Newport, 1984; Newport & Supalla 1987 for details of cases in the USA). These schools for the Deaf, residential or otherwise, are unfortunately not very plentiful on the African continent.

As indicated above, part of the predicament in addressing the issue of signed language acquisition by the deaf child, is that the majority of deaf children are born to hearing parents. Therefore it is the contention of this paper that, despite empirical research by this author pointing to the dismal failure of institutional policy to safeguard Sign Language in South African schools; and despite educational principles poorly equipped to anticipate the requirements of the deaf child - such as the appointment of non-signing teachers and an educational system that operates on bad educational principles, none of these may be considered the deciding factor in explaining the non-performance of deaf school leavers. Rather, I would like to argue, critical emphasis needs to be placed on the undervalued importance of MT (signed language for the deaf child) to being acquired in the CP. This, it is argued, is the best way the Deaf can face the challenges in their developmental and educational path. Although, even, the 10% who have MT acquired naturally from their parents, will still have to contend with the challenges posed by a flawed educational system, but they nevertheless have a distinct advantage over the other

90%. This article will offer some thoughts on the importance of the acquisition of MT during the CP for the deaf child as predictive measure for educational success in later years

2. A General Overview

In terms of early language acquisition: (i) hearing children usually learn the sound and vocabulary of the language; and (ii) in the case of deaf children learn by means of the hand shapes and sign vocabulary through imitation. Grammar is seldom taught explicitly, as capacity of the human brain for understanding and mastering grammatical rules is innate. A myriad studies have shown that deaf children acquiring a signed language (that they are exposed to from birth) at the identical rate of maturation as non-deaf children acquire spoken language. Deaf children acquiring signed language do so without modification, loss or delay in the timing, content and maturational course associated with reaching all linguistic milestones observed in spoken languages (Petitto, 2000: 43; similar findings have been recorded by Charron & Petitto, 1987; Petitto, 1985; 1988; Petitto & Bellugi, 1988; Pettitto & Charron, 1988; and Petitto & Marentette, 1990; 1991).

Wolff (1973) notes that what is much less clear is how this remarkable feat is achieved, as there seems to be a tremendous amount to be learnt and it seems to be absorbed quite effortlessly and in quite a short time. Furthermore, Langacker (1973: 12) records that the child's acquisition of native language is not known to be dependent on any special tutoring. Langacker (1973: 13) furthermore observes that children are able to acquire a language just as well by socialising or playing with other children who happen to speak it as they can through the concerted effort of doting parents. This is a particularly intriguing observation, especially as concerns deaf children, the majority (90%) of whom are born to hearing parents (Kyle & Woll 1985; Lane *et al*., 1996).

Chomsky in (1981) posited that children are biologically programmed for language and that language develops in the child in just the same way that other biological functions develop. Chomsky refers to this universal endowment of every child as "Universal Grammar", which

consists of a set of principles common to all languages. What children then have to learn is the way in which their own language makes use of these principles and the variations on those principles that may exist in the particular language they are learning. According to Lenneberg (1967) there is, however, a "critical period" for language acquisition, or at least for language acquisition without special teaching and without the need for special learning. During this period, language learning proceeds easily, swiftly and without external formal intervention. After this period, the acquisition of grammar is difficult and, for some individuals at least, never fully achieved (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998: 342). As inferred earlier in this article, deaf children are heavily disadvantaged in this process, for the simple reason that their first contact with people after birth, namely the hearing parents (for 90%), does not expose them to a natural signed language.

If the “critical period”, as discussed above, is based on the hypothesis that there is a limited window of opportunity in the brain’s development when it is acutely predisposed to the acquisition of a language, then this is true of deaf children too, for during this biologically determined period children's brains are highly responsive to any natural language in their environment, be it spoken or signed. This early, natural acquisition of language is thought by some to be a necessity for children to achieve full fluency in a language, which also influences their cognitive abilities and their capacity for learning other languages (Lenneberg 1967). Stages in the acquisition of a native language can be measured by the increasing complexity and originality of a child's utterances.

3. Milestones in Language Acquisition

Research has been able to establish what can be referred to as “milestones” in language acquisition (cf. Barrett 1999, MacCormick & Schiefelbusch 1984, McLaughlin 1998, Owens 2001). Some of these milestone adapted from Owens (2001) and Mclaughlin (1998) are tabulated below to facilitate the discussion to follow:

E = Expressive Language **R= Receptive Language** **I = Imitative Language**

0-2 months	Moves limbs, head, eyes in response to voice, or noise(R) Vocalizes randomly "cooing" (E) Simple vowel sounds: ah, ee, oo (E)
3-5 months	Turns eyes or head in direction of voices and sounds (R) Vocalises when talked to or sung to (E) Exhibits differentiated crying (E) Vocalises emotions, intonation patterns "cooing" + babbling (E) Produces sounds like: ka, coo, goo (beginning of period) (E) Followed by other sounds like grunts, growls and squeals (end of period) (E)
6-8 months	Localises sound source (R) Vocalises consonant sounds (E) Forms bi-syllabic repetitions (ma-ma, ba-ba) (E) Imitates sounds already in repertoire (I)
9-11 months	Orients to spoken name (R) Imitates consonant-vowel combinations (I) Performs on verbal cue alone - baba, mama (R) Imitates non-speech sounds (click, cough) (I) Inhibits activity in response to NO (R) Looks at familiar persons or objects when named (R)
12-15 months	Uses appropriate intonation patterns in jargon speech (E) (jargon being what most call babbling, voices rise and fall like ours do in speech) Imitates words inexactly (E) Uses two words meaningfully (E) Uses gestures and other movements to communicate (E) Follows a simple direction (R) Shows a body part, clothing item, or toy on verbal request(R) 10-20-word vocabulary
16-19 months	Names one object on request (E) Follows 2 familiar directions (R) Points to one picture on request (R) Uses more than 2 single words to express wants (E) Points to 3 body parts on self or doll (R) Selects 2 or 3 familiar objects (R)
20-23 months	Points to 4 pictures (R) Uses 2-word sentences (E) "up, please" Names at least 3 familiar objects or pictures (E) Imitates new sounds and simple words immediately (I) Follows a new instruction exactly (R) Identifies 5 body parts (R) 200-300-word vocabulary (E)
2-2,5 years	Demonstrates an understanding of several action words by selecting appropriate pictures (R) Name familiar objects of environment (E) Jargon substantially decreased (E) Asks simple questions (where ball?) (E) Says full name (E) Identifies general family names (R) Listens to simple stories (R) Understands all sentence structures (R) Repeats 2 digits from memory (E) Uses 'a' and 'the' correctly (E) 200–300-word vocabulary (E)
2,5-3 years	Understands 800 words at beginning of period (R) Identifies 7 body parts (R) Jargon is totally discarded (E) Begins to use verb contractions (E) Uses short, simple sentences (E)

	Relates simple imaginative tales (E) Talks about immediate experiences (E) Uses personal pronouns + verb inflections + noun inflections (E) Rapid vocabulary expansion (900 words) (E)
3-4 years	Improved listening skills (R) Expressive vocabulary 900-1500 words (E) Speech usually 90-100% intelligible in context (E)
4-5 years	Vocabulary of approximately 2 000 words (E) Uses longer and more complex sentences (E)
5-6 years	Expressive vocabulary of 2 500 words (E) Uses almost all phrase structure and rules of adult language, although incorrect forms still occur periodically. (E)
Table adapted from Owens (2001) and Mclaughlin (1998)	

3.1. Milestones in Language Acquisition: A Deaf Child of Hearing Parents

Hearing parents commonly delay learning signed language themselves because of the fear that their deaf children may never talk unless they are exposed exclusively to speech during an early critical period (Lenneberg 1967). In South Africa and the rest of Africa, this predisposition towards speech favouring above sign largely stems from a combination of the following: fear of stigmatisation, a belief that the current state of affairs is divine punishment, exposure to traditional belief systems and, more often than not, the advice from medical practitioners who give hope of a "cure" taking the form of radical medical intervention. This ultimately results in negative success rates in communicative approaches to raising the deaf child. In the absence of an alternative (signed language), the risk is run that the deaf child is thus limited but only access to the spoken signal will result in almost no early language acquisition. The sign language competence they do acquire when they are later exposed to it will as a result be less proficient, depending on the age it was acquired (Hyltenstam, 1992 and Newport & Supalla, 1987). The first two to three years of a child's development are considered a "critical period" for natural language acquisition. Thus language acquisition that begins at the age of three or four years for the deaf child (placed in a deaf educational environment), and not before, cannot be considered "natural". This resultant lack of early first-language competence, which has been shown to hamper acquisition of any language, results in children progressing throughout their education "semi-lingually" (Cummins, 1984 and Paulston, 1977). Furthermore, while some hearing parents tend to assume that the use of early manual communication (signs or gestures)

will endanger their children's development of spoken language, the contrary is much closer to the truth: gestures may in fact be considered a prelude to language, whether spoken or signed. This is further emphasised by research that has indicated that deaf children produce signs earlier than speaking children do words (cf. Bonvillian, Orlansky & Novack, 1983; Folven & Bonvillian, 1991; Orlansky & Bonvillian, 1984, Meier & Newport, 1990 and Newport & Meier, 1985) who posit that the timing of milestones for signed languages largely coincide with that for spoken language.

When it comes to early vocalisations such as crying, fussing, grunting and cooing, deaf babies sound the same as hearing babies; thus also explaining why it is difficult for the parent to detect hearing loss at this stage. However, after the first few months, vocal babbling by deaf children shows a decrease both in frequency as well as variety (Masataka 2000). This is the age when parents and siblings begin to respond to the baby's grunts and babbles. With the decrease in vocal babbling, deaf babies find themselves at a disadvantage socially and communicatively relative to hearing children as well as deaf children with Deaf parents. To compound this, hearing parents also often overlook the beginnings of non-vocal communication in deaf babies - beginnings just as important as vocal babbling for hearing infants (Masataka, 2000). Masataka, furthermore states that, the lack of spoken communication between hearing parents and their deaf babies is an important factor to consider when observing the development of deaf babies. Manual babbling, called "mabbling", consists of the simple production or repetition of basic handforms (phonemes) such as isolated hand shapes or movement. If the hearing parents also participate, mabbling can provide the possibility for rudimentary interaction or "conversations" with the deaf infants in the same way that babbling prompts hearing parents to talk to their hearing infants. As mabbling becomes incorporated into communication along with meaningful gestures many hearing parents who are non-signing, deprive their children of an important milestone in the acquisition of their natural language, signed language.

What happens when children have limited access to signed language because their parents do not know Sign Language, and the child is also deprived of access to spoken language because of

deafness, is that the deaf children spontaneously start gesturing to members of their family. Their gestures tend to be idiosyncratic, reflecting salient features of their environmental. For example, if the father has a beard and the child wants to gesture “father”, she may touch his chin. The deaf baby first produces one gesture at a time, and then combines gestures to form two-gesture utterances, and later three-gesture utterances, and so forth. Gestures are grouped into categories, for example, the agent responsible for the action, the act, the person or thing acted upon, and the person or thing receiving what has been acted upon. Interestingly enough, hearing mothers tend to use exclusively single gestures when speaking to their deaf/hearing children. This indicates that the elementary grammar in these gesture constructions is not learned from somewhere, but proves Chomsky's point of an innate ability. However, even though the infant has this innate ability, it is only activated by another person who already possesses linguistic competence. The parent is therefore the facilitator and always has to be a step ahead of her baby. Vygotsky (1978) calls it, "the zone of proximal development.” The infant is led to the next stage in communicative development through the facilitation of her interaction with her mother. It is the mother's language, internalised by the child, which allows her to move from sensation into “sense” and from a perceptual world into a conceptual world. For the deaf child, where a hearing parent is not competent in signed language, is detrimental to language development. Joseph (described by Sacks, 1991) is a classic example of circumstances of children not introduced to natural language during the critical period.

Schlesinger and Meadows in *Sound and Sign* (1972), explain that communication between child and mother involves not just talking, but the right *kind* of talking, a dialogue rich in communicative intent, in mutuality, and in the right sort of questioning. If this does not occur it is impossible to make the "dialectic leap" successfully that Vygotsky (1978: 203) (cf. also Mayer & Wells, 1996: 95, as cited in Strong & Prinz, 2000: 132) speaks of as the leap from sensation to thought. This in turn leads to problems with understanding questions. These children have a poor sense of causation, and rarely introduce ideas about the future. Sacks (1991) also describe the case of Charlotte, a little girl of six, tremendously animated, playful, and full of curiosity, tuned vividly to the world, not easily distinguishable from her hearing peers. What caused her

to be so well balanced? He claims that it was the fact that her parents, as soon as they found out she was deaf, learned a signed language (SEE)[1] and later changed to ASL in order to communicate meaningfully with their child. Questions were no problem to Charlotte – the "dialectic leap" was completed successfully. Similar research based on the specific African and South African contexts are hard to come by except for this writer's own work in the Free State province of South Africa (Akach to appear).

Returning to Chomsky (1981), there is "an innate structure that is rich enough to account for the disparity between experience and knowledge." This latent structure is, however, not fully developed at birth, nor is it too obvious even by the age of eighteen months. However, between the ages of 21 and 36 months (in all children – deaf and hearing) in a very dramatic way the child becomes open to language, and is able to construct a grammar from the utterances of her parents. But in the case of hearing parents of deaf children not being able to produce meaningful utterances in a language accessible to the child – sign language – a very different and restricted outcome is the result. The remarkable capacity of the child to acquire language in such an instance starts diminishing and ends more or less at the end of childhood (age twelve to thirteen) and the onset of puberty with the language acquisition incomplete. This period is described by Lenneberg (1967) as the "critical period" for acquiring a first-language – the only period when the brain seem to have the ability to actualise a complete grammar without any conscious instruction.

Hearing children or deaf children with Deaf parents acquire competence in language during the first five years of life. This right cannot be claimed by deaf children of hearing parents who don't learn signed language immediately after discovering their baby is deaf. There is evidence that those deaf children who learn sign language after the age of five never acquire the effortless fluency and flawless grammar of those who learn it during the critical period. It was also found that Deaf children only exposed to Signed Exact English (SEE) have an impaired

[1] SEE (Signed Exact English) was one of the contrived systems among others that were created by hearing people to put English on hands. These systems have been variously known as Manually Coded English (MCE).

capacity for natural language acquisition and processing and have problems in creating and comprehending grammar (Jacobs, 1974). This absence of natural language also restricts the parent-child interaction severely and interferes with the natural bonding process. In this light, Jacobs (1974: 173-174) levels an accusation at hearing parents framed as a statement to their deaf progeny: “Your parents never bother to put in an hour a day to learn sign language or some part of it. One hour of twenty-four that can change a lifetime for you.”

3.2. Milestones in Language Acquisition: A Deaf Child of Deaf Parents

The acquisition of sign language grammar occurs in much the same way, and at much the same age, as the grammar of spoken language. Deaf children of Deaf parents enjoy, from the start, full communication with their parents via a shared natural language. They acquire fluent language skills as easily and naturally as hearing children do, and at the same crucial period in their development (in the third year of life) their sign has a precision and richness no non-native signer can easily acquire (Jacobs, 1974).

Normal human development demands the availability of and exposure to early language and as sign language is considered an excellent alternative to spoken language, the deaf child of Deaf parents is not deprived of anything as far as language acquisition is concerned. As mentioned before, the first few months are occupied by babbling, which seems to be an innate natural behaviour, regardless of the baby's hearing status (Petitto & Marentette, 1991). At this stage, the deaf baby of Deaf parents will be making and seeing signs and gestures that may function in the same way as vocalising and hearing for hearing babies: mabbling. Complete signs are made by repetition of handforms, e.g. the sign for milk is made by the opening and closing of the hand into a fist, “mama” is expressed by touching an open hand to the chin in ASL. In SASL, a flat B handform moves from left to the right of the chest to indicate “mama”, while two “A” handforms moving alternately up and down would indicate “milk”. This can happen as early as five or six months of age (observed by parents). The social consequence is a legitimate communicative exchange or “conversation” between parent and child. As early as at three

months, Deaf mothers of deaf babies use motherese even more than hearing mothers do. Motherese is an altered signing interaction of adults (parents) with infants (also known as "caretaker speech" or "parentese") - this is discussed in greater detail below. Deaf babies also produce individual and repeated sign components, in a similar manner to what hearing children do with sound, without any apparent attempt at communication. According to research there are only about six hand configurations frequently seen in deaf babies learning sign language. These are general and are found across all documented signed languages (Boyes-Braems, 1990). In the end, the language-relevant parts of this mabbling will become incorporated into communication along with meaningful gestures and the Deaf baby is then well on her way to acquire a natural language. It must also be said that mabbling and gestures differ in that the latter are meaningful while the former is not.[2] In light of Boyes-Braems' (1990) suggestion that signed language can be acquired a little earlier than spoken language, it is also claimed that the deaf baby of Deaf parents has a larger vocabulary during the first year or two, but this advantage disappears by the age of two.

During the preschool years (age two to five) Deaf children who are naturally exposed to signed language at home quickly increase the frequency with which they use conventional signs to communicate about objects and actions. Conventional sign modifications such as verb inflections are used by the age of two; and at the age of three they modify signs themselves. It is, however, only at the age of five that verb inflections are used correctly. At the age of three years one also sees the use of demonstrative pronouns such as *that, there* and *this*, as well as possessive pronouns such as *mine* and *yours*, etc. During the second half of their fourth year, verbs are first used to communicate direction and location. They then include qualitative and quantitative information in their signs, e.g. *how big, how fast,* etc. At this point facial expression is included to indicate subjective meaning.

[2] At the age of nine months deaf babies start using single signs. At 16-24 months they start using combinations of two signs. Gestures still play an important role. At the age of nine months already both deaf and hearing babies use pointing as a showing or requesting gesture. Round about 12 months Deaf babies stop using pointing to refer to people and they begin to use personal pronouns like ME, HER, YOU, etc., at about 18 months.

As indicated before, most severely and profoundly deaf children who receive early exposure to sign communication are much more competent in their early language development than those children who receive only exposure to spoken language. Signed language development of a deaf child of deaf parents thus manifests itself in the following manner

4. Motherese

During the early months and years of childhood it is a commonplace observation that adults tend to modify their "speech" in an unusual and characteristic fashion when they address infants and young children. This is known as *motherese* (cf. Pye, 1986; Ochs & Schiekffelin, 1984; Masataka, 1992; Grieser, & Kuhl, 1988; Fernald et al, 1989).

This phenomenon is also found with Deaf mothers signing to their deaf babies. Research found that the mother using motherese, whether spoken or signed, enhances the young child's language learning (Ferguson, 1964). Motherese is usually used with infants younger than eight months. The enhanced acoustic features of motherese seem to elicit and maintain the infant's attention. Deaf infants show the same interest in signed motherese as do hearing infants in spoken motherese and start paying attention to it as early as two days of age (Masataka, 2000). Cooper and Aslin (1990) showed that infants' preference for exaggerated prosodic features as produced by motherese, was present when tested at the age of two days. It was also determined that the linguistic relevance of affect in spoken language acquisition is demonstrated by findings that four- to nine-month-old infants are responsive to meaning conveyed by prosodic contours long before they respond to the segmental content of utterances by adults. Infants show more readiness for social engagement when listening to motherese than when listening to adult-directed speech and this tendency is more robust in younger infants. Motherese is also found to facilitate the infant's detection and discrimination of major linguistic boundaries, make it more noticeable, thereby "instructing" infants about language.

A group of mothers using Japanese Sign Language (JSL)-motherese, when observed, was found to: (a) place the sign closer to the infant (the optimal signing distance for visual processing); (b)

orient the hand so that the full hand shape was visible to the infant; (c) eye gaze was directed at the infants; and (d) the sign was lengthened by repeating the same movement (Masataka, 2000).

An experiment done on hearing infants who were exposed to signed motherese, indicated in them an interest in it strikingly similar to those of deaf infants (Petitto & Marentette, 2000). What may be deduced from this is that the specifically patterned linguistic input that is expressed as motherese might enhance an infant's acquisition of the basic forms of the language equally in either the signed or spoken modalities. Considering all the facts, the role of motherese, whether spoken or signed, cannot be overlooked when looking at the language acquisition of the deaf as well as the hearing baby.

5. Gestures

Gestures are an essential component of communication from the first year of life through adulthood. They accompany the speech of hearing children in much the same way as they accompany the signs of deaf children. The fact that sign and gesture both use the same channel of communication – from hand to eye – makes it more difficult to make the distinction between when deaf children mix gesture and signs than when hearing children use gestures. Early use of gestures paves the way for hearing as well as deaf children's eventual use of words and signs, respectively (Petitto & Marentette, 1991. The deaf child's Deaf parents have the advantage of continuing language in the same channel, i.e. visual-gestural. The same is extended to the hearing parents with a deaf child if they learn and use SL as early as the crib period - a period before the child can sit on their own. At about nine months of age, both deaf and hearing children use pointing as part of gesturing when showing or requesting something. By twelve months deaf children stop pointing to refer to people, although pointing can still refer to things or places (Kyle and Woll 1985). Six to twelve months later, person pointing comes back, but this time those motions are used in the context of signs as personal pronouns. As far as frequency is concerned, most of the gestures of young deaf and hearing children appear to be the same until the age of two. During the school years deaf children tend to use more gestures with their

sign language than hearing children use with speech.

6. *First Signs, First Words*

Deaf children acquiring sign language do so without any modification, loss, or delay to the timing, content and maturational course associated with reaching all linguistic milestones observed in spoken language. The differences that are observed between children acquiring a signed language versus children acquiring a spoken language are no greater than the differences observed between hearing children learning one spoken language, such as for example Italian, versus another, such as Finnish. Some Deaf parents claim that their babies produce their first sign as early as five to six months (cf. Bonvillian, Orlansky, & Novack, 1983; Folven & Bonvillian, 1991; Orlansky & Bonvillian, 1984). However, it is more conservative to assume that the first signs are produced at nine months. Hearing children, by contrast, produce their first word at about one year. For a time they produce proto words. These proto words are often produced in the correct context and so they tend to sound like real words. At this stage they do not understand the "language" they are producing; it is only attempts to imitate sounds made by adults and probably have no more meaning than a child babbling. The same phenomenon can be found with signed language where parents claim the first signs are made at six months. This stage between six to nine months is therefore the birthing period for proto signs. However, the earlier appearance of signing as compared to speech by up to three months nevertheless seems to be a fact.

Then follows the *telegraphic speech* stage when the ability to combine signs and words develop (e.g., "want milk"). Similarities are observed between signed and spoken language until the age of five when both modalities are well entrenched: "What is most remarkable is that the modality ‘switch’ can be ‘thrown’ after birth regarding whether a child acquires language on the hands or language on the tongue. We saw that children exposed to signed language can acquire them just as easily as children exposed to spoken language. Speech and sound are not critical to human language acquisition. Instead, there appears to be a stunning, biologically based

equipotentiality of the modalities, be it spoken or signed, to receive and produce natural language in ontogeny," (Chamberlain, Morford & Mayberry, 2000: 47).

7. Comparison between the Acquisition of Signed Language in Deaf Children with Deaf Parents and Acquisition of Spoken Language in Hearing Children

As mentioned earlier, the language development of deaf children growing up in a signing environment from birth is in much the same way a spoken language is acquired (Jacobs, 1974). First signs appear at a similar time to first words, albeit a little earlier. Small, but accurate muscle movements are needed for this. This agility develops at different rates in different body parts. Coordinated hand movements generally develop before coordinated mouth movements. Based on this, a deaf child should be able to produce a sign earlier than a hearing child can produce spoken word.

7.1. When Should a Spoken Language be Introduced to a Deaf Child?

Many factors influence successful second-language acquisition, for example, motivation, intelligence, aptitude, personality, attitude and learning styles, but the two things that influence it most are “the critical period” and complete acquisition of a first-language (in this instance, sign language), just like a first spoken language (mother tongue) should be acquired and entrenched, thus providing the base from which the second-language can subsequently be learned.

8. Critical Period for Second-Language Acquisition:

The Critical Period Hypothesis states that there is a time in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning. The relationship between a learner's age and his or her potential for success in *second-language acquisition* is the subject of much lively debate. According to Porter (1998), the critical period for acquiring native-like proficiency in a

second-language is between the ages of three and six after L1 is already in place or as soon thereafter as possible, and the period before puberty (around 12 or 13 years). Although this mainly refers to the pronunciation of a second- language, studies in the acquisition of syntax or the grammar of a language show a similar time-frame. Thus the hypothesis holds that the earlier the exposure to the L1, the more proficient the learner will be. Much older children may become very capable in the second-language, but there will always be differences of accent, word choice and/or grammatical features.

If a second-language is learned by older children and adults, they have to make use of more general abilities to learn and not the specific, innate capacities which are available to the young child. In *How Languages are Learned*, Lightbown and Spada (1993) describe tests conducted by Patsowski (1980), who studied the age of the acquisition of features of a second-language other than accent. He used a group of pre-puberty learners (his age limit was fifteen years) and a group older than fifteen (or post-puberty learners) with no knowledge of English. He also used a group of English-speaking children in the United States to determine the standard of native-used English. At the end of his experiment he found out that the first group of learners succeeded tin equalling the standard of native-English speaking children. All children in the group reached more or less the same standard of results. Yet, the second group had problems in the mastery of the second-language and there was also much diversity in the results of the second group. According to Patsowski (1980), therefore, the age of acquisition is thus a very important factor. Similarly, Johnson and Newport (1989) conducted a study of 46 Chinese and Korean speakers who had begun to learn English at different ages. Their findings were more or less the same as those of Patsowski. They found that before the age of fifteen, and especially before the age of ten, there are few individual differences in second-language ability as compared to L1 and as compared to one another. Older learners will not have native-like language skills and are more likely to differ greatly from one another in ultimate attainment of the language.

In summary, why then is the “critical period” so important and why are there differences

between younger and older learners? It can be explained in terms of the following:

***The Biological*:** What language development along with interrelated functions of logic, analysis and intellect are said to be related to the left side of the brain. At the age of puberty the assigning of functions or lateralisation, takes place. If a learner is thus not exposed to a second-language before puberty, the acquisition of the foreign language is much more difficult (cf. Lenneberg 1967).

***The Cognitive*:** What After puberty learners will not be able to make use of their natural innate ability to learn language, but will respond better to more explicit teaching of grammar and rules (cf. Chomsky 1981).

***The Affective*:** Younger children are less self-conscious and more willing to take risks and make mistakes, which make them better language learners. All the evidence mentioned above shows that the earlier a child can learn an additional language the better, provided that the child's first-language which in the case of the deaf will be signed language, is firmly established and well entrenched.

> The Importance of Establishing the First-Language before the Second-Language is Introduced:

According to Lightbown and Spada (1993), if a child's first-language is not well developed, early intensive exposure to the second-language may entail the loss or incomplete development of the child's first-language. This leads to subtractive bilingualism, where one language is lost before another is fully developed. These concomitant communicative restraints may in turn lead to problems in academic achievement and socialisation later in life. Roger Bacon, as quoted by Fromkin and Rodman (1998: 346), is said to have said: “He that understands grammar in one language understands it in another as far as the essential properties of Grammar are concerned. The fact that he can't speak [sign], nor comprehend another language

is due to the diversity of words and their various forms, but these are the accidental properties of grammar."

If a first-language is well entrenched it provides a base from which the second-language can then be taught and acquired. Research on school learners receiving a few hours of instruction per week, and learners who start a little later (for example, at the age of ten, eleven or twelve) tend to catch up very quickly with those who began earlier.

Taking into account all the factors above and keeping in mind the situation at school where the majority of learners enter pre-school without any or very little sign language, it is wise to start introducing a second-language at about ten to eleven years. The first years in school should be used to entrench the first-language, sign language. There is no way in which a child with a deficit of three or four years in terms of language competency in the first-language, can cope with continued acquisition of sign language and also learn a second-language such as English, required for purposes of reading and writing. Not one of the two will ever be fully established. English (or any other language) as second-language should be taught by means of the first-language (sign language), which strengthens the argument that the first-language must first be properly entrenched before the second-language is introduced. Nevertheless, if you can introduce the L2 still within the CP after L1 then things are good.

The case may be different for deaf children from Deaf parents, as at the age of three or so their sign language is fully established, which means that they can be introduced to a second-language much earlier. This distinction between Deaf of Deaf and Deaf of hearing makes one question the propriety of subjecting Deaf learners to a bilingual/bicultural approach right from the first day of entering school at six or seven years of age if such first-language entrenchment may not be guaranteed for approximately 90% of the deaf population of learners.

In this light it may be more prudent to teach Deaf learners only Sign Language and in signed language during the first few years of schooling until the first-language (SL) is fully entrenched. Only then can English (or the preferred educational second-language) be introduced. In this

way greater success in academic achievement may therefore be achieved by deaf learners with full ability in the management of both first- and second-language.

Morford and Mayberry (2000) observe that late first-language learners (i.e. deaf individuals who acquired scant language in early childhood) who were first exposed to ASL and written English between the ages of five and nine performed much worse than hearing second-language learners of English on a grammatical processing task. The same was not true for native ASL learners. Native ASL signers, who acquired ASL from birth and English as second-language between the ages of five and nine, performed just like hearing participants, who had learned English as a second-language at the same age, on the grammatical processing task. These findings demonstrate that early exposure to a first-language facilitates, and perhaps is necessary for later language learning at a more advanced age, as in second-language acquisition.

9. Conclusion

The deaf child, in order to fully integrate into a predominantly hearing world, is faced with the particular challenge of adapting to an educational system that necessitates bilingual education. Sign Language features as first language or mother tongue and language of instruction under ideal circumstances, but for the purposes of reading and writing, the deaf child is also required to acquire a second spoken language. After careful consideration of the dire circumstances in deaf education as observed by the researcher in South Africa and the rest of Africa, and backed up by empirical data collected at schools for the Deaf in the Free State Province of South Africa, (in preparation), the conclusion is reached that greater attention should be paid to the need for the learning of a signed language by the parents during the critical period of child development. Only once this is achieved, the second-language should be introduced ideally through the medium of the first-language. But, this relatively obvious solution to address the dismal academic achievement and low literacy scores of deaf children after years of schooling, poses a particular challenge given the ill informed preconceptions of parents and society at large regarding the Deaf, Deaf culture and Sign Language and its status as natural language and their

complete ignorance of how language (L1 and L2) are acquired.

Ideally, considering all of the above, parents are to be encouraged to, as soon as they realise that their child is deaf, to adjust their expectation as to what their child needs in order to acquire a natural language, Sign Language. This in itself is not easy, and poses particular challenges especially in Africa. Parents wait until much too late to get a diagnosis of deafness confirmed by a medical professional. In most instances, only when the child does not say anything meaningful at a relatively advanced age for speech development, do parents take the child to a doctor and is deafness diagnosed. In the belief that deafness can be "corrected" (the only conceived path to normalcy offered by the predominantly hearing culture), parents are also not advised, educated and/or allowed an opportunity to learn a signed language in order to communicate with their deaf child as early as possible in the child's natural language in order to facilitate language acquisition and development.

Many parents of deaf children seem to cherish that the child will eventually learn to speak if they are fitted with the best possible hearing devices, including the surgical procedures for cochlear implantation. This despite the fact that in Africa, such medical interventions pose not only medical risks, but immense financial constraints on parents with often limited resources at their disposal. As a result, the deaf child does not start acquiring a signed language during the aforementioned critical period, thereby being robbed of the advantage of an innate ability to learn a language and facilitate the later acquisition of a second language for the necessary purposes of education (reading and writing). Under usual circumstances parents do not have to be aware of the importance of establishing a first-language for laying a foundation for learning a second-language. Parents of deaf children, however, as a general rule have to, for their deaf children have to learn/acquire a second-language for reading and writing. While the hearing majority can easily flourish monolingually, the deaf child or Deaf people, for that matter, cannot as the modern, developed and increasingly globalised world relies greatly on the written word for the transfer of information.

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Paper 3.

PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS SIGN LANGUAGE AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AT TWO SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA

Parents' Attitudes towards Sign Language as a Medium of Instruction:
An Empirical Study at Two Schools for the Deaf in the Free State Province of South Africa

Abstract

While language and language acquisition are taken for granted for the hearing child, they pose a seemingly insurmountable challenge for the deaf child born to hearing parents. Prevalent statistics from the western world indicate that 90% of deaf children in any country are born to hearing parents and a mere 10% of deaf children are born to Deaf parents. The research reported in this study sought to ascertain whether these statistics also hold true for South Africa. Taking cognisance of this statistic and the documented fact that parents play a critical role in language acquisition and choice of language of instruction for their children, the other objective of the study was to determine parents' attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction in schools for the Deaf in South Africa. Two schools in the Free State Province of the Republic of South Africa were used for purposes of this study.

Key Terms: Parents' attitudes, Language acquisition, Sign Language, Medium of instruction.

Contents

Parents' Attitudes towards Sign Language as a Medium of Instruction:
An Empirical Study of Two Schools for the Deaf in the Free State Province of South Africa

1. Introduction

Gorman (1998) noted that the impact parents have on their children's educational aspirations and occupational success has long occupied the centre stage in sociological literature. This body of research, consisting mostly of large-scale surveys, suggests that parents' attitudes toward education have a significant effect on their children's educational aspirations. The increased conscientisation of society in the last half a century has also led to the emergence and entrenchment of the notion of active citizenship: the combination of rights and obligations that link individuals to the state and which come with inherent benefits, including granting citizens a voice in deciding their own destiny (Green 2009). The role of parents in education systems has thus moved from the periphery to the centre stage of critical discourses in education. One key aspect of the role of parents in education systems is the importance of parents' attitudes to education. The centrality of parental attitudes is explainable by a convergence of reasons. Fundamentally, parents, as active citizens, have the power to privilege their attitudes in major policy debates, either through community mobilisation or by voting for those political actors that reflect their preferences and policy positions with regard to the education system. This is both a waking nightmare and a goldmine for any politician and/or policy maker. Either way, parents' attitudes towards the education of their children always find their way to the centre of political and/or policy debates.

Further, as the primary care-givers and the key decision makers regarding the education of their children, parents' attitudes towards the education of their children cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the fundamental importance of parents' attitudes towards the education of their children is amplified when the child under consideration has special needs, as would be the case for a Deaf child. However, there are but a few studies that have sought to establish the link between parents' attitudes (despite the aforementioned centrality of these attitudes to the nature of a child's education) and the nature of education for children with special needs. These are discussed in the third section of this paper. The studies mentioned have all been

carried out outside South Africa. The research reported in this paper endeavours to address this state of affairs.

In seeking to fill the hiatus in the research (and in the literature) with regard to parents' attitudes towards the education of children with special needs in South Africa, the research reported in this paper sought to determine parents' attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction for their deaf children in two schools for the Deaf in the Free State Province of South Africa. The paper is divided into five sections. The first section reviews the literature to elaborate background of the deaf child born and raised in a family of hearing parents. The literature review focuses on communication challenges that are encountered when a deaf child is born into a hearing family and it draws on perspectives emanating from elsewhere in the world, other countries in Africa and also the South African scenario. The second section provides an overview of selected literature on the role of parental attitudes in education with a deliberate focus on the education of children with special needs. This is followed by the third section which documents the research objectives, the research questions and research methodology of the present undertaking. The fourth section presents the results of the research, with brief explanations and discussions to clarify certain salient points. In the fifth section presents a detailed discussion of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations.

2. What the Literature tells us about a Deaf Child born to a Hearing Family: the Challenges of Communication

A deaf child in a hearing family presents an obvious challenge to the parents as far as communication is concerned. On realising that the child neither hear nor speak, parents of deaf children tend to spend a great deal of time and resources to "correct" the affliction, i.e. restore hearing (Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan 1996). In doing this, they hope to address the child's future in such a way as to even the playing field and allow the deaf child an equal opportunity in terms of an educational and professional career. All such corrective measures are based on the desire for communication, more specifically, for language, because for most parents of deaf children often language equals speech.

In light of the above, it is important to take cognisance of the following definition of communication by Freeman *et al.* (1981: 92), which clearly contradicts this reductionist belief in language as equal to speech:

> Communication is a vital tool of sending and receiving information between two organisms. "Communication" may be defined as any behaviour that involves sending and receiving information. "Communication" is a broader term than "language". For instance, insects and plants communicate with each other and human beings communicate with other animals. "Language" is just one vehicle of communication.

In the literature there is no consensus on the definition of language. However, a consideration of the characteristics of language as outlined by Freeman *et al.* (1981: 92), especially in stressing language as one part of communication, may serve to clarify what language is understood to be in this context: “Language is systematic, language is symbolic, language is socially learned and language evolves and changes, language can be communicated in a number of forms or modalities and finally language does not necessarily have a written form.”

These characteristics of language are clearly much broader and more encompassing than the parent’s equation of "language" with "speech". Yet parents fears that their children will not be able to hear given the entrenched reductionist understanding of the hearing majority that “language” equals “speech” and the acceptance of any claim by linguists arguing for greater precision in definition.

The belief that "language" equals "speech" is not a phenomenon of modern times but, particularly, with the perceived need to educate deaf children, this belief has been foregrounded in several centuries. The earliest recorded history of educating deaf children dates back to the 15th century (Lane *et al.* 1996: 59; Plann 1997: 81). A noble family in Spain entrusted their deaf child to Pedro Ponce de Leon, a monk, to be taught to speak in order to

inherit their wealth, as the ability to speak was a requirement to inherit (Evans 1982: 146). In this case the parents required not "education", but "speech" of their child. The advent of education for the deaf child led to disagreement about on which mode of communication should be used with and by Deaf learners. Two distinctive approaches came to into being, “oralism” and “manualism”. In the former mode the child, (with or without adequate residual hearing) was required to look at the mouth (interlocutor) and read lips to understand what was being said. The downside of this approach is that it has since been demonstrated that only 25% of speech sounds are visible on the lips, while 75% remains obscure to the lip reader. Yet, this method of providing the deaf child access to speech has prevailed (Plann 1997: 2 & 121). The tension that has for a long time characterised the debate between oralism and manualism, favouring the former despite its failings, is captured in the following statement (Akach 1988: 107):

> Manualism is a derogatory term that was coined by proponents of "Oralism" to discredit what in modern times is known as signed language. It is the use of hands, face, shoulders and upper body in a systematic rule governed way, to convey meaning. The term "manual" was used in concord with the term "manual labour". Since it is the out of the ordinary, the marked mode of communication, it had been and still is very easy to turn parents and their deaf children against it.

Although, for centuries, the controversial debate between "oralism" and "manualism" has raged on among educators of Deaf people, the attitude has slowly changed in some places in the very recent past to favour "manualism" (signed language). Linguists, psycholinguists and sociolinguists have produced findings clearly demonstrating that signed languages are indeed languages in their own right and have come to argue strongly and convincingly that signed languages should be accepted by the larger hearing communities as the language of the Deaf, especially as a growing demand for such recognition came to be aired by the Deaf communities themselves.

Whilst Ponce de Leone started teaching the Deaf to speak in 1620, Abbé de l'Epée in France favoured an alternative method. He began by using manualism (signed language) as a method of education (Lane *et al.* 1996). The former method used in Spain (oralism) spread to many countries in Europe and later on to other parts of the world. Later De Leon's approach was further entrenched in Germany by Heinicke, so that by 1760 it came to be known as the "German method". The use of Signed language, which came to be known as the "French method", also spread to other countries in Europe and eventually North America (Lane *et al.* 1996: 57). But this preferred use of signed language in education was brought to an abrupt halt by a resolution passed at the 1880 Milan Congress. The congress was convened by hearing educators who deliberately excluded all the Deaf delegates from the congress (Aarons & Morgan 1998; Akach & Morgan 1999).

While the two modes of communication in the education of the Deaf were being battled at for supremacy in other parts of the world, on the African continent a mixed approach was emerging. Most schools for the Deaf were established by missionaries from Europe and depending on which country they came from and which mode of communication with the Deaf that those countries used; they brought their preferred mode of communication with them. In South Africa the first school for the Deaf was built in 1863 by Irish Catholic missionaries and they introduced Irish Sign Language into those schools (Aarons 1996; Penn, 1992b; Penn & Reagan 1994; Aarons & Akach 2002; Heap 2003).

The use of signed language in education in South Africa was, like elsewhere in the world, also brought to an abrupt end after 1880 after the Milan conference that banned signed languages. To compound matters, in the later part of the twentieth century, the composition of schools for the Deaf in South Africa was based on the Group Areas laws enacted by the Apartheid regime from 1948. This propagated enforced limits on people's movements, thus keeping them to designated regions within the country and, concomitant with this, enforcing by law education (reading and writing) in their own languages (Aarons & Akach 2002; Penn 1992a). As language was strongly linked to ethnicity and identity by the Apartheid Government this, rather than a

person's choice or physical deafness, came to be the determining factor in education. To illustrate: in the Eastern Cape province, for example, the schools were built for a isiXhosa-speaking populace, in Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal) for isiZulu-speaking individuals, in the North-West Province (then referred to largely as the "homeland", Bophuthatswana) for Tswana-speaking learners, in the Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo) for Tshivenda-speaking learners and Northern Sotho-speaking deaf people, and so forth. The irony of the whole undertaking is that the deaf children, for whom these schools were built, of course neither spoke nor understood any of those spoken languages. However, in congruence with Milan conference of 1880's resolutions and enabled by the ethnic divisions of Apartheid, oralism came to be entrenched as the mode of communication in South African schools for the Deaf (Aarons & Akach 2002).

Elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Cameroon, Zaire (now the DRC), Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ethiopia, and others, began educating their Deaf learners from the mid-1950s (Akach 1996; 1997; 1998; 1999). The schools in these countries, like in South Africa, were built mainly by missionaries. Other charitable organisations such as the Aga-Khan Foundation initiated a few schools (Units) in Kenya by 1948 (Makumi 1988). The native languages in which areas the schools were built (e.g. Dholuo and Luhya in Western Kenya, and Ewe and Fulani in Ghana), were orally "taught" to their deaf learners. In these countries, as opposed to in South Africa which had some history of SL instruction, educationists never had the opportunity to use signed language in any formal setting as the schools were set up long after the Milan Conference of 1880, which prescribed the Oral method exclusively.

3. The Role of Parental Attitudes in Education of the Deaf Child

In the USA, Erting (1985), building upon the view of deafness as a sociocultural phenomenon similar to ethnicity, suggested that hearing parents and Deaf parents come to the school with differing views of, and experiences with, deafness. Also, there is a greater match between the views of the hearing parents and those of the hearing educators than there is between the

views of the Deaf parents and those of the hearing educators. These differences are important for several reasons, including the fact that the definition of deafness determines, to a large degree, the kinds of programmes and services provided by the school. If there is a mismatch between the view held by those providing the services and those who are intended to benefit from it, the programme is not likely to meet with success.

It is important to emphasise in this context that, when hearing parents discover that a child is deaf, they face an abrupt change – one that challenges their understanding of themselves as parents and of what it is to be human. The diagnosis of deafness in their child changes their role as parents to a new one, that of parents to a deaf child. Soon they discover there must be changes in their expectations for their child's envisaged present and future life. Free and easy communication between them and their child will inevitably veer away from what they knew or expected before. That is, it will not develop in the same way as it did their own parents. Something as taken for granted and as seemingly natural as speaking with each other as parent and child, is precluded by the deafness of the child. If anything that approximates satisfactory communication is to occur, parents soon learn they must change their form of communication from spoken to signed language. The meaning of this challenge to the hearing parents' basic identity as hearing, speaking human beings can be grasped only when one understands the role of language as the dominant in providing information and the most important instrument of socialisation (Erting 1985: 230–231).

Erting (1985: 230–231) further advances that the language used by significant others is a part of the world that children internalise and come to accept as *the* world, the only existent and only conceivable world, the world *tout court*. A person's first language, through which primary socialisation occurs, is inextricably part of that person's selfhood and hence of identity formation. Hearing parents, unless they had deaf parents themselves, were socialised through spoken language. Being *speakers* of a language is fundamental to their understanding of themselves, their identity and their social world. Having a deaf child demands a complete change. It necessitates that parents learn to use hands and bodies rather than voice to produce

language, and that they rearrange their notions of selfhood to take this into account. However, an even more difficult challenge faces them: they must use this new form of language to communicate and to socialise with their child. If communication is to occur, they have no choice but to set aside their own first language, which is an integral part of their selfhood and their social world, and replace it with another that will become their child's first language but never their own.

In sharp contrast to hearing parents of deaf children, Deaf parents often *expect* their children to be deaf, especially if they come from families with a history of deafness. Frequently, when expecting a child, they hope for a deaf child, rather than a hearing or hard-of-hearing child. When Deaf parents express apprehension about having a deaf child, the concern usually is related to the difficulties they know the child will encounter in a hearing, speaking world, especially with limited job opportunities and educational problems. The challenge that deafness presents to the deaf individual's notion of selfhood first occurs when it is perceived as an aspect of self not shared by the majority. Potentially, the challenge recurs every time deaf individuals face deafness as a condition that makes them different, or as a limitation in one way or the other. Deaf adults have been meeting those challenges and living with deafness as part of their identities through the ages. Usually, having a deaf child is not a trauma for them and does not require a major rearrangement of their notions of identity and self. They know from experience what deafness means and they do not lack confidence as parents as a result thereof. Furthermore, their first language is usually some variety of sign language, acquired from their parents if they were Deaf, or from Deaf peers and it is the same language they use with their child from birth. Communication usually proceeds unhampered as the deaf child acquires competence in sign language from the parents. For these parents, the deafness of their child presents a challenge to their identities as Deaf parents only when introduced to formal educational structures when they enrol their child in school and must interact with hearing educators. This interaction is inherently problematic because of the difference in opinion on, and varying definitions of deafness held by hearing educators vis-à-vis Deaf parents. An imbalance is immediately perceived where hearing people, as the majority circumscribing

normalcy, are considered to be in a position of power and control over deaf people, in this case with respect to the education of Deaf parents' children (Erting 1985: 232–234).

Writing on parental attitudes towards mainstreaming young children with disabilities and with specific reference to the United States, Galant and Hanline (1993) observe that young children with disabilities are being included in regular early childcare settings with increasing frequency throughout the United States. Effective methods to ensure deaf children's social, instructional and physical integration are readily available and easily implemented. Research findings demonstrate that such mainstreamed settings support the growth and development of children with disabilities and are consistent with recent public policy interpretations of the least restrictive environment. Mainstreamed settings always imply inclusion. Inclusion holds the promise of integrating not only the children, but also their families into full community participation. Yet one has to realise that families of children with disabilities often feel isolated from activities of the early childhood community, such as play groups. Many parents of children with disabilities want their children to form friendships with nondisabled children and reap the benefits of real-world experiences offered by integration. Parents often have two concerns, however, when considering integration: the possibility of negative interactions with peers and the quality of the childcare programmes. The opportunity for friendship development and other benefits are often overshadowed by parental needs to protect their children from verbal abuse, isolation and ridicule.

Underlining the demographics of children born with deafness (and what sets them apart as a special constituency) and the challenges that families with Deaf children face, Feher-Prout (1996: 155) suggests that more than 90% of children with severe to profound hearing loss are born to normally hearing families. The realisation that a child is deaf causes stress in families who have little contact with deaf persons and know little about the implications of deafness. In addition to coping with the shock of the initial diagnosis, families must acquire an understanding of a substantial and complex body of knowledge. Parents are often swamped with information on amplification devices, sign language, educational methods, school

placements and legal issues, all of which demand that they fully understand and are fully informed to assure appropriate critical decisions about their deaf child's future.

Gorman (1998), in this context provides interesting insights on the linkages between social class and parental attitudes towards education by observing that there are several competing explanations for the different ways middle-class and working class parents approach education. Working-class parents know from their workplace experiences the skills and education their children will need and they therefore teach their children traits such as conformity, punctuality and obedience. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, try to instil traits in their children such as independence, creativity and self-actualisation. A more recent version of this kind of argument posits that working-class parents are in fact raising their educational aspirations for their children based on the parents' reading of the changing economy. Yet other studies have focused on parents' attitudes towards the particular kind of education that their children receive. One such study is that of Shin (2000) focusing on parent attitude towards the principles of bilingual education and the children's participation in bilingual programmes. Shin (2000) investigated whether parents agreed with the rationale for bilingual education and whether they approved of their children being placed in a bilingual classroom. Drawing conclusions from 506 parents from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds who participated in the study, the results showed that there is strong support on the part of parents for the rationale for bilingual education. The study also supported placing children in a bilingual programme (Shin 2000: 98).

Calderon (2000), in a study that investigated parental involvement in deaf children's educational programmes, found that parental involvement in deaf children's early intervention (EI) and school-based education programmes is increasingly being encouraged and expected. Parental involvement is based on parents' positive attitudes in Deaf education which in turn are informed by empirical studies that have established that deaf children with better language and communication skills perform better academically. There is also strong evidence for a connection between children's social-emotional development, or social competence and

academic outcomes in Deaf education generally. Increases in children's reading scores, more constructive use of classroom teaching time, and better social and academic problem solving resulted when deaf children reached higher levels of social-emotional competence and language and communication skills.

From the foregoing overview of a selection of the literature on parental attitudes in education, it is apparent that parents' attitudes are critical in determining the success or otherwise of any educational intervention that seeks to improve the educational environment of Deaf children. The use of sign language as a medium of instruction for Deaf children is considered such an educational intervention. Its ultimate success or otherwise will depend to a great extent on the support of parents. The support of parents, in turn, is informed and based on the parents' attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction. It is important to note that over and above the scientific models that have been used to study and map parents' attitudes towards the education of their off-spring, parents' enduring interest in the education of their off-spring is fundamentally premised by the primordial instinct that dictates that human beings seek the best for their off-spring. This primordial instinct is further amplified when the offspring in question is challenged in certain aspects, such as is the case with a Deaf child.

4. Research Objectives, Questions and Methodology

In the light of the above, the current investigation was guided by and based on the following research objectives, questions and methodology:

4.1. Research Objectives

The study investigated deaf children's parents' attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction, as well as oralism and general communication with the deaf. It also investigated whether the age, sex and socio-economic status of the parents have any relation to their attitudes and beliefs. The study also considered the means by which parents communicate with their children at home and how the child communicates with friends in a variety of social situations.

4.2. Research Questions

The following research questions provided a framework for the study:

(a) What communication methods do parents use with their deaf children?
(b) What expectations do the parents have about the level of education and occupation of their children?
(c) What attitudes do parents of deaf children have towards different communication methods?
(d) Do the age, sex and socio-economic status of parents have any relationship to attitudes?

4.3. Research Methodology

The research employed a combination of two research methods, the collection of data through questionnaires and through structured oral interviews. The parents who constituted the population for the study are linked to the two schools for the Deaf in the Free State Province: Thiboloha based in QwaQwa in the Northeast of the Province and Bartimea, situated in the town of Thabanchu 79 kilometres east of the capital, Bloemfontein. The two schools had a combined total of 210 parents (households). In communicating with the parents of the two schools, it was explained that the aim of the research was to improve the education of Deaf children and therefore their cooperation was invaluable. Due to the manageable population, the entire population was used to solicit responses to questionnaires. The response rate was 76%.

The questionnaires were administered by the principals of the two schools. The parents were given the questionnaires when they came to collect their children for the April 2003 school break. For those parents who did not turn up to collect their children, the children took the questionnaires home and they brought them back at the end of the school break. The questionnaire was in English and Sesotho. Sesotho is the main language of the catchment area. The questionnaires were accompanied by a letter explaining the intent of the questionnaire. In instances where the respondents could neither read nor write in either of the two languages

interviews were organised. Simple descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. For the attitude statements in each group, a Likert Scale was used and coded as follows: 1 = strongly disagree (SD); 2 = Disagree (D); 3 = Undecided (U); 4 = Agree (A); and 5 = Strongly Agree (SA). This implies that a score of 1 was the most negative and a score of 5 was the most positive. In analysing the different attitude attributes isolated in the questionnaire, distributions, frequencies and percentages were calculated and interpreted.

5. Results

The total number of parents of deaf children in the two schools was targeted. A total of 183 parents (households) out of 210, representing 76% responded. Of the total number of the respondents 61 (33%) were male, while 118 (65%) were female and four (2%) did not indicate. In terms of marital status, 39% were married, 41% were single, 9% were divorced or separated, and those widowed represented 9%, while 2% did not indicate. In terms of level of education, most parents (88%) had an education lower than Grade 12. 59,8% of the respondents were unemployed. It should be emphasised, though, that this does not necessarily mean the entire household was unemployed.

Before the parents were asked how they communicated with their children at home, they were asked the number of children they had. The number of children per family ranged from 1-9 as indicated by Table 1.

Table 1: The number of children in the respondents' families

N	Number=n	Percentage
1 – 5 Children	144	78,7
6 -10 Children	10	5,5
N – R No response	29	15,8
Total	**183**	**100**

In the families interviewed, deaf girls predominated by almost 10% to boys, as indicated by Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of sex in the respondents' families

Gender	Number=n	Percentage
Girls	101	55,2
Boys	81	44,3
N – R No response	1	0,.5
Total	**183**	**100**

In the figures presented in Table 3, 20,8% of the parents had one child (assumed deaf). Asked whether their child was born deaf, a majority (57%) answered in the affirmative. 27% said their child became deaf. 8% did not know and 8% did not respond.

Table 3: The age at which the parents knew their child was deaf

Age	Number=n	Percentage
1 – 3	122	66,7
4 – 10	21	11,5
above 10	2	1,1
N – R No response	38	20,7
Total	**183**	**100**

Deafness was noticed or diagnosed in the majority of cases before the age of 3 (66,7%) of the respondents who replied. Figures in Table 3 show that parents knew or discovered their children were deaf between the ages of 1-3. Most of them said they realised something was wrong when the children could still not talk as they grew older.

When the parents were asked whether they knew what caused their child to be deaf, 42,6% said they did not know, 16,9% indicated “disease” without specifying the kind, 7% said “accident”, while 7% indicated that the mother of the child was sick/ill during the pregnancy (see Table 4).

On the question to elicit the kind/type on communication mode they used with their deaf children, 21,3% said they used speech, 71% said signed language, 4,9% said any other, while 2,7% did not indicate the mode of communication.

Table 4: Mode of communication at home

Mode of Communication	Number=n	Percentage
Speech	39	21,3
Sign Language	130	71,0
Other modes	9	4,9
N---R No response	5	2,8
Total	**183**	**100**

Because South Africa is constitutionally recognised as a multilingual country with 11 official languages, the hearing community has a choice of what language to speak at home, and more so, what language the child should be educated in. 71% of the respondents indicated that this is true with the Deaf children at home. The implication is a concurrence of parents that these children should use SASL at home and also be educated in it.

On the question of how their children communicated with the children in the neighbourhood during play, the following responses were given:

Table 5: Communication at play

Mode	Number=n	Percentage
Sign Language	120	65,6
Speech	41	22,4
Don't communicate	6	3,3
Don't know	3	1,6
N---R No response	13	7,1
Total	**183**	**100**

Information summarised in Table 5 indicates that many parents say that they observe their children at play. 65% of the respondents said that other children in neighbourhood used signed language, 22% observed speech being used, 3,3% said their children did not communicate with other children at all, 1,6% did not know and 7,1% did not respond at all. The use of Sign Language at play is consistent with what they talk about in the home (see Table 4). It seems from these figures that 65,6% deaf children of the responding parents may have a signing environment at home. Whether this means that the children in those neighbourhoods have learnt SASL properly and used it in any meaningful communication is not clear from the present context.

Parents were asked what language they preferred their children to be taught in (medium of instruction). 67,7% preferred signed language, 15,3% had a preference for speech, 11,5% said it did not matter and 5,5% did not indicate their preference (see Table 6 below).

Table 6: Communication method the parent preferred to be used at school to teach their children

Communication method	Number=n	Percentage
Signed Language	124	67,7
Speech (oral)	28	15,3
It doesn't matter	21	11,5
N—R No response	10	5,5
Total	**183**	**100**

Table 3, 4 and 5 above show of what parents say about the use of signed language usage at home is 71%, at play it is 65,6% and at school 67,8%. The slight drop in the use of SASL between home, play and school combined, is perturbing because if this is the case, there should be no problem and no cause for this study. A question that begs to be asked is whether the parents believe that the language of the home should be different from that of the educational and social environment. While 67,8% (Table 6) preferred signed language to be used at school, there is some need to investigate whether the parents proactively inquire and follow-up whether signed language is in fact used at school. It is not a common practice for parents from

this milieu to walk into a school and demand to know what language is used to teach their child. Because of the high regard for education and educationists, it is taken for granted that the preferred language of the parent is being used in the classroom or that, if not, the best interests of the child are served by the school. After all, apparently the choice of school made by the parents is made depending on the medium of instruction such as isiZulu, English, Afrikaans, Sesotho, etc., but the ultimate responsibility as to medium of instruction is considered to lie with the teacher considered the most qualified to decide: "Teacher knows better, don't ask me," a parent retorted while another asked, "What is speech, oral or signed language? My child is in school."

The respondents were also asked what signed language they would prefer to be used at school. A list of three signed languages was given, namely, South African Sign Language (SASL), American Sign Language (ASL) and/or Irish Sign Language (ISL); the latter two because these languages historically had a tremendous influence on SASL for different reasons. The first schools for the Deaf in South Africa were established by missionaries from Ireland. They used a signed language closer to the British one; hence there was some ISL influence on SASL (Aarons & Morgan 1998; Aarons & Reynolds 1997; Penn 1992b). ASL came to have an influence on SASL for a different reason. In 1988, the V.N. Naik School in the Natal Province (now KwaZulu-Natal) was purpose-built for Indian deaf children in Durban in line with the Group Areas Act and Apartheid Government policies. The first principal of the school, who was also instrumental in its establishment, went to the USA where he was convinced upon his return to implement ASL signs in the English word order, Signed Exact English (S.E.E[3]), as language medium for the school. This was not an entirely illogical or disjunctive decision as, at the time, no school in South Africa was using any signed language whatsoever, let alone SASL, in a structured manner as medium of instruction. As the school leavers from V.N. Naik School spread around the country since 1988, they would interact with the Deaf community who use SASL, thereby introducing new vocabulary and structures into SASL since 1988. This spread of vocabulary and growth has also been observed in Kenya which Okombo and Akach (1997) have referred to as

[3]SEE (Signed Exact English) was one of the contrived systems among others that were created by hearing people to put English on hands. These systems have been variously known as Manually Coded English (MCE).

language convergence and the wave phenomena in the growth of a National Sign Language in Kenya. ASL has also gained entry into SASL via Deaf South Africans on student exchange programmes in the USA, especially at Gallaudet University, the only university for the Deaf in the world. After graduating and returning to South Africa, most of the Deaf students took up key positions in Deaf leadership in SA, thereby becoming the role models for others and thus spreading ASL sign vocabulary into SASL. This phenomenon has also been observed elsewhere on the African continent (Akach 1996; 1997; 1999).

Thus noting these developments, the researchers asked which signed language the parents preferred to be used and taught as a school subject. The results were quite startling. 15,3% chose SASL, 1,6% chose ASL and 83,1% did not respond. What does this tell one? Firstly, it has to be determined whether the parents in fact understand that there are many signed languages or whether, when asked this question, they think there is only one (universal) signed language.

Table 7: Which signed language would you prefer to be used in teaching your child

Signed languages	Number=n	Percentage
SASL	28	15,3
ASL	3	1,6
BSL	-	-
Missing No response	152	83,1
Total	**183**	**100**

The policy of the Ministry of Education in South Africa, in line with the multilingualism approach enshrined in the constitution (RSA Constitution 1996), is that a learner at school is required to follow the policy to taking at least two languages at school, one of which should be the mother tongue (L1) (if it is the medium of instruction) and/or second language (L2) (if the mother tongue/L1 is not the medium of instruction). For the deaf learner, this policy could potentially exclude SASL. This is for the simple reason that approximately 90% of Deaf people are born to hearing parents. SASL not used, recognised and taught as a school subject. A Deaf child, whose parents do not use SASL, is therefore left to create his/her own rudimentary method of

communication to get attention, demand or ask for something. The same is used by the siblings as well. These signs so created by the child, develop into what has come to be known as "home signs" (Lane *et al.* 1996). These signs are therefore only used within the home. These deaf children born into hearing families only come into contact with signed language when and if they are placed in the few schools for the Deaf in South Africa. The remaining 10% of deaf children are born to Deaf parents. The children born to these parents would have probably SASL as mother tongue. It is very common in the USA and Europe for Deaf of Deaf to have signed language as their mother tongue (Lane *et al.* 1996). There has not been any proper survey done to establish the figures for any country in Africa. As for the respondents of this study, all but one parent were hearing and even in this instance the Deaf parent was but one of the two parents in the family.

Having asked the parents if they preferred signed language to be used rather than spoken language in their children's education (Table 6) and which signed language (Table 7), it was pertinent to ask them if they wanted their children to be taught a spoken language and which it should be. The majority (84,4%) did not respond. 7,7% said they would prefer Sesotho, while 10,9% said they would prefer English (see Table 8) – it should be borne in mind that the parents in the catchment area of this study are predominantly Sesotho speaking.

Table 8: Preferred spoken language if the Deaf are to be taught a second language

Spoken Language	Number=n	Percentage
Sesotho	14	7,7
English	20	10,9
Missing No response	149	81,4
Total	**183**	**100**

One of the parents, when asked this question, vehemently commented that, "The Deaf cannot be taught how to speak and yet do the Sign Language unless otherwise."

This parent pointed to a relevant concern. The question was ambiguous as to whether the spoken language was to be in its spoken or written form. The bilingual/bicultural approach in teaching the deaf learner emphasises that signed language should be used as the primary language of face-to-face communication, medium of instruction, and that it be taught as a school subject as well. It should also be used to teach and explain the print form of whatever spoken language is chosen as the second language (L2) and/or language for reading and writing.

5.1. Parents' Expectations of their Deaf Child

People bring children into the world, go through the rituals of social life to mark the stages of life such as baptism and school, they anticipate employment, marriage, children and thus a continuation of the cycle of life. In the broader social collective, the anticipation is that a child should grow up to become a useful citizen to contribute to the well being of the nation or social unit leading to an active, healthy and prosperous adulthood. In the Western world the ingrained belief is that this aspiration of success is achieved by means of education. Parents of deaf children are no exception to these aspirations for their children. Nevertheless, the sad truth, as mentioned before, is that Deaf school leavers in Africa tend to be semi-literate to functionally illiterate with a reading level of a grade 4 child (Makumi 1988; Aarons & Reynolds 1997).

Given the above reality, parents were asked what educational level they expected of their children. 7,7% of the parents indicated secondary school level, 15,8% college, 22,4% Technikon[4], 43,2% indicated university level. Only 4,9% said it did not matter and depended on the child's ability, while 6% did not respond.

Table 9: Level of education the parents expected their children to reach or attain

Level	Number=n	Percentage
High School	14	7,7

[4] Traditionally in South Africa, these were the colleges of Technology since converted to Universities of technology.

College	29	15,8
Technikon	41	22,4
University	79	43,2
Any other	9	4,9
Missing or No response	11	6,0
Total	**183**	**100**

Parents were also asked what they wanted their children to study and what kind of occupations they wanted them to pursue. Especially, as indicated in Table 9, the majority had aspirations of children pursuing tertiary education whether it be at college, Technikon or university. Those who chose "college" suggested they wanted their children to study occupations such as policing, nursing, teaching, interpreting and clerical work. "Technikon" was chosen by parents who wanted their children to study I.T., business management, architecture, civil engineering, clothes design, accounting, practical work such as needlework, carpentry, plumbing, or work as an electrician, and/or hotel management. Those parents who chose the "university"-option mentioned courses such as social work, commerce, veterinary science, biology, law, and medicine. Those who chose any other wanted their children to choose for themselves, depending on their ability, and one parent commented that he wanted his daughter to be a housewife.

It is patently clear from the parents' responses that deafness, as a physical affliction, does not guide or influence their inspirational choices for their children. They see their deaf children simply as children and want as much for them by way of opportunities as they would for their non-deaf children. These high expectations must inevitably meet with disappointment when the parents receive results from the school(s). The two schools chosen for this study, for example, do not offer education beyond Grade 8 (formerly Standard 6). To qualify for tertiary education in South Africa, a learner must pass Grade 12 (Standard 10) with matric exemption. The implication is that, despite the laudatory and enlightened expectations held by parents, the government has much lower expectations and sets much lower standards for Deaf learners by establishing schools for the Deaf up to Grade 8 only. This despite the fact that there are no

schools in South Africa established in with such expectations for any hearing (mainstream learners) or other disabled South Africans (physical and blind). It is only the Deaf that seems to meet with such low expectation from the State. This evidently sends a message to society at large by formal state structures such as schools, regarding the Deaf.

The government's expectations are therefore set at the same level as for mentally challenged children as Okombo (1992) pointed out as also being the case for Kenyan Deaf education. This should be of grave concern. The Deaf in Africa at large have also suffered from this kind of societal and government sanctioned aspirational deficit in other areas of life. Arranged marriages, now becoming extinct, were common in many African communities. In the past deaf girls and boys were often prevented from getting married at all and in other instances marriage to a hearing partner was arranged for various reasons. The most common reasons for the latter were practical – from the point of view of the hearing majority. The reasons varied from the perceived requirement to have someone around who would hear knocking at the door, hear when a thief comes and help to teach the children to speak and to prevent or limit the possibility of having deaf children, among others (Akach 1988). The last reason is quite inconsistent with the figure of 90% of deaf children born to hearing parents, has been shown worldwide.

Given this background, the present study also set out to get parents' opinion on what kind of partner (hearing or deaf) they would prefer or arrange marriage for their deaf sons and daughters.

Table 10: The kind of partner the parent would like for their deaf son/daughter

Kind of partner	Number=n	Percentage
Deaf partner	67	37
Hearing Partner	27	15
Doesn't matter	63	34
Missing No response	26	14

Total	**183**	**100**

The 37% of the parents, who indicated a preference for a Deaf partner for their child, gave one or more of the following reasons:

- "Will allow them good communication"
- "Marry Deaf and then the whole family will be deaf" (uniformity)
- "Good relationship"
- "It will be a problem if he marries a hearing person"
- "Feel comfortable"

Those parents who preferred hearing partners (15%) for their children chose this for one or more of the following reasons:

- "Assist him/her with hearing"
- "Can help him/her in many ways"
- "Can help each other"
- "Bridge communication in the community" (interpreter?)
- "Hearing if possible"
- "To help family matters"
- "Hearing partner so as to learn SL"
- "Hearing because if there is anybody knocking"
- "Hearing, the children may be affected"

The 34% who indicated it did not matter did so for the following reasons:

- "Freedom of choice"
- "Doesn't matter so long as they can be understood (*understand each other*)" [emphasis added]

A few of the parents added the following:

- "I don't want her to be married"

- "I want her to stay with me"

Akach's 1988 study among parents in Kenya indicated a complete avoidance by parents of the choice of "deaf partner" but this study in SA clearly indicates a far more even division in parents' wishes for their children's life partners. This shows a greater deal of awareness and understanding of the Deaf community in South Africa, at least among parents of Deaf children, than in the Akach (1988) study in Kenya of almost twenty years previously.

5.2. Parents' Attitude towards Different Means of Communication

As argued earlier, the most important issue in the education of the Deaf is the matter of communication. The choice between the use of signed language and speech (oralism) is a much contested one. In Africa, in most instances, the parents leave the decision to the teacher(s) in a belief that they may be more qualified to know what is best for their children (cf. Akach 1988). Even with greater acceptance of SL and particularly the protection it enjoys under the constitution in South Africa, the controversy still rages on. A set of thirteen statements were formulated to elicit parents' attitudes on this matter. The statements all related to mode of communication with and by the Deaf. Each statement is considered individually (see Table 11).

Table 11: Parents attitude towards different means of communication with the Deaf (the percentages were determined based on the 183 parents who responded)

Legend:

SA=Strongly Agree
A=Agree
U=Undecided

D=Disagree
SD=Strongly Disagree
NR=No Response

	SA	A	U	D	SD	N-R	TOT

1	The Deaf should be taught to speak	27,9	25,1	8,7	8,2	10,9	19,2	100
2	The Deaf must use speech when communicating with hearing people	16,4	25,2	9,8	14,2	14,2	20,2	100
3	Signed language is the first language of the Deaf	53,6	23,0	2,2	1,6	1,6	18,0	100
4	The Deaf should be taught in Signed language at school	54,1	22,4	3,3	2,2	0,5	17,5	100
5	The Deaf should marry into the hearing community to encourage and sustain speech usage	15,4	19,1	26,2	9,3	13,1	16,9	100
6	The Deaf should marry Deaf to ease the communication barrier	23,0	20,8	19,1	9,3	9,8	18,0	100
7	I don't care if my child is taught in signed language or orally (speech)	15,3	21,9	13,1	11,5	18,0	20,2	100
8	Teachers know better which method of communication is best for the Deaf	42,6	26,2	3,8	2,2	8,3	16,9	100
9	If a signed language is used in schools, it should be South African Sign Language	36,6	24,1	9,8	3,8	7,7	18,0	100
10	The Deaf should be taught other Languages besides English/Afrikaans/Sotho	33,3	26,8	6,0	6,0	10,4	17,5	100
11	The Deaf should be taught their mother tongue language just as their hearing peers	42,1	27,9	4,4	4,9	3,8	16,9	100
12	Signed language from other countries can be used in South African schools	27,8	29,5	13,7	6,6	3,8	18,6	100
13	Signed language can enable the Deaf to achieve higher educational levels	55,2	22,5	3,8	1,1	0,5	16,9	100

Statement 1: The Deaf should be taught to speak.

The parents' responses to this statement were as follows: 53% agreed, 9% were undecided, 19% disagreed, while another 19,2% did not respond.[5] Freeman et al (1981) quote from an interview survey carried out by Gregory (1976) of 108 English mothers. The interview asked the mothers what they felt were their greatest challenge? 76% answered that a problem arose from difficulties in communicating their point of view. Asked what they felt was the greatest problem from the child's point of view, 89% answered communication. In this context, it should be claimed here that whenever human beings think of communication or language, they think of "speech".

Statements 2 and 5: The Deaf must use speech when communicating with the hearing people.

41,6% agreed, 28,4% disagreed, 9,8% were undecided and 20,2% did not respond. The responses here are quite mixed in that 53% disagreed that they should be taught to speak but 41% agreed they should use speech when they speak to the hearing.[6] The quandary then comes to the fore as where the assumed speech should be learned? Closely connected to the "use of speech" statement, was Statement number 5 that the Deaf should marry a hearing spouse to perpetuate the use of speech. 34,5% agreed, 22,4% disagreed, 26,2% were undecided and 16,9% did not respond.[7]

Statement 3 and 4: Sign language is the first language of the Deaf people.

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3 Some parents' comments were:
"I think if it is possible for the Deaf people to learn speech, and then be it."
"They are human beings and they should be treated with dignity and respect."
"They have the right to make choices just like anybody else."
"Deaf taught speech – easier to communicate, use speech to communicate – impossible."
"Speech will help them to pass a message to a person who does not understand SL."
"The Deaf cannot cope with speech."
"It is highly impossible for the Deaf to speak."
"They must speak? How about hearing people? Must they sign?"

4 Some comments made by the parents in this context were:
"So as not to give their children problems."
"They should have the right to privacy."
"To break the communication barrier between them and the hearing."
"The Deaf are not aliens, their presence won't have an effect on the hearing community, let alone their speech."
"I don't think it will be right because when the hearing people are not using SL, they will feel left out."
"The hearing should learn and know signed language to communicate with the Deaf."

76,6% agreed, 3,2 % disagreed, 2,2% were undecided and 18% did not respond. It seems the majority do not doubt that SL is the first language of the Deaf, and if so, then the Deaf must be taught in signed language as indicated by Statement 4, with which 76,5% of respondents agreed, 2,7 disagreed, 3.3% were undecided and 17,5% did not respond.[8] One of the parents nevertheless raised a concern about a deaf person with the ability to speak but express the perception that learning SL ultimately ruins that ability, albeit limited:

> There are children like Israel [name of the child] who can talk but not as fluently as the hearing people. As soon as they reach school for the Deaf they start to ignore their capability to speak. He can hear clearly as the normal being but he pretends to hear nothing. I suggest such people should be encouraged to use their little ability to achieve more. And to investigate what causes that. May be it is their little confidence in their speech or feel belittled when they try to polish their talking. Please! Please! Let this be taken into consideration.

Statement 6: The Deaf should marry a deaf spouse to ease the communication barrier.

Of the subjected 43,8% agreed, 19,1% were undecided, 19,1% disagreed, and 18% did not respond.

Statement 7: I don't care if my child is taught in signed language or speech (oral).

37,2% agreed, 29,5% disagreed, 13,1% were undecided, while 20,2% did not respond. These results are perturbing in view of the fact that the majority of the parents agreed that signed language was the first language of the Deaf and also that it should be taught as such (cf. Statements 3 and 4). To turn around and agree to "not caring" gives the educator the sole mandate to make this decision on the parent's behalf. One parent said: "Signed language or

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5 "That SL should be taught in the schools of the normal children so that the Deaf children will not feel inferior in the community while participating in social activities and play with them."
"Educators must give direction to the learners as well as parents so that we may help each other to choose the career of the child and the interest of the child towards her studies."
"SL should be fully used in the schools of the Deaf because it enhances their communication skills and opens their environmental communication."

Speech? I don't care as long as they get the best education." Another commented: "Teachers know which language – parents also, especially those who are involved with their children."

Statement 8: Teachers know better which method of communication is best for the Deaf.

This statement is closely related to Statement 7. Consistent with the result above, 68,8% agreed, 10,5% disagreed, 3,8% were undecided and 16,9% did not respond. It is important to reiterate again the ultimate power thus awarded to the teachers on this most important educational matter, especially as the educational system and teachers have, for many years, held a strong preference for oralism and therefore made the conscious decision to teach the Deaf to speak. The status quo regarding the preferred medium of instruction has changed in recent times and the concern is that the same progress has not yet been made by teachers of the Deaf following traditional approaches. Today, in a post-1994 South African milieu in which Sign Language enjoys special protection under the constitution, greater emphasis should be required to ensure Sign Language as the means of communication in the educational environment. Parents, from the present study, seem to be far more enlightened in this regard than teachers or the formal governmental structures they trust to make these decisions on their behalf.

Statement 9: If a signed language is used in schools, it should be South African Sign Language.

60,7% of parents agreed, 11,5% disagreed, 9,8% were undecided and 18% did not respond. Given that many people do not know and/or agree that there are different signed languages, it may be possible that some parents did not understand the meaning of this statement, hence the 11,5% who disagreed and 18% who did not respond.

Statement 10: The Deaf should be taught other languages besides English/Afrikaans/Sesotho.

Bilingual-bicultural education for the Deaf has been emphasised in many studies (cf. Cummins 1984; Cummins & Swain 1986; Davies 1991a; Okombo 1994, etc.). To this end parents were asked to react to the above statement. 60,1% agreed, 16,4% disagreed, 6% were undecided and 17,5% did not respond. One parent commented:

> SASL should be taught to our children and it is also good to expose them to other languages to know the difference. I would love it if SASL is taught to all parents of deaf children and therefore workshops should be available to parents to explain the culture and the differences and to know how to communicate with the child.

Another parent responded:

> As parents we wish that pupils be taught in the second language and also the first language so as to be able to communicate with their families. Some of the families are not educated (schooled).

Yet another parent commented:

> It hurts if you cannot communicate with your own people. The deaf child has to know the language of his people (hearing) so that it does not hurt because he/she should communicate with his people.

<u>Statement 11: The Deaf should be taught mother tongue just like their hearing peers.</u>

70% agreed with this statement, 8,7% disagreed, 4,4% were undecided and 16,9% did not respond. This response takes us back to Statement 1, which stated, "The Deaf must be taught to speak." 19,1% disagreed with this but, in the light of the ability to speak or communicate with your people using a spoken language (mother tongue), the general feeling was they should speak. This contradiction is inexplicable. There should have been a follow-up statement to clarify whether the parents want the child to learn mother tongue in its written/read form, in which case then they would have been fully supportive of the bilingual-bicultural approach in Deaf education. The results of these two statements are contradictory and the only reasonable explanation would be that the statements were not sufficiently clear.

<u>Statement 12: Signed languages from other countries can be used in South Africa.</u>

Since each country has its own signed language, developed by its own Deaf, the parents were given this statement to react to. 57,3% agreed, 10,4% disagreed, while 13,7% were undecided and 18,6% did not respond.

Statement 13: Signed language can make or enable the Deaf achieve higher education levels.

As mentioned earlier, Deaf school leavers are known to perform at the level of grade 3 or 4. This has always been attributed to the preference for the use of speech (oralism) and bad teaching in addition, in their education. On the above statement, 77,6% of parents agreed, 1,6% disagreed, 3,8% were undecided and 16,9% did not respond. This is a decisive indicator as to the desires of parents for their children and the results suggest that parents, at the very least, are strongly in favour of this.

6. Discussion of Research Findings and Conclusions

The objective of the study was to investigate the attitudes parents have towards their deaf children and especially their education. The study also endeavoured to establish whether age, sex and socio-economic status have any bearing on such attitudes. Apart from the above, the purpose of the study also encompassed the pursuit of answers to certain research questions and/or problems. From the findings of this study it is pertinent to state that a majority of parents (76,6%) acknowledged the existence of education and SASL is the preferred language for their children even for those (21,3%) (Table 4), who conceded they did not use it with their offspring. Even the parents, showed ambivalence and/or confusion regarding speech and language, agreed that SL was the first language of the Deaf. This therefore contradicts the reductionist definition of language as synonymous with speech. More so, this enlightened attitude of the parents transcended educational level. In this context it is important to keep in mind Barbara Kennapell, as quoted in *ASL in Schools: Policies and Curriculum* (1992) when she states,

> From the hearing point of view, language is seen as being related to speech so that the two cannot be separated. Their view is that language comes from the mouth … but from the deaf perspective, speech and language can be separated.

The ingrained belief that language is the same as speech inevitably leads to a belief where the Deaf is forced to *speak* in order to be regarded as knowing a language (i.e. able to communicate) and to be considered socially communicative and therefore functional within society. This misconception about the relation between language and speech stems partly from promises made by medical personnel and teachers of the deaf who promise to teach and make the Deaf learner fluent in speech. The ambivalence or contradiction in the results in which parents accept the Deaf have a language but "must be taught to speak (mother tongue)" is tantamount to not accepting their children as they are. This should be considered in the light of the following statement by Baker and Battison (1980)

> Language has often been described as the most essential human characteristic and ability, an extension of this position might be (i) if you do not accept the person's language, you do not accept the person, and (ii) if you do not believe the person has language, you do not believe the person is a complete whole person.

Given this background, it should also be pointed out that, despite its protection under the constitution, South African Sign Language (SASL) is not among the 11 official languages of South Africa. It is highlighted as a language to be developed for use in communicative domains (RSA Constitution 1996). The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, on the other hand, augments this by declaring that SASL is an official language for educational purposes (RSA *South Africa* 1996). In spite of this protection for SASL by an Act of Parliament, 53% of parents are still in favour of the teaching of speech for their children. This outcome is quite similar to that of a previous study of parents of the Deaf in Kenya *(*Akach 1988). In the latter instance, the parents preferred speech, notwithstanding the fact that the home language was one of the 47 indigenous languages of Kenya and Kiswahili is the lingua franca, used at play, used to communicate in the marketplace and in street conversation, while at school English is the official language, whether

for the Deaf or in mainstream education. The preference shown by parents in this study is similar, quite possibly because for them speech is equated to language and in order to ease social acceptance of the child, the parent therefore believes that speech would be required.

The onset, cause and type of deafness did not have any bearing on the attitudes of the parents towards SL or the child. The majority of the parents (71%) chose to use SL while 21,3% chose to use speech with their deaf child. These choices were made not because the child was born deaf or became deaf at whatever age (Table 4). However, this should nevertheless be considered in the light of the contradictory response (table 4 and statement 1), namely the 53% (Statement 1). who indicated that the Deaf should be taught to speak. The latter response may be attributed to the advice of medical personnel and educators who, in most cases, favour speech.

This study has shown that, despite the ambivalence as to the choice of language of instruction, the aspiration of the parents for the level of education they want their children to attain was very high (see Table 9). As any parent of a hearing child, these parents want their children to attain the highest possible level of education resulting in the best possible job. They aspire for their children to be doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, policemen, nurses, designers, architects, etc. Whether these expectations and aspirations are realistic and commensurate with the kind of education their children get or are getting in South Africa, is a matter for another study. It is nevertheless, as mentioned before, important to point out the poignant discrepancy between the parents' expectations of only the best for their children and the low expectations set by government and educational structures in South Africa. It is impossible to fulfil these expectations of the parents with the current educational milieu. Since the first school for the Deaf was opened in 1883 (cf. Aarons & Akach 2002) only a handful of deaf school leavers have made it to university, and the majority of those who did managed in universities outside of South Africa (DeafSA, report to PANSALB 1998).

The ultimate parental aspiration, all the others aside, is for a child to grow up, achieve good education and find employment, marry and eventually have children of their own, thus perpetuating the current family structure. The parents in this study seem to associate the kind

of partner they would want for their child with the obvious concerns regarding communication and marriage. 37% opted for deaf partners, 15% for hearing partners as the preference and 34% indicated that “it doesn’t matter”. The reasons ranged from the opportunity for good communication between two people to the ability to speak to the children (assuming the children of the couple would always be hearing). Whatever the choice, a general preoccupation with "communication", "hearing" and "speaking", underlies all responses.

The study revealed that attitudes towards the deaf person and signed language are at variance with particular situations, conditions and circumstances existing in South Africa at the time of the study. Thus, on the issue of SL being used as language of education, 67,7% chose speech and not SL, and 11,5% indicated that it did not matter, while 5,5% did not respond. 71% of the parents said that they used signed language at home to communicate (Table 4). This was consistent with the attitudinal Statement 4 in which 76,5% of the parents agreed that signed language should be used in instructing the Deaf child at school. They further agreed that signed language holds the key to a deaf learner achieving higher levels in education (Statement 13). These results indicate that the constituency of parents surveyed want that SL be the language of instruction in the School for the Deaf that their children attend. The Deaf learners, on the other hand, know that the teachers do not sign and if they do, it is not SASL as a naturally occurring language. The point has been made in this context by protests organised by learners where some individuals even locked teachers out of the school compound; the writing of memoranda to the Department of Education; and at national level, marches organised by the Deaf Federation of South Africa (DEAFSA). However, these protests have achieved very little in terms of tangible action leading to change. To date, the status quo has been maintained.

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Paper 4.

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS SIGN LANGUAGE AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY (A CASE STUDY OF 2 SCHOOLS)

Teachers' Attitudes towards Sign Language as Medium of Instruction: An Empirical Study (A Case Study of 2 Schools)

Abstract

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (*Act no. 108 of 1996*) recognises eleven languages as official to the Republic. It also recognises other minority languages, including South African Sign Language (SASL), which it targets for development and uses in the public communicative domain. The Constitution, together with the *South African Schools Act*, *no. 84 of 1996*, which recognises SASL as an official language for educational purposes, provides a legal and legislative framework for the use and propagation of SASL in the schools for the Deaf as a medium of instruction; as school subject; and as medium of communication. However, the provisions of the Constitution and the *South African Schools Act* are not implemented and Deaf children in South Africa continue to experience monumental challenges in educational and information access. Among the many factors that contribute to this scenario, attitudes feature prominently. This paper presents the results of an empirical study of teachers' attitudes towards Sign Language as medium of instruction at selected South African schools for the Deaf, with specific attention to teachers' attitudes towards *oralism* vis-à-vis Sign Language and its use as a medium of instruction.

Key Terms: Language attitudes, medium of instruction, Deaf education, Oralism, Manualism, Sign Language

Contents

Teachers' Attitudes towards Sign Language as Medium of Instruction:
An Empirical Study at Two Schools for the Deaf in the Free State Province of South Africa

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the 1996 South African Constitution is a beacon of hope in a world plagued by conflict, poverty and the failure of governments. The constitution is a monument to the determination of a society to overcome the burden of its history – the evils of colonialism, racism and apartheid and the manifold social problems that are the legacy of centuries of inequality (Currie & De Waal 2002: 2). The Constitution not only addressed the monumental challenges of a long history of colonialism, racism and apartheid and the manifold social problems that are the legacy of centuries of inequality – issues that have stalked South African society for centuries on end, but it also sought to alter South Africa's social fabric in fundamental ways within the framework of transformative constitutionalism – a long-term project of constitutional enactment, interpretation, and enforcement committed (not in isolation, but in a historical context of conducive political developments) to transforming a country's political and social institutions and power relations in a democratic, participatory, and egalitarian direction (Klare 1998: 150).

That the language dispensation of the Republic of South Africa is part of the social fabric that the Constitution sought to address in fundamental ways, cannot be gainsaid. As Blommaert (1996: 204) indicates, the new Republic set an important precedent by providing for eleven official languages instead of the one, two or four of most other African states. The Constitution represents a vision of a country willing to champion multilingualism as a symbol of political and cultural pluralism. Within the language domain, the Constitution also opens new avenues in the discourse on language by recognising other minority languages, including South African Sign Language (hereafter SASL), which it targets for development and use in the public communicative domain.

The Constitution, together with the *South African Schools Act, no. 84 of 1996* which recognises SASL as an official language for purposes of education, provides a legal and legislative

framework for the use and propagation of SASL as medium of instruction in schools for the Deaf. This includes the development of SASL as a school subject and as medium of communication. Unfortunately, despite good intentions, the reality is that the relevant provisions of the Constitution and the *South African Schools Act* are not actively being implemented at present, as Deaf children in South Africa continue to experience monumental challenges in educational and information access. Among the many factors that contribute to this scenario, the attitudes of various role players feature prominently. This paper presents the results of an empirical study on teachers' attitudes to sign language as a medium of instruction at selected South African schools for the Deaf, with specific attention to teachers' attitudes towards *oralism* vis-à-vis Sign Language and its use as a medium of instruction.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section outlines the aim, objectives and research questions of the empirical study and also includes a note on the respondents, the sampling method used, and the techniques used for data collection. The second section provides an overview of literature on language attitudes in Deaf education. To further contextualise the discussion, the third section provides a historical overview of Deaf education in Europe, America, other parts of the world, as well as in South Africa. The fourth section presents the results and a detailed discussion of the results. In conclusion, the final section presents some conclusions and recommendations arising out of the study.

2. **Aim, Objectives, Research Questions and Methodology**

The study was guided by an overall aim, specific objectives, as well as the research questions. A combination of research methods was employed in the course of the study. The aim, objectives, research questions and methodology are documented below.

2.1. Aim of the Study

The *South African Schools Act, no. 84 of 1996* states that SASL should be regarded as an official language for educational purposes in South Africa. However, previous studies, surveys and

reports such as Aarons (1996, 1999), Aarons and Morgan (2000), Akach, Aarons and Morgan (2001) and Aarons and Reynolds (2003) have reported that most teachers do not have the necessary signing skills in SASL to prepare them to use this language as medium of instruction in the teaching of Deaf learners. Taking cognisance of this prevalent handicap amongst teachers, the aim of the study was to investigate the attitudes of teachers towards SASL as medium of instruction.

2.2. Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were:

(a) To investigate teachers attitudes towards Deaf pupils and SASL;

(b) To investigate teachers' attitudes towards oralism and Deaf pupils communication; and

(c) To investigate how teachers communicate with Deaf learners outside the classroom and how Deaf learners communicate with fellow learners at play, in the classroom and in social settings.

2.3. Research Questions

The following research questions provided a framework for the study:

(a) What communication methods do teachers use in teaching Deaf learners?

(b) What expectations do teachers have about the level of education and the future professional career progression of Deaf learners?

(c) What attitudes do teachers have towards different communication options open to teaching the Deaf?

(d) Do age and gender of teachers play a role in teachers' attitudes and predispositions towards different communication options?

2.4. Research Methodology

The study used a combination of research methodologies. Apart from research questionnaires, the researcher conducted unstructured interviews with teachers and also an extensive literature review. The research was carried out in 2003. The catchment area of the study was

two schools for the Deaf in the Free State Province of South Africa. Namely, Thiboloha, situated in QwaQwa in the North-eastern part of the Province, and Bartimea, situated in the town of Thabanchu, east of the central city of Bloemfontein. The two schools have 62 teachers in total and all were included in the study.

The questionnaires for Thiboloha School were administered by the deputy principal of the school. The teachers were requested to complete the questionnaires and return them by the end of the second quarter of the year, i.e. June 2003. The questionnaires for Bartimea School were administered by the acting principal, and the teachers were requested to complete the questionnaires and return them by the end of the second quarter of the year, namely June 2003. Due to the manageable research population [62 teachers], the questionnaire administration targeted the entire population. Out of the entire population, 43 teachers completed and returned the questionnaires, representing a response rate of 69%. In this kind of study, a response rate of 69% is significant and the results from such a sample are considered valid. It can be used to draw general conclusions for the entire research population.

3. Overview of Selected Literature on Language Attitudes in Deaf Education

Communication by and with the Deaf comes into sharp focus when confronted with the challenge of teaching. In the 15th century a deaf boy from a noble family in Spain was placed under the care of a monk, Pedro Ponce de Leon, with the express purpose of teaching the deaf child to speak, as speaking was considered essential to any understanding of education. In the 17th century, in France Abbé de l'Epée requested permission of a mother of two deaf girls to teach them. He used the manual method (now called sign language) (Lane 1996). These two instances stand as historical points of departure for an ongoing tussle between two approaches to deaf education, oralism vs. manualism.

The Deaf represent about 2,5% of any population. This is not a large percentage of any population. Most deaf persons (about 90%) are born to hearing parents. The result of this is that they tend to live in isolation and, when the time comes for formal education their ability to

communicate comes into sharp focus. This, too, is often the time when parents, but especially the child, for the first time realise the existence of other deaf children. The school is where the deaf congregate for the first time as a homogenous group. This is where they get to learn one another's (sign language), values, and this is where for the first time they become part of a collective or community within which a communal culture may evolve (cf. Ladd 2005). Ladd (2005) further submits that although Western deaf communities have existed since at least the 15th century, it was not until the first deaf schools were established in the late 18th century that large numbers of deaf people managed to congregate, educate one another, develop their own cultures, and form urban communities around such schools. This portrays schools for the deaf as the cornerstones in acculturating deaf people who mostly come from non-deaf families. Thus any move towards closing down of such schools in the name of inclusion/ mainstreaming/integration is like killing a whole community. Deaf children are considered "language-less", for they cannot speak at home and it is only when they go to school that they learn their own language, Sign Language. On literacy upon leaving school Ladd (2005:28) says that the consequences of oralism are always severe. Deaf school leavers worldwide tend towards a reading age of grades 3-4, sufficient for the headlines of tabloids newspapers, yet their speech is still incomprehensible. He proposes a deaf country and a new term for "deafness" to be "deaf-hood".

The isolation of Deaf children in the first years of their lives in a predominantly hearing world therefore leads to a blatant misapprehension that deaf people don't have a language. This belief is compounded by prevailing attitudes toward Deaf people and signed language. A combination of these factors has led to an urgent need to study attitudes toward sign language and deaf people in order to address, societal assumptions.

All language attitude research is firmly located within its parent discipline: social psychology of attitudes (Baker 1992:9). It considers the role of attitudes in language restoration, preservation, decay and death. There are three components inherent in language attitudes: the cognitive, affective and readiness for action. The cognitive component concerns thoughts and belief; the

affective component concerns feelings towards an object (e.g., sign language); and the action component concerns a readiness for action towards-example. The study of language attitudes is embedded in the approach of Baker (1992) that in the life of a language, attitude to that language appears important in language restoration, preservation, decay or death. If a community is distinctly unfavourably inclined towards bilingual education, or where the imposition of a "common" national language is attempted, language policy implementation is unlikely to be successful. It is important to note that in the milieu of the deaf, signed languages are still struggling to be recognised as fully fledged languages. Fighting for restoration or preservation is not within the frame of reference in a situation where these languages are still far from being recognised for the purpose of use in education. In this context, the greatest attitude challenge is embedded in the non-acceptance of the deaf child in society as the deaf child is often considered defective and in need of some corrective intervention so as to restore "normalcy". Normalcy in this context almost always implies a means of actualising the spoken language of the parents or of the hearing majority.

Baker (1992: 10) continues that the status, value and importance of a language is most often and mostly easily (though imperfectly) measured by societal attitude towards the language. Attitudes are latent and inferred from the direction and persistent pattern of external behaviour. For McGuire (1985), as cited by Baker (1992: 11), attitudes locate objects of thought on dimensions of judgement. An example would be a language (for example signed language) as an object, considered either favourable or unfavourable. Freeman, Dieterich and Rak (2002) assert that early intervention and education for children who are deaf and hard of hearing is expected to promote not only the acquisition of language but the development of basic skills for social functioning. Adams (1997), cited by Freeman *et al.* (2002), notes several reasons why early intervention and other educational services can promote development, including the acquisition of language and basic social skills. Three salient reasons are that (a) increased parental knowledge about the child's hearing impairment *(a medical or pathological term)* is related to an increase in positive interactions with the child; (b) parents who receive early support as they begin to mourn the loss of the child's hearing are better able to cope with the

impairment; and (c) early support provides parents with the skills (e.g., securing appropriate hearing aids, ensuring consistent amplification use) to manage the impairment. Power (2002), in writing about practices in Deaf Education in the UK with a particular perspective on inclusion, states that firstly, there is confusion over the use of different terms such as inclusion, inclusive education, inclusivity, and social inclusion. Secondly, there is the confusion whether inclusion is different from integration or mainstreaming and, if so, in what ways. Thirdly, there is confusion over whether inclusion refers to a goal (e.g. ending "educational segregation" through closing all special schools), a state (e.g. all children educated in mainstream classrooms), a process (e.g., of increasing participation for children with special needs), a means to an end (e.g. mainstream education as a way to better academic outcomes for all), or a value system (e.g., one concerned with the rights of all marginalised groups). Mainstreaming/inclusion/universal or any of the terms is a way of heightening attitude towards signed languages and deaf education in that language. It also perpetuates denial in parents by giving false hope that their children will be able to acquire a spoken language and attain a solid academic education in keeping with their hearing counterparts. Yet, no advantage has been recorded when a child is educated in the mainstream. Power (2002: 232) continues to state that in the UK the children's rights to inclusion take precedent over parents' rights. That is to say, even if a parent would like the child to be educated at a special school in sign language s/he has no right to demand this. However, it is important to note that the British Deaf Association (BDA), the major national organisation for Deaf people representing the views of the Deaf community in the UK, advocates sign bilingual education for the "majority of deaf children" and sets out a number of conditions as prerequisites for bilingual education, including "access to a Deaf peer group" and "curriculum and assessment in the child's preferred language", which might or might not be British Sign Language (BSL). Power (2002: 233) quotes the BDA as having very strong objections to the wide-scale placement of individual deaf children in local mainstream or special schools, as it is not possible to meet the criteria for effective bilingual education.

Siegel (2002: 258) captures the argument for a constitutional right to communication and language by stating that the need for and right to communication and language is fundamental

to the human condition. Without communication, an individual cannot become an effectively functioning, productive and socially adapted adult, or an informed citizen in any democracy. The importance of communication and language for deaf and hard-of-hearing children – as for any other children – is so basic as to be beyond debate. Given the historic difficulties deaf and hard-of-hearing children nevertheless face, their compromised communication and language skills along with the educational, social, cognitive and psychological consequences these represent, need to weigh in favour of a constitutional right to communication as necessary. The lack of a free and open flow of communication, and therefore of ideas, is nowhere more starkly illuminated than by the failure to provide deaf and hard-of-hearing children with teachers who can communicate directly and proficiently with them, or in the absence of such, with effective interpreters when the classroom teacher possesses insufficient language skills.

Kiyaga and Moores (2003) posit that the challenges facing educators of deaf children in sub-Saharan Africa are similar to those faced by other developing countries trying to establish appropriate services for children identified as disabled. Kiyaga and Moores (2003) argue that given the population, cultural and language diversity of sub-Saharan Africa, it is legitimate to grant exceptions to any generalisations made about any aspect of the sub-continent. Beliefs about deafness in African societies range from acceptance and protection to rejection, including the ultimate extreme: infanticide. In other cases, cultural practices may result in the deaf child being hidden from public view because of familial shame over having a "handicapped" child who may bring misfortune upon the family. Such beliefs can lead to abuse, neglect, and abandonment with a deaf children's potential to contribute to the development of African nations summarily being dismissed as a result. Naniwe (1994), for example, in reporting on a case in Rwanda and cited in Kiyaga & Moores (2003: 88), quoted a mother of a 34-year-old deaf woman as saying: "Do you think I consider my daughter to be like other children? Other daughters of her age already have three, four, or even five children. And her, what is she? Always dragging next to me, she will never get married: she will never be able to."

Ladd (2005: 12) emphasises that "born deaf, sign-language-using people have for the past two centuries been placed within a succession of extremely constructed models, notably the traditional 'medical' or pathological model. This perceives them as primarily as biologically deficient beings in need of cures or charity to be successfully assimilated into society." This model led parents and educators alike to rely on medical professionals for information on deaf children, with a concomitant negative attitude to sign language and deafness in general. The approach of medicine is to address deafness as a physical defect to be approached in such a way so as to enable hearing and spoken language as the only means for achieving normalcy.

According to Mann and Printz (2006: 357), a likely reason for the lack of empirical research on deaf educational professionals' perceptions of sign language assessment tests is the varying degree of sign language proficiency deaf children show as a result of their exposure to different forms of sign language input (e.g. natural sign language vs. pedagogical sign systems). The majority of the German educators of the deaf who responded to the survey expressed a need for consistent assessment and, in particular, for instruments designed to evaluate mastery of specific linguistic features of sign language. The educators particularly stressed the significance of assessment tools designed specifically for children who acquire a natural sign language as a first language.

Writing on language attitudes towards Australian Sign Language, Napier, Leigh and Nann (2007) submit that, as a consequence of wider recognition and acceptance of sign languages in Australia and elsewhere, attitudes towards these languages have changed and become more positive. Positive attitudes towards sign languages have had a major impact on wider community interest in learning sign language. In many countries sign language learning programmes have been established at tertiary education colleges and universities. Regardless of the circumstances within which a sign language is introduced into an educational programme for deaf children, the consequences of that introduction include the obvious need for parents and significant others in the child's immediate environment to learn to communicate in the language. Nevertheless, formal systems, and ultimately college and university teacher training

programmes, have not fully addressed issues related to the teaching of pre-kindergarten through Grade 12 deaf and hard of hearing students. Audism, specifically, affects teacher preparation and teaching practices by impeding student achievement through low expectations; emphasising English over ASL in instruction; tolerating poor ASL skills; and sustaining a field dominated by hearing researchers, administrators and teachers. As with other cultural minorities and oppressed groups – e.g. inner-city students or students with low socio-economic status – teachers' low expectations of deaf children lead to lower levels of academic performance and low self-esteem. Audism leads educators who have been trained to think of deaf children as handicapped or disabled to lower their educational expectations for deaf children. Research has indicated that teachers often have low expectations of deaf children and view them as unable or slow to learn (Woodward 1982, cited in Napier *et al.* 2007: 303)original.

Further, according to Napier *et al*. (2007: 303) many Deaf individuals write of a different experience. For example, Bahan (as cited in Wilcox 1989) proclaimed that it was the hearing world that told deaf individuals they were handicapped or disabled. In turn, this encouraged deaf children to believe they were handicapped and disabled in the eyes of the majority of hearing people. The Deaf community, and ASL, teacher educators and teachers have continued to look upon deaf people from an audist or pathological point of view. This view, combined with the overriding American perspective of the superiority of the English language, casts ASL as an inferior language, if considered a language at all. For example, instead of focusing lessons on history, science, or math, teachers often interrupt deaf students' subject-matter instruction and focus on improving speech pronunciation. Historically, throughout their years of schooling the quality of classroom discourse for deaf students has rarely included continuous and effortless communication. To facilitate effective educational opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing children, educational reform is needed that views ASL as having equal status with English, and Deaf culture as a valid part of the American, or indeed the global, culture and that provides the foundational learning necessary to implement these beliefs in the classroom. Many teachers of deaf children who are not fluent ASL users do not know the difference between ASL and English-based sign systems, for example. In addition, the privileging of English

over ASL causes many teachers to change ASL from a rich fully formed language to a manually coded version of English. This approach provides a potential means of surmounting the linguistic and educational barriers that are faced by deaf and hard of hearing children, and establishes a bilingual perspective (Johnson *et al.* 1989, cited in Napier *et al*. 2007). Nover (1995) found that the typical deaf education teacher preparation programme did not provide the opportunity for students to gain knowledge about theories supporting ESL, bilingual education, multicultural education within the Deaf community, and ASL linguistics (Napier *et al.* 2007: 304–305).

According to Myers and Fernandes (2009: 33), early twentieth-century linguists believed that speech was necessary to language as well, and therefore that deaf people without speech were without language. As such, deaf people were looked upon as defective and subhuman, a situation that researchers on sign language, psycholinguists, neurolinguists, and others have successfully endeavoured to change. Moreover, the work that went into establishing American Sign Language as a recognised language also assisted in establishing the equal humanity of deaf people as neither more nor less human than any other person (Stokoe 1960).

The preceding overview of attitudes towards deaf education points out an apparent need for more in-depth research into attitudes towards deaf education. Such efforts should include studies with larger and more diverse samples. The study reported in this paper is representative of such an initiative. Studies on attitudes on Deaf education in sub-Saharan Africa are rare. The case is no different within the South African setting.

4. A Historical Overview of Deaf Education in Europe, America, Other Parts of the World and South Africa

It appears that communication with and by the Deaf only comes into sharp focus when education of the Deaf is considered. The earliest recorded history of the education of the Deaf dates back to the 16th century, as briefly referred to earlier. In Spain children of noble families

were placed under the auspices of Pedro Ponce de Leon, a monk *cum* teacher, to acquire speech before they could legally claim their inheritance (cf. Evans 1982). Speech, therefore, was the focus not only as a vehicle of communication, but as a precondition to wealth (inheritance) and therefore also social standing. Parents tried to ensure their Deaf child a legal avenue under which to inherit their wealth. In 1620 Juan Pablo Bonet published *Simplification of the letters of the alphabet* to be used as a method of teaching the deaf-mute to speak. In his book he proposed that finger-spelling could be used by members of the family to communicate with young deaf children. This is another marker of the beginning of the oral (speech) vs. manual (signed language) controversy.

The controversy was sparked off when the first public school for the Deaf was established by the Abbé de l'Epée in Paris in 1760 (cf. Lane *et al*. 1996). The educational approach in this school, in contrast to the Spanish approach mentioned above, used signed language to teach. The Abbé de l'Epée's school became the cradle for Western Deaf education. Most of the signed languages in the Western world today, including American Sign Language (ASL), trace their roots back to old French Signed Language (FSL) (Lane et al 1996). This method of communication used by the Abbé became known as the "French method" and it gradually spread across the Western world. A Deaf Frenchman, Laurent Clerc, accompanied Thomas Gallaudet home to the USA. Gallaudet was a hearing American priest who had travelled to Europe in search of a method to teach the Deaf. He ended up at the Abbé de l'Epée's school and on his return to America an asylum for the Deaf, later known as the American School for the Deaf, was built in 1871 in Connecticut. Meanwhile, the oral method dating from the 16th century and used by Pedro Ponce de Leone to teach deaf children to speak, read and write, simultaneously also gained a foothold in the Western world. This method became known as the "German method" when Samuel Heineicke adopted and developed it to the point of institutionalisation in Germany by 1760.

The institutionalisation of oralism in Europe, mostly in Germany and England, was further entrenched when the now infamous Milan International Conference on Deaf Education gave it prominence in 1880. At this conference a resolution was passed that unequivocally stated that

the Deaf must be taught by using the oral method only (cf. Quigley & Paul 1984). The conference was attended by 164 delegates, all of them hearing, seven-eighths of whom were from Italy and France. All but the Americans voted for the resolution, thus confirming the subsequent domination of oral over SL instruction, and by default disbarring the minority signed language from all social and education situations as a viable alternative to Deaf communication: (Lane et al 1996: 61)

1. The Convention, considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs, for restoring deaf-mutes to social life [and] for giving them greater facility of language, declared that the method of articulation should have preference over that of signs in the instruction and education of the deaf and dumb;

2. Considering that the simultaneous use of signs and speech has the disadvantage of injuring speech and lip-reading and precision of ideas, the convention declared that the pure oral methods ought to be preferred.

The poignant implications of the above resolutions are best illustrated by the fact that in the closing moments of the Congress, the special French representative would cry from the podium, "*Vive la parole*" ["Long live speech"] (Lane *et al*. 1996: 61).

From this point on and given the formalisation of the initiative, the notion of the superiority of the oral method over manualism (sign language) spread rapidly to the rest of the world. In third-world countries, especially on the continent of Africa, missionaries from the Western world came to establish schools for the Deaf and with them came the enthusiasm for oralism (Akach 1988, Aarons & Akach 1998a 1998b, 1999, 2002, Aarons, 1996, 1999). Oralism was also boosted by several developments in technology such as the discovery of the telephone (which led to the development of amplification) by Alexander Graham Bell; the development of an audiometer used for the measurement of auditory acuity; and the discovery and the development of sophisticated hearing aids for amplification of speech (Evans 1982).

In the 1950s, receiving little attention from the proponents of oralism, a scientific study into the nature and structure of signed language was underway in the USA. When in 1960 William Stokoe published his research findings regarding ASL (1960), the controversy between oralism and manualism was renewed. Stokoe's study brought about the winds of change. A quarter of a century later marked changes appeared in the attitudes of educators towards signed language. This was backed by a vast amount of psycholinguistic research conducted within the same period (cf. Quigley & Paul 1984). It was nevertheless an uphill struggle for the manualists to convincingly prove that signed languages were in fact fully fledged languages. Although this had been demonstrated by linguists, psychologists and educators, inter alia Friedman (1977), Klima & Bellungi (1979), Siple (1978), Stokoe (1960), and Wilbur (1979), the proponents of oralism in Deaf education were not yet convinced and would not yield. It should be noted that at this point oralists held the balance of power in schools for the Deaf and in formal government structures governing educational policy. This is to a great extent still the case worldwide where parents agree to their deaf infants being implanted with an artificial cochlea (Cochlear implant) in the belief that this will enable the children to develop speech naturally. The great expectation of the 1950s' technologies, which were never realised (Evans 1982), have not deterred parents of Deaf children from searching for technological solutions to deafness with the goal of acquiring speech irrespective of deafness.

The partial acceptance of signed language in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s by the educators of the Deaf in many parts of the world saw the gradual emergence of what can only be described as an unnatural communication with the Deaf. The method became known variously as Simultaneous Communication (SimCom), Signed Exact English (SEE)[9], Total Communication (TC) and Manually Coded English (MCE). Whatever the name this method of communication acquired, it constituted an attempt to sign and speak at the same time. Essentially, the oralists, who partially accepted manual communication, asserted that if you "sign", then you must "speak" as well. This supposedly catered for the partially deaf, who had some residual hearing (that is, enough to hear some speech) and the hearing who could not sign. According to Stokoe

[9] SEE (Signed Exact English) was one of the contrived systems among others that were created by hearing people to put English on hands. These systems have been variously known as Manually Coded English (MCE).

(1960) and many who followed him, signed language is independent of spoken language. The compromise, speaking and signing simultaneously, made for a “no language” as signing and speaking at the same time meant that the user obeyed the grammar of neither language (neither the spoken nor the signed).

Turning to the South African setting, the history of Deaf education in South Africa by Irish missionaries can be traced to 1863 when the first school for the Deaf was established in the Western Cape, years before the Milan Conference and its preferencing of the oral method to the exclusion of signed language. The Irish Dominican Order, under the leadership of Bishop Grimley (who established and started teaching at the school for the Deaf in Cape Town) taught by means of the medium of signed language. The Dominican sisters were from Ireland and therefore most probably used Irish Sign Language (ISL). Proof of this may be in the fact that the remnants of Irish signs, especially their unique finger-spelling configurations, are still to be found in the Western Cape (Aarons & Akach 2002). By the time of the 1904 census, the Dominican Grimley Institute in Cape Town (also known as St Mary’s) still embraced a policy of manualism in the school.

The Dutch Reformed Church subsequently established a school for the Deaf and Blind at Worcester in Western Cape SA in 1881. Different from the Grimley approach, a combined speaking and signing method was used, as reported in the census report of 1904 (Aarons & Akach 2002). With the refinement of the Apartheid policy by the Nationalist Government by 1953, schools for the Deaf mushroomed in the areas demarcated for particular ethnic (language) and racial groups in South Africa. The schools were built for Deaf pupils from Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Setswana and other spoken language backgrounds in the belief that the Deaf could be taught to speak through the oral method. Mainly in the black schools for the Deaf, a system of signs, invented in Britain and known as the Paget-Gorman System was introduced. The teachers and the pupils were instructed to speak and simultaneously use the Paget-Gorman signs. This system was not a language but a set of invented signs based on unnatural hand-shape permutations and lacking a grammar at any level (Aarons & Akach 2002). Using the

Piaget Gorman System in combination with speaking came to be known in Deaf education in South Africa as "Total Communication" but had, in fact, little positive communicative outcomes. In practice the pupils at these residential schools for the black Deaf, left largely to their own devices and the absence of a viable communication alternative, developed their own signed language used outside the classroom. In the schools for white deaf pupils oral method (speech) was preferred over manual communication method.

In post-1994 democratic South Africa, the status quo in Deaf education described above was maintained. According to the Deaf Federation of South Africa (DEAFSA), there are approximately 500 000 users of SASL in South Africa (cf. Akach & Morgan 1999). As mentioned earlier, the South African *Constitution, Act no. 108 of 1996,* recognises and accords official status to eleven official spoken languages. Although SASL is not one of the official languages, it is mentioned in the Constitution as one of the languages that must be promoted and developed by the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB), a body enacted by an Act of Parliament (*Act 59 of 1995, amended in 1999*) to oversee and maintain multilingualism in South Africa. For ongoing development and use of these languages, PANSALB must create favourable and conducive conditions (Constitution of SA, section 6(5)). The *South African Schools Act, no. 84 of 1996*, recognises SASL as an official language for educational purposes.

Today it is considered accepted and sound educational practice for learners to be educated through the medium of their first language, rather than a second language (cf. Cummins 1989; 1996). As this practice is not in place, the average reading age of Deaf adults in South Africa still stands at approximately fourth-grade level (Aarons & Akach 1998; Aarons & Reynolds, 2003; Aarons & Akach 1999). As mentioned above, prior to the *South African Schools Act*, education of the Deaf – if they attended school at all – was conducted either orally (using lip-reading and speech training) or using a combination of speech and hand signs (inappropriately referred to as "Total Communication"). Both these methods have been shown, internationally and locally, to fail woefully on several counts (cf. Ahlgren 1982; Prinz & Strong 1998; Drasgow 1993; Johnson, Liddle & Erting 1989; Svartholm, 1994; 1995; Aarons & Akach 1998a). This has resulted

in, first of all, the Deaf school leaver failing to learn to speak a spoken language; secondly, acquiring only partial literacy, if any; and thirdly, achieving an entirely unsuccessful general education owing to the resultant limited communication and complete lack of access to the content of instruction. Deaf adults were therefore underprepared to engage in any productive way with the economy of the country, and were often economically dependent on disability grants and other funded schemes (Aarons & Akach 1999). This state of affairs, especially as regards partial literacy, is attested to by the number of Deaf adults who joined a project in 1999 which investigated the acquisition of written English as a second language by Deaf adults who used South African Sign Language as their first language, having all gone through the school system and leaving with a low reading level of about grade 4 (cf. Glaser & Aarons 2002).

Pre-research observation at the schools investigated in this study tells us that the teachers think they use a signed language in the classroom, while in actual fact they use speech and some signs (that is, a form of "Total Communication"). If the South African Schools Act (Act no 84 of 1996) is properly enforced, we might ask the question how it is that teachers who do not have competence and fluency in signing skills are tasked with teaching in the schools for the Deaf. Questions also need to be asked as to why the South African Departments of Education are still condoning the employment of teachers who cannot use the language of learning laid down for a particular school. Further questions need to be asked about whether the teachers and the Department of Education are not violating the Deaf learners' constitutional and language rights by denying them access to education in the only language they know or have access to.

5. Results and Discussion

The majority of the teachers who responded were female (65,1%). About half of the respondents were between 41–50 years of age (cf. Table 1):

Table 1. Distribution of teachers by age

Age/years	Number=n	Percentage
20-30	5	11,6
31-40	5	11,6

41-50	22	51,2
Over 50	6	14,0
No Response	5	11,6
Total	43	100

N-R: Non-Response

Most of the teachers in the sample are very experienced, with the majority (76,8%) having at least ten years' or more teaching experience. Most are well qualified, with 72,1% of the teachers holding a qualification equivalent to or above a diploma, meaning that they are qualified to teach hearing learners. Their qualifications are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Qualifications of the teachers

Qualification	Number=n	Percentage
Teaching Certificate	8	18,6
Teaching Diploma	29	67,4
Degree	2	4,7
No Response	4	9,3
Total	43	100

The majority of the teachers (74,4%) had at least some years' experience in teaching hearing learners in mainstream schools before moving to a school for the Deaf.

Table 3. Qualifications as a teacher of the Deaf

Qualification	Number=n	Percentage
Teaching Certificate	10	23,3
Teaching Diploma	5	11,6
Degree	0	0
No Response	28	65,1
Total	43	100

There was a high non-response rate to the question of whether the teachers had additional training before joining a school for the Deaf. This result is most likely because the teachers did

not have any such formal qualifications to teach the Deaf. This becomes even more evident when one compares Tables 3 and 4.

Table 4: Distribution of teachers' experience since training to teach the Deaf

Time since training to teach deaf	Number=n	Percentage
0-10 years	9	20,9
11-20 years	11	25,6
Above	3	7,0
No Response	20	46,5
Total	43	100

Table 3, together with Table 4, suggests that some teachers have undergone a form of training in teaching the Deaf without necessarily achieving a qualification, as indicated in Table 3. Of those who trained as teachers for the Deaf, the majority (41,9%) have a diploma but a similar percentage seems to have no formal qualification. Most of those who responded have more than ten years' experience in teaching at a school for the Deaf, irrespective of qualification or non-qualification. Asked at which institution they received their training and/or qualifications, 86,0% did not respond, giving rise to the speculation that the 34,9% who gained any kind of qualifications as shown in Table 3, gained theirs by correspondence (distance) education. The reasons why they did not give the name of the institution at which they gained their qualifications can only be speculated upon. When asked whether they wanted to pursue further studies in Deaf education, 60,5% indicated their intention and/or desire to further their education in this area.

Asked which medium of instruction they used in teaching the Deaf learners, 97% of the respondents said they used signed language, compared to 0% admitting to oralism and 2,3% who did not respond. As a follow-up to the question on medium of instruction, those who used oralism were asked if they used a signed language to clarify a point that was not understood through oralism only. The responses are encapsulated in Table 5:

Table 5: Signed language used to clarify what is not understood through oralism or speech only

Used signed language	Number=n	Percentage
Yes	5	11,6
No	3	7,0
No Response	35	81,4
Total	43	100

On the question as to whether they used signed language to clarify what was not understood, while using oralism or speech only, 11,6% claimed they followed up in signed language. The majority did not respond, 81,4% therefore perhaps denying using speech by default. The researchers cannot speculate as to why they were unsure. Since the belief that signed language is universal cannot be ruled out, they were asked which signed language they used and the majority (93,0%) clearly stated SASL. Closely related to this, the teachers were asked about the length of their formal training in using SASL. The majority (67,4%) gave the same number of years they had taught in schools for the Deaf and 32,6% did not respond (Table 6).

Table 6: Duration (in years) learning SL

Duration	Number=n	Percentage
1–10	14	32,6
11–20	13	30,2
21–40	2	4,6
No Response	14	32,6
Total	43	100

Table 4's 76,8% who had at least 10 years of experience in teaching the Deaf roughly concurs with the 66,9% in Table 6 who indicated the duration of their teaching at a school for the Deaf as the time it took them to learn SASL. This tends to confirm that none of the teachers in this sample had any formal SASL training.

Table 7: Teachers' self-rating of fluency/skill in SASL

Fluency/Skill	Number=n	Percentage
Very fluent/skilled	1	2,3
Fluent/skilled	8	18,6
Satisfactory	30	69,8
Poor	4	9,3
Total	43	100

According to Table 7, therefore, the majority of teachers rated themselves as having satisfactory fluency in SASL.

Asked what kind of communication mode the learners used outside the classroom, the majority (79,1%) indicated SASL as shown in Table 8:

Table 8: Mode of communication learners used outside of classroom

Mode of communication	Number	Percentage
SASL	34	79,1
Signed Exact English	1	2,3
Signed Sesotho	1	2,3
Total Communication	0	0
No Response	7	16,3
Total	43	100

Closely related to the information in Table 8 were the answers to the question about whether the learners used Manually Coded English (MCE) (spoken language). The responses were enlightening, as indicated by Table 9.

Table 9: Use of other communication methods (MCEs)

Use of MCE	Number = n	Percentage
Yes	10	23,3
No	18	23,3
No Response	15	34,8
Total	43	100

Signed Exact English, Signed Sotho and Total Communication are categorised as Manually Coded Languages (MCL) commonly known as Manually Coded English (MCE). Therefore, the discrepancy between the responses in Table 8 and Table 9 can only be attributed to the teachers' understanding or misunderstanding of the terms used. In cases where the teachers think learners cannot lip-read, 39,5% said they wrote the word on the blackboard, 30,2% said they finger-spelled the word, 14,0% showed the word from the book, while 16,3% did not respond. Lip-reading is closely connected to oralism which the majority of the teachers (97,7%) said they did not use as medium of instruction. 83,7% of the teachers indicated that they take alternative measures when the learners cannot lip-read. In sharp contrast, when the learners do not understand a sign, the majority (72,1%) of the teachers say that they explain the "sign" by using SASL itself.

Table 10: What the teachers do when a 'sign' is not understood

Action when sign is not understood	Number = n	Percentage
Fingerspell	6	14
Write	6	14
Signed Sesotho	1	2,3
Explain	31	72
Total	43	100

The two schools which were the focus of this study run from pre-primary (Reception/Grade 0) to Grade 8. The teachers were asked where the learners went after they left the school. Their responses are reflected in Table 11.

Table 11: Where the learners go to after school

Proceed to:	Number = n	Percentage
Vocational school (trade)	8	18,6
High School	0	0
Technikon	2	4,7
College	2	4,7
University	1	2,3
Home	27	62,7
No Response	7	16,3
Total	43	100

The majority (62,7%) of teachers believe that learners to return to their homes after completing Grade 8. This indicates the limited expectation of the teachers for the learners. It might also show that teachers understand and acknowledge the actual situation, with no nod to unrealistic expectations. Given the low reading age of Deaf school leavers already mentioned earlier, it may be that such semi-literacy to illiteracy contributes largely to the responses on Table 12. Here the respondents were asked how they would rank reading, writing and speech for their learners. The majority of the teachers (67,4%) ranked reading as the most important of the three and therefore the priority in educating their learners.

Table 12: The most important aspect of education to be achieved as perceived by the teachers

Aspect of Education	Number	Percentage
Reading	29	67,4
Writing	11	25,6
Speech	0	0
College	2	4,7
No Response	3	7,0
Total	43	100

When the teachers were asked about the qualifications learners attained after levels of education higher than primary (or any other institutions), the majority (69,7%) responded that learners attained technical (known as N) courses from level I-V.

Table 13: Highest qualification attained by Deaf learners when they leave school according to teachers

Level	Number = n	Percentage
N I	1	2,3
N II	7	16,3
N III	0	0
N IV	21	48,8
N V	1	2,3
Diploma	2	4,7
No Response	7	16,3
Total	43	100

According to the teachers in this sample, the highest level of education that the Deaf learner could achieve is vocational training (trade). Table 13, compared to Table 11, indicates that teachers tend to believe that even when the Deaf attain the qualifications as in Table 12, they still return home thereafter. If these perceptions are accurate, then this is a pointer to the extent to which even the qualified Deaf school leaver is discriminated against when it comes to finding employment in the adult workforce.

Even though according to their answers, the teachers think the Deaf should only use signed language to communicate and that they (the teachers) too should use signed language, they still think amplification of sound/speech by a hearing aid helps in the acquisition of speech. The foregoing shows a contradiction between acquisition of signed language which is the teachers priority and speech development which is their convert priority. In general, 51,2% believe amplification does not help. However, asked whether it helps specific medically labelled categories or degrees of deafness, 65% think that amplification helps the Hard of Hearing, 47% say it helps the partially deaf to some extent and none of the teachers thinks it helps the profoundly deaf. Given that the majority of teachers indicated they used signed language only, the responses here are startling. It seems the teachers want to be politically correct, if not constitutionally correct, by implying loyalty to SASL, even if in reality they don't use SASL in teaching, thereby largely confusing the issue. This is a good example of the difference between perceptions and facts.

Table 14: Distribution of teachers' attitude towards the Deaf learners and their language

NB: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Undecided; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree.

		SA	A	U	D	SD	N-R	Total
1.	The Deaf must learn to speak to survive in a hearing world.	2,3	2,3	7,0	23,3	60,5	4,6	43
2.	Oral method is the easiest way to teach the Deaf.	2,3	0	4,7	23,3	62,7	7,0	43
3.	Signed language is very easy to use in teaching the Deaf.	37,2	27,9	0	4,7	9,3	20,9	43

4.	The Deaf must have speech in order to proceed to high school	2,3	9,3	7,0	34,9	41.8	4.7	43
5.	Signed language is very easy to learn.	4.7	16.2	4.7	46.5	23.2	4.7	43
6.	The Deaf have a culture, values, customs and a language (signed language).	60,5	27,8	0	2,3	4,7	4,7	43
7.	Signed language is the first language of the Deaf.	86,0	9,2	0	0	2,3	2,3	43
8.	Signed language is based on cultural values of the Deaf.	51,3	34,2	7,0	2,6	0	4,9	43
9.	The Deaf should be taught other spoken language besides English/ Afrikaans.	4,7	27,9	11,6	18,6	30,2	7,0	43
10.	The Deaf should go for N courses only.	4,7	4,7	11,5	46,5	27,9	4,7	43
11.	The Deaf should have unlimited education like their hearing peers.	32,6	44,2	2,2	7,0	9,3	4,7	43
12.	Signed language as opposed to oralism can uplift academic achievements.	41,9	32,6	11,5	4,7	2,3	7,0	43
13.	The Deaf use speech a lot when communicating with the hearing people.	4,7	11,6	4,6	30,2	41,9	7,0	43
14.	The Deaf use speech amongst themselves.	7,0	9,3	2,3	23,3	55,8	2,3	43
15.	SASL is easily understood by the Deaf in South Africa.	53,5	37,2	2,3	2,3	0	4,7	43
16.	Signed Exact English/Afrikaans/Sotho is better than SASL.	7,0	2,3	11,6	32,6	37,2	9,3	43
17.	SASL has a limited vocabulary, so it cannot be used in learning situations	2,3	4,7	16,3	37,1	32,6	7,0	43
18.	Signed Exact English/Afrikaans/Sotho is rich in vocabulary, so it is the only way the Deaf can achieve higher education.	4,7	11,6	18,6	23,3	34,8	7,0	43
19.	The Deaf use Signed Exact English/ Afrikaans/Sotho amongst themselves.	4,3	11,6	4,7	25,7	46,7	7,0	100
20.	At a distance, signed language is the best communication method to use.	27,9	23,3	14,0	20,8	7,0	7,0	100
21.	The oral method is only useful in a one-to-one situation or in a classroom of 12 Deaf.	0	9,3	7,0	30,2	46,5	7,0	100
22.	Distance can affect the movement of the lips from being read.	0	9,3	7,0	30,2	46,5	7,0	100
23.	Signed language is the best language for the Deaf.	67,4	23,3	0	2,3	2,3	4,7	100
24.	Signed language is a language just like any spoken language with the linguistic rules that go with it.	51,2	27,8	4,7	7,0	2,3	7,0	100
25.	Congenitally deaf, born deaf and pre-lingual deaf should be taught in signed language.	58,1	34,9	0	0	0	7,0	100
26.	Post-lingually deaf, partially deaf and hard of hearing should use speech only.	2,3	9,3	9,3	48,8	23,3	7,0	100

27.	Signed language should be one of the official languages in South Africa.	65,1	30,2	0	0	0	4,7	100
28.	The Deaf should acquire lip-reading skills in schools for the Deaf and then proceed to high school with the hearing peers.	2,3	16,3	9,3	34,9	30,2	7,0	100
29.	Teachers' training curriculum should include signed language.	53,5	32,5	4,7	2,3	2,3	4,7	100
30.	Speech and signed language should be used at the same time	4,7	14,0	7,0	27,9	41,7	4,7	100
31.	Parents of deaf children should use signed language with their children.	65,1	30,1	0	0	0	4,7	100

The teachers surveyed seem to have a positive attitude towards the deaf pupils they teach regarding their language, signed language, and level of expectation in view of level of education. 95,3% agree that SASL is the first language of the Deaf (Statement 7) and in support of this they urge the parents to learn and use SASL at home with a similar margin (95,3%) (Statement 31). 65,1% agree that signed language is easy to use in teaching (Statement 3) but at the same time contradict this by disagreeing that it's easy to learn by almost the same percentage (69,8%) – see Statement 5. About 74,5% seem to think that SASL can enable deaf learners to achieve higher levels of education (Statement 12). This is in accord with Statement 11 whereby the respondents agree by a margin of 76,8% that the Deaf should have unlimited education as do their hearing counterparts.

There seems to be general agreement (79,0%) that signed language is a language like any language with grammar and linguistic rules (Statement 24). This is further supported by the majority agreeing that SASL should be one of the official languages of South Africa (95,3%) as opposed to its current status of being recognised only for development and official only for educational purposes (see Statement 27). To cap the overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward Deaf learners and their language, 86,1% agree that signed language should be incorporated within the teacher training curriculum in South African colleges of teacher education or faculties of education of universities (Statement 29). This statement provides a stark contrast to the current status quo where teachers are trained and posted to the schools of the Deaf without being linguistically equipped to communicate with the deaf learner, save for the

purposes of imparting knowledge, which they quite rightfully agree can only be achieved with the use of signed language in which they are not formally trained. Most of the teachers (88,4%) agreed that the Deaf have a culture of their own (Statement 6) and 85,2% agreed that SASL is based on the cultural values of the Deaf (Statement 8). For Statement 15, 90,7% agreed that SASL is easily understood by the Deaf in South Africa. The respondents agreed that SASL is the best method of communication at close range and also at a distance from the interlocutor, 65,2% see (Statement 20) and at the same time, 90,7% agreed that signed language is the best language for the Deaf (Statement 23).

In contrast to the positive attitude towards SASL in teaching, in general communication and culture of the Deaf, oralism (speech) was clearly relegated to the negative side by the respondents. On Statement 1, namely that the Deaf need speech only to survive in the hearing world, 83,8% disagreed. They also disagreed (86,1%) with Statement 2, namely that oralism is the easiest way to teach the Deaf. In Statement 4, they disagreed with the belief that speech is the key to success in the Deaf learners' life. This is in agreement with Statement 28 in which 65,1% disagreed that the acquisition of lip-reading skills is a prerequisite for admittance to secondary education. Likewise, they disagreed that speech is the key to secondary school admittance (Statement 4). In contrast, 48,8% disagreed that Deaf learners should be taught other spoken languages besides Afrikaans and English (Statement 9). Speculation ensued with the foregoing Statement 9 as to whether this is incongruent with the general belief that indigenous black languages cannot be used at institutions of learning, especially at institutions of higher learning. However, the belief that SASL may be used under such circumstances was supported by 69,7% (Statement 17). Statements 16 (69,8%), 18 (58,2%,), 19 (72%) and 30 (69,8%), all put to rest the belief that Signed Exact Spoken languages, e.g. Total Communication and Manually Coded Languages are to be considered better or superior to signed language. There was agreement (86%) that irrespective of the degree of hearing loss and the onset of deafness, SASL should be used (Statement 25) and 72,1% for Statement 26.

Oralism, just like other unnatural communication modes, was summarily dismissed by the respondents. In Statement 2, they disagreed that oralism is the best (86,1%) educational method. In Statement 13, 72,1% disagreed that the Deaf use speech when communicating with hearing people. In Statement 14, 79,1% disagreed that the Deaf use speech amongst themselves. Statement 21 reflected 76,7% as disagreeing that oralism is only useful in a one-to-one situation or in a classroom with a maximum of twelve Deaf learners. Statement 22, however, is in sharp contrast to Statement 21; the respondents agree that lips can be read from a distance (76,7%) although having agreed that the same is impossible even in a one-to-one situation.

It is important to recall that one of the objective of this study was to discover what kind of communication method was used to communicate with deaf learners for purposes of teaching. Furthermore, it was of interest whether the communication used led to teachers to predict a level of education for their learners and by extension, occupation and/or professional career. The study also set out to find out what attitudes the teachers had towards different communication methods in the teaching of the Deaf.

Most teachers stated that they used a signed language and when asked for particulars, they indicated the use of South African Sign Language (SASL). This entirely contradicts the basis on which the need for study was based. Factually, in the researcher's opinion, despite their statements to the contrary, these teachers do not use SASL in the classroom. The absence of signing in the classroom is evidenced by an entirely different evaluation carried out by Aarons, Akach and Morgan (2002) at one of the schools (Thiboloha school for the Deaf) in this study. The evaluation was commissioned by the principal of the school after the teachers of the same school had petitioned the Department of Education to expand the school to accommodate higher grades (secondary school)., Akach, Aarons and Morgan (2002) found little evidence for quality teaching within the lower grades to warrant any expansion to higher grades. Amongst other things, the Thiboloha evaluation found that the teachers were not using SASL as a medium of instruction in the classroom, let alone teaching it as a school subject. The learners'

performance and their complaints about not being taught accordingly confirmed these findings. Subsequent to the study, and as an act of desperation, the learners of the same school in 2002 locked the educators/teachers out of the school and only allowed them back into the school once a promise had been extracted that they would learn to sign and improve their signing skills. The limited improvement on the part of the teachers is indicated in this study by the teachers (69,8%) indicating their signing skills as satisfactory at most (Table 7) and yet it was not even satisfactory. Had the teachers' self-rating of their skills been higher than satisfactory, this would have been questionable. Teachers at both schools (Bartemia and Thiboloha) have had no formal training in SASL. Table 6 shows very clearly that the teachers thought they learned SL and attained what they themselves thought were satisfactory rating on the job. This is in spite of the fact that the teachers are adequately qualified as teachers of the hearing and have had long experience in teaching the Deaf.

Analogous to the protest action by the learners in one school, the learners of the second school protested peacefully against the non-use of proper signed language by the teachers in their classes. In 2001-2004 there was a National Research Foundation (NRF) funded project at the school carried out by researcher (Akach to appear). The three-year research project was an attempted to implement a bilingual/bicultural teaching approach in Deaf education. This project encompassed the lower grades (Pre-grade 1 and Grade 1 when it was started in 2001 and in 2004 Grades 2 and 3). In the project the hearing teachers were trained in the use of SASL as medium of instruction, then to team teach with a Deaf classroom assistant. The success of this pilot project was such that older learners in the mid- and upper primary section of the school demanded that the same approach be applied to their classes. They wrote a protest memorandum and demanded that the memorandum be presented to the Department of Education. This was done and officials from the Department of Education came in person to consult with the teachers/educators on April 29, 2003. Emanating from that meeting a short course of about 20 hours for the teachers on the structure and use of SASL was organised and run by the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein.

These two incidents at the schools, although coincidental, clearly show that the teachers' apparent belief that their use of SASL is satisfactory is a patent fallacy. The Deaf learners, by their actions, have indicated the dire need for structured courses to assist the teachers in acquiring the necessary skills.

The current lack of educational progress of South African Deaf learners can only benefit from advanced teacher training in SASL. Deaf school leavers in SA can attain results as has been seen elsewhere in the world where the Deaf school leavers have come to flourish and aspire and achieve greater levels in education, in the US, Sweden, etc. Also in South Africa Deaf students have been seen to graduate from universities having gone through years of arduous studies. However, to date this has been the exception rather than the rule. With instruction in signed language this may become more prevalent. Recently, a teacher at a school for the Deaf moved with a group of Deaf learners to a mainstream high school for girls to interpret for them in this environment. The final progress has not been documented, but it suffices to say that the girls are not lagging behind; they are on par with their hearing peers. Without an interpreter, the mainstreaming (variously known as integration and inclusive education) of a Deaf learner as contained in the Salamanca Declaration document of 1994, would not only fail dismally in the education but represent a lost cause (Aarons & Akach 1999). Appreciating the value of sign language as medium of instruction, however, makes such integration possible.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

It is abundantly clear from the findings of this study that the subjects of this study (all teachers at two schools for the Deaf) had little knowledge as to whether they were using SASL or not. This is evidenced by the performance of their learners, most whom go home after school having no future prospects and those who still go on to study for N courses. The learners, on the other hand, know what they want from school and know that SASL offers the means to achieve this. The learners at the two schools have shown their eagerness to learn and have demanded to be taught in SASL. The abundance of teaching experience the teachers have plus

the fact that they believe they have acquired the right signed language without any structured course is detrimental to the learners. The teachers need to enrol for a proper course to appreciate the complexity of signed language and by extension realise what the learners miss. Most of the teachers (60,5%) indicated their desire and intention to study further and that should inter alia include studying of SASL.

There is need for further research to determine what is lacking in Deaf education. On a positive note, the teachers know their limitations and indicate that they are open to further study in order to better their linguistic abilities to the benefit of their deaf learners. This can be done by (i) retraining the teachers on the job (i.e. at school) with assistance of the Deaf adults being employed as classroom assistants; and (ii) making it mandatory that at teacher training facilities the graduating teachers take SASL courses for at least two years. The latter option does not necessarily prepare the trainee to be posted to school for the Deaf, but in case there is a child at a regular mainstream school, they would be in a better position to handle them.

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Paper 5

FROM POLICIES AND LAWS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SIGN LANGUAGE IN DEAF EDUCATION: WHAT WENT WRONG?

From Policies and Laws to the Implementation of Sign Language in Deaf Education: What Went Wrong?

Abstract

Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) declaration on the primacy of mother-tongue education in educational systems in a 1953 Report entitled *The use of vernacular languages in education: the report of the UNESCO meeting of specialists, 1951*, mother-tongue education has been topical in many a country's education systems. Intermittent research since 1953 has served to confirm UNESCO's premise of the primacy of mother-tongue education. Yet, despite UNESCO's declaration and empirical research that have time and again confirmed the importance of mother-tongue education, many countries continue to struggle with the implementation of mother-tongue education. The implementation of mother-tongue education for the Deaf, using sign language, has faced even greater odds. This paper offers a critique of the principles, policies and laws that have guided the implementation of mother-tongue education for the Deaf using sign language. The discussion in the paper ultimately seeks to establish the inconsistencies in the principles, policies and laws that have guided Deaf education and that have contributed to the non-implementation of mother-tongue education for the Deaf using Sign Language. The paper concludes by recommending ways in which these inconsistencies may be addressed.

Key Terms: Mother-tongue education, sign language, Deaf education, vernacular languages, UNESCO.

contents

From Policies and Laws to the Implementation of Sign Language in Deaf Education: What Went Wrong?

1. Introduction

> If one accepts the existence of Deaf culture and the legitimacy of sign language as a naturally occurring language, as suggested in the sociocultural paradigm, then there are a number of fairly important educational implications that one would need to address. Current models and practices in Deaf education by and large tend to assume and be grounded in the pathological paradigm of deafness, in which the Deaf are basically seen as deficient in significant ways when measured against a hearing norm. The acceptance of existence of Deaf culture forces us to reconsider the "normativity of hearingness" against which the Deaf are to be measured, which in turn means that the kind of educational practice where considered appropriate would look very different to much contemporary schooling. Perhaps the greatest change would be the altered status and role of sign language itself. For example, a growing number of educators of the deaf have suggested that the most appropriate approach to the education of Deaf children is one that is essentially bilingual and bicultural in nature – utilising sign language and at least one spoken language, and teaching children to function in both the Deaf and hearing worlds (Reagan, 2008: 172).

Since the 1953 UNESCO declaration on the primacy of mother tongue in educational systems in the report entitled *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education: the Report of the UNESCO Meeting of Specialists* (UN *1951*), mother-tongue education (MTE) has become a focus for many a country's education system. Intermittent research since 1953 has served to confirm UNESCO's premise of the primacy of MTE. But, despite UNESCO's declaration and the empirical research that established the importance of MTE, many countries continue to struggle with the implementation of MTE. Reagan's (2008) statement quoted above captures the dilemma that continues to characterise the implementation of sign language in Deaf education. It is important to note that this dilemma is not only attendant to the implementation of sign language in Deaf education; it is symptomatic of the dilemma attendant to the implementation of MTE in many a polity where MTE is only paid lip-service, both at policy and implementation

levels. However, the crisis of MTE is much worse for Deaf children who have sign language as their mother tongue: the failure to recognise sign language as a legitimate mother tongue or first language or primary language for the Deaf by many governments poses one of the greatest dilemmas for Deaf education.

This article presents a critique of the principles, policies and laws that have guided the implementation of MTE for the Deaf using sign language. The paper is divided into four sections. The first offers a theoretical background by reviewing selected literature on MTE in general and Deaf education in sign language in particular as it applies to the Deaf. The second section provides an overview of the historical development of Deaf education. The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the major trends in Deaf education over time. The third section considers the principles, policies and legislation that have underlined Deaf education and the fourth section provides a case study on how the principles, policies and legislation discussed in the preceding section have impacted on Deaf education in South Africa. This is followed by the conclusions reached from this study.

2. Mother-Tongue Education (MTE) for the Deaf: An Overview

As mentioned earlier, MTE has been a contentious issue in many education systems, especially in the developing world. The contention has largely been premised on the pervasive nature of ideologies that support and seek to entrench the view that a *proper* education can only be attained through the use of Western languages, often referred to as the languages of the former colonial masters. Paradoxically, it has never occurred to educators and policy makers in the developing world that in the developed world, education in Western languages in essence equals mother-tongue education. Arguments to support the use of Western languages in the education system of the developing world have been proffered and in the main they hinge on the hegemonic pervasiveness of Western ideological and technological advancement – a position that makes an education in these Western languages a precondition for participation in the emerging globalised economy. However, these arguments do not detract from the strong claim that MTE is vital for successful education.

The following select review of the literature proceeds from the general to the specific, i.e., from the importance of MTE to the importance of MTE for the Deaf through sign language.

Yadav (1992: 177) reminds the reader that, as early as 1951, at a UNESCO meeting of specialists in Paris, it was recommended that every effort should be made to provide primary education in the mother tongue, for that it is culturally, psychologically and pedagogically more appropriate to do so. The 1951 report observed that it is through the mother tongue that every human being first learns to formulate and express ideas about her/himself and about the world in which s/he lives. The UNESCO report concludes that pupils should start their schooling through the medium of their mother tongue because they understand it best and because to begin their school life in the mother tongue will make the gap between home and school as small as possible (UNESCO, 1953/1968: 691, cited in Yadav, 1992: 177) The position adopted by UNESCO found further support in the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand where some 1 500 participants from 155 nations recognised that traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have a value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development in their users. The delegates drafted a World Declaration on Education for All, which declared categorically that literacy in the mother tongue strengthens cultural identity and heritage (Yadav, 1992: 178).

Despite the above, it should be acknowledged that the discourse on MTE has not been unanimous in its support of the benefits of MTE. In a paper that considers “when mother-tongue education is not preferred”, Gupta (1997) submits that the ultimate rationale for the promotion of mother-tongue education is the empowerment of underprivileged groups. Arguments against preference for MTE are also based on matters related to empowerment, whether for groups, or for those individuals who comprise the groups. Governments choose to privilege one or more languages within a country. A privileged language is one with a special prominence either in society or in officialdom, such that knowledge of it becomes one of the gateways to power. A privileged language is usually chosen because it is the language of an overwhelming majority of the population, or of an elite group (Gupta, 1997: 496–497). This

privilege may be awarded legal recognition by allocating it the status of an official or national language, but a privileged language may also have no such designation (English in the USA is such an example, at least at present), while in some instances a designated official language may not in reality be privileged.

Gupta (1997) further submits that the political motivations of governments are crucial in determining their choice of linguistic policy. Despite the overt rhetoric, governments are not always motivated by an impartial hope in favour of the empowerment of all. For example, if the ruling party wishes to ensure that a particular ethnic group does not gain access to the power structure, it may wish to privilege a particular language and then deny access to that language through the schools. On the other hand, if a government sees itself as needing to facilitate access to all ethnic groups, its policy will be differently constituted (by privileging more than one language and/or by ensuring access to learning privileged languages). Phillipson (1992:120 and Gupta (1997: 497) makes the incisive observation that an apparently sound focus on the mother tongue as medium of education does not in itself provide a guarantee of enlightened education. Because provision of mother-tongue education has been linked (especially in Africa) with denial to access of the privileged medium of English, Africans in the peripheral English nations seem, with few exceptions, to feel that support for African languages is intended to confine them to an inferior position. From this perspective, although the imposition of an ex-colonial language, which is now the language of the elite, can be seen as a continuation of colonial dominance, the formerly colonised people should not be construed as victims (Gupta, 1997: 497).

Increasingly, there is a realisation that MTE, like many other aspects of education systems the world over, is not value free. Indeed, MTE has been identified as a site for the contestation of various ideologies. In pursuing this line of argumentation, Langman (2002: 47), for example, observes that mother-tongue education is often considered to be fundamental to the maintenance of a minority group, as well as more recently a linguistic human right. In contrast, majority populations and governing parties often consider the demand for mother-tongue

education as a potential or actual form of resistance to integration or assimilation, and hence a potential threat to the sovereignty of the state. As such, policies surrounding the maintenance or removal of mother-tongue education for minorities are often central points of contention between minorities and representatives of state power. In effect, implementation of MTE, whether there are clear majorities or clear minorities in a polity, is an ideology-laden enterprise. Pennycook (2002: 11–12) observes that whether from the point of view of a linguist's approach to language preservation, liberal concerns with the maintenance of diversity, or arguments in favour of individual and community rights, the mother tongue remains a beacon of recognition for language educators.

The notions of mother tongue and mother-tongue education are both often presented as political icons like democracy, universal education, or gender equality. Furthermore, it must be said, to the extent that an emphasis on mother-tongue rights in education and elsewhere constitutes a highly significant position against the conservative and racist attacks on bilingual education, multilingual community language use, or ethnic identity, it remains one of the most significant domains of political action for applied and educational linguistics. To resolve the tensions attendant on the discourse on mother-tongue education, Pennycook (2002: 23) therefore suggests that it is important to avoid overarching statements about the mother tongue. It is important for linguists and policy makers to work and act contextually at all times.

As is already clear from the above, the promotion of MTE can therefore be used to serve different purposes. Nowhere is this more evident than in the history of MTE in South Africa. De Klerk (2002) already observed that the struggles around languages in South Africa provide an illuminating case study on how the promotion of mother-tongue education has at various times in South African history served a range of purposes. Under apartheid, language was perceived and promoted as a core element of culture and ethnicity. Language, culture, and ethnicity became virtually coterminous. The apartheid government used this construct as shorthand when classifying, segregating, and polarising South Africans. In post-apartheid South Africa, key political parties and sociolinguists began a process of language status, corpus, and acquisition

planning, which was presented as an integral part of a vision for a multilingual, integrated, and non-racial South Africa. On the books, South Africa has a Bill of Rights that enshrines language rights, a Constitution that identifies eleven official languages, a Language-in-Education policy that promotes use of students' mother tongues in education, a Draft Language Bill, a Language Policy and Plan, and an Act that requires the establishment of a Board responsible for promoting multilingualism in various ways and advising the government on language matters. A common conceptual theme of these legal frameworks and official documents is a strong commitment to building national unity through the promotion of multilingualism, cultural diversity, and non-racialism. In the everyday public sphere, however, the hegemony of English goes largely unchallenged in South Africa (De Klerk, 2002: 30–31). This is but one indication that there is a requirement that several factors need to converge for MTE to be entrenched within the polity. In a country like South Africa where MTE still bears the connotations of an apartheid legacy, MTE is viewed with great suspicion, especially by the Black majority.

Given the majority's suspicions regarding MTE, it would not be farfetched to anticipate that with increasing globalisation, the issue of MTE would slowly drift to the periphery of discourse on education and general public policy. Interestingly however, this has not happened. The turn of the century saw a renewed interest in MTE, albeit from the perspective of multilingual education. In an education position paper, UNESCO (2003) observed that education in many countries of the world takes place in multilingual contexts. Most plurilingual societies have developed an ethos which balances and respects the use of different languages in daily life. From the perspective of these societies and of the language communities themselves, multilingualism is more a way of life than a problem to be solved. The challenge is for education systems to adapt to such complex realities and provide a quality education which takes into consideration learners' needs, whilst balancing these with social, cultural and political demands. While uniform solutions for plural societies may be both administratively and managerially preferred, such one-size-fits-all approaches disregard the risks involved both in terms of learning achievement and loss of linguistic and cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2003: 12).

On mother-tongue instruction, the UNESCO's paper posits that mother-tongue instruction generally refers to the use of the learners' mother tongue as the medium of instruction. It may also refer to the mother tongue as a subject of instruction. This is considered to be an important component of quality education, particularly in the early years. The expert view is that mother tongue should cover both the teaching *of* and the teaching *through* this language. Because of this, it is perhaps important to emphasise that the term "mother tongue" may be used in several different situations. Definitions include the following elements, as explained by UNESCO (2003:15): the language(s) that one has learnt first; the language(s) one identifies with or is identified as a native speaker of by others; the language(s) one knows best and the language(s) one uses most. "Mother tongue" may also be referred to as "primary" or "first language".

In further extending the discourse on MTE in the era of globalisation, Stroud (2003: 17–18) observes that globalisation, in the sense of a significantly different order and configuration of social, economic and political life, may carry all manner of negative implications for developing communities, such as increased marginalisation, poverty and cultural alienation. Many have looked to an extended use of indigenous local languages to provide a healthy corrective to these processes, the rationale being that, as language is a gateway to other economic, cultural and social resources, control over linguistic resources is indirectly also control over economic and social advancement in general. However, in many developing contexts, the educational use of indigenous languages is caught up in a veritable cross-swirl of local and global currents with deleterious effects on curricula, materials production, teacher training, and classroom language use as a consequence. Attempts to use mother tongue at school are often plagued by curricula skewed towards metropolitan languages; that is, languages of wider communication such as French, English and Portuguese, poor materials provision in vernacular languages, insufficient teacher training in bilingual and bicultural methodologies, and conflicts between teacher roles, institutional requirements and social identities. Taken together, all these factors predispose to an unmarked choice of a metropolitan language as the main language of daily instruction, and conspire to seriously limit the range of teaching methodologies that teachers can employ.

From the foregoing brief overview, it is evident that MTE, inasmuch as its legitimacy in education systems is by and large unchallenged, remains an elusive policy and educational goal to achieve generally. This is even more apparent when the principles of MTE are applied to the education of Deaf children in particular who have to rely on sign language as a mother tongue. As Mukhopadhyay and Sison (2006: 62) state, for hearing children the shared language is oral or spoken while for those with severe to profound hearing loss, it is self-styled gestures and/or sign language. This variation can be traced to the difference in the hearing status between these two populations of children. Hearing children can hear and hearing being one of the main senses links sound with language development, particularly language development and acquisition. Hence, their first oral or spoken language is acquired with seeming ease in the context of their experiences and environments. On the other hand, children who are deaf can hardly hear or cannot hear at all. This biological limitation hinders or entirely prevents their acquisition of spoken language. While language development for this latter group happens in ways similar to those of hearing children, starting with manual babbling and evolving into linguistic expression, such language takes the form of sign instead of speech. For these children the receptive channel of communication is visual rather than auditory. Sign emanates from visual concentration on movements and facial expressions that children can easily master compared to the tedious effort those deaf children to exert in order to hear sounds required in oral language. This is the self-styled sign system during the early development years, which eventually becomes the foundation for the natural home sign language of the child. However, many educational systems do not accommodate sign language as a mother tongue and/or as an instructional tool for the Deaf child. Often, language is equated with speech.

Reagan (2008), cited at the beginning of this paper, presents a candid overview of sign language in education with specific reference to the South African situation by contextualising it against a substantial body of international literature devoted to making both the linguistic and the educational case for the use of sign language in the education of Deaf children. The arguments he presents in favour of the use of sign language are strong ones, and include empirical

evidence related to the relative ease of acquisition of sign language for Deaf children. Such acquisition of a natural sign language by deaf children is in marked contrast to the acquisition of either a spoken language or a manual code for a spoken language for such children. Indeed, acquisition of sign language by children (deaf or hearing) parallels the normal first language acquisition process documented for hearing children. In addition, sign language can be used effectively to teach both academic content and literacy skills in the spoken language, and finally, for deaf children as for all children, early language acquisition is essential “for the continual development of cognitive skills and later acquisition of literacy skills in either a first or second language.” Underlying such arguments is a generally unarticulated view of sign language as the "natural" language of the Deaf child. There is, something of a "sleight of hand" argument here, since what most advocates of the use of sign language in Deaf education really want to argue is that the use of sign language is a matter of using the child's mother tongue. In the case of the vast majority of Deaf children (who have hearing, and thus, generally non-signing parents), sign language is not in fact, at least in a technical sense, the child's mother tongue – indeed, the question of what the mother tongue of the pre-lingual Deaf child is, is a particularly vexing and complex one. Nevertheless, while the question of what the real mother tongue of the Deaf child actually may be remains unresolved. What is quite clear is that of the available options, simply from a practical and pragmatic perspective, education in sign language does, in the view of the majority of educators of the deaf, constitute the most reasonable alternative (Reagan, 2008: 173–174).

While the use of sign language in the education of Deaf children may well make sense both educationally and linguistically, this does not mean that it is common, let alone universal, practice. For the most part, sign languages are still rarely used in formal educational settings; rather, where signing is employed, either a form of contact sign language or an artificially constructed manual sign codes for a spoken language is most likely to be utilised. In an educational environment based on a cultural model of Deafness, as articulated by Johnson *et al.* (1989) at Gallaudet University, instruction would take place through the medium of the appropriate natural sign language and the goal for all students would be functional bilingualism

in the natural sign language and the dominant spoken language (written from) of the society in which the child functions. Students would study not only the common curriculum shared by their hearing peers, but would also study the history of Deaf culture and Deaf communities in other parts of the world. Thus, the goal of such a programme would be to promote students who would truly be bilingual and bicultural, to be able to function competently and comfortably in the hearing world, while still at home in the Deaf world. Such a programme, of course, would almost certainly entail Deaf students studying together, in a setting not unlike that provided by residential schools, rather than in mainstream settings. This is an important point, since at present mainstreaming is almost universally seen as a "good thing" in educational circles: its intent, after all, is to open schools to children with disabilities and to provide a more appropriate and fulfilling education for all, both the "abled" and the "disabled", and to end the past practices of inappropriately segregating students with disabilities. In other words, mainstreaming, or "inclusive education" as it is also called, is intended to both empower students with disabilities and to expose and sensitise other students to disabilities (Lane et al 1996) These are certainly both admirable goals, but the problem for Deaf students is that mainstreaming almost inevitably means a lack of significant contact with other Deaf people, given the relatively small numbers of Deaf students in any particular geographic context. Instead of thinking about appropriate educational placement based on the "least restrictive environment", to use the popular educational phrase, we might be better off (at least in the case of the Deaf) favouring the "most enabling environment" – a subtle distinction, but nevertheless an important one. It is important to note, though, that this does not automatically rule out the inclusion of hearing students in such an educational setting. Such students would be welcome, but only with the clear understanding that such a project rests on the rejection of the dominance of hearing cultural, behavioural and linguistic norms. Further, an educational programme grounded in a cultural model of Deafness would actively encourage Deaf children to be exposed to a wide variety of Deaf adults. In fact, given the importance attached to the use of sign language and familiarity with the Deaf culture, such an educational programme would generally favour the use of Deaf teachers – a radical departure from current educational practice in most settings. Finally, control of the educational programme would rest, to a

significant extent, in the hands of the Deaf community (locally and, in the South African context, nationally), rather than in the hands of hearing experts on deafness and deaf education, as is typically the case at present (cf. Reagan, 2008: 174–175).

3. Development of Deaf Education: A Historical Perspective

Through time many approaches have been devised and/or developed to cater for the education of the Deaf. The three most prominent were the "oral method" (based on speech); "manualism" (based on the visual/signed modality); and the latter-day development that has come to be referred to as "inclusive, mainstreaming and/or integration policy" in Deaf education. These three approaches in the education of the Deaf are elaborated upon in the following subsections.

3.1. The Oral Approach to Deaf Education

The entrenchment of the oral approach to Deaf education can be traced to the "Milan Conference" of 1880 and its resolutions. Although the delegates who came from European countries (mostly Italy and France) and the United States, the stakeholders and the beneficiaries of the education discussed, the Deaf, were not invited. In fact, the Deaf were actively excluded from attending the voting session of the conference. At the conclusion of the conference a resolution was adopted in favour of "oralism" (education for the Deaf based on speech) as opposed to "manualism" (education for the Deaf based on signed language). Up to and including the time the conference was held, there were hearing and Deaf teachers in Deaf education. However, only hearing teachers and/or educators were invited to vote at the Milan Conference of 1880. Despite the lack of representation from the Deaf constituency, the policy that emanated from this conference is still being implemented in many parts of the world.

According to Lane *et al*. (1996: 61), all the 164 delegates, but the Americans, voted for the following resolutions, thereby entrenching "oralism" in Deaf education and consequently "disbarring" the minority signed language of whatever nation:

i) *The Convention, considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs, for restoring deaf-mutes to social life [and] for giving them greater facility of language, declared that the method of articulation should have preference over that of signs in the instruction and education for the deaf and dumb;*

ii) *Considering that the simultaneous use of signs and speech has the advantage of injuring speech and lip-reading and precision of ideas, the convention declares that the pure oral method ought to be preferred.*

iii) *The restoration of deaf-mutes to social life and giving them greater facility of language*.

The adaptation of these resolutions did not require much strategising for their implementation. Through these resolutions the delegates simply declared the death of signed language. This had an immediate ripple effect on the staffing of the schools. Deaf teachers were fired indiscriminately and pupils who were already "contaminated" by signed languages were quarantined. The Deaf teachers who were retained were confined to menial work at the schools (Lane et al 1996), a legacy that is still apparent in the schools for the Deaf, especially in the Third World. Except now they are not even allowed to be educated to the level of teachers because of the policy of language education.

3.2. The Manual Approach to Deaf Education

The most common answer one gets from teachers of the Deaf when one questions them on how they communicate with and teach the deaf is that they use Total Communication (TC). The variant of this name is Simultaneous Communication (SimCom). Total Communication developed in response to Stokoe's research (1960) showing that the signed language used in the USA, American Sign Language (ASL), was equal linguistically to any other human language. This for obvious reasons proved less than popular with the pure oralists. Because of the overwhelmingly scientific nature of Stokoe's findings they could nevertheless not be ignored and a compromised position was adopted in Deaf education. This was a policy of "sign and speak at the same time", otherwise known as Total Communication, (in itself a misnomer)

(Johnson et al 1989, Connor et al 2000, Moog et al 2003). Although TC has been defined as a philosophy of communication and not as a language; teachers of the Deaf, in the main, view TC as a language.

TC gave rise to the various artificially contrived codes developed to teach English and other spoken languages to the Deaf. These include Manually Coded English (MCE) and have been expanded to include Manually Coded Kiswahili, isiZulu, Dholuo, etc. MCE was and still is an attempt to map the grammar of English (Signed Exact English-SEE[10]) or any spoken language into signs this proved an impossible task: an analogy might be uttering Russian words while using the seSotho word order. However, from an administrative point of view, TC proved an easy policy to implement, in much the same way as the former oral policy. TC was easy to implement because it appealed to the proponents of "oralism" in much the same way as the Milan resolution of speech only appealed to the majority of hearing people in Deaf education. Although, in this case, there was no instructing conference as there was with oralism, TC nevertheless quickly gained popular ground as it became adopted by individuals, schools and governments in many parts of the world including South Africa (cf- Aarons & Akach 1999).

3.3. Inclusive, Mainstreaming and/or Integration Policy in Deaf education

The latter half of the 20th century saw the development of what has come to be known as inclusive, mainstreaming and/or integration policy in Deaf education. From the early 1970s onwards, this policy led to the practice of closing of schools for the Deaf in favour of educating the Deaf within regular (mainstream) schools. The United States and European countries took the lead in this. The event that fomented this movement is the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (UN 1948). This was further buttressed by the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN 1993) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO 1994), which further affirmed that "every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be

[10] SEE (Signed Exact English) was only one of the contrived systems that were created by hearing people to put English on hands. These systems collectively are known as Manually Coded English (MCE).

given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning" (cf. Aarons & Akach, 1999: 1).

The policy of mainstreaming again proved an approach that was easy to carry out without much planning or strategy as the deaf child was simply sent to the nearest school in the neighbourhood. It should be noted that while the two approaches of "oralism" and "manualism" were adopted without due consideration for the needs and the best interest of the deaf child, this approach, on the other hand, must have appealed to parents from the point of view that they would not be separated from their children who, under different educational circumstances, might have been sent away to boarding schools – a common feature of the schools for the Deaf at the time.

4. Summary

It can be posited that all three approaches shared the advantage of easy implementation. However, it is important to bear in mind that the success of any educational approach is ultimately situated in learner achievement. Evaluations of the three approaches attest to, the deaf school leaver leaving school with the reading ability of a four-year-old hearing child (cf. Aarons & Akach, 1999). In implementing oralism, speech was taught at the expense of knowledge. The teacher belaboured the articulation (and proper pronunciation) of a word such as "*table*" and by the time the learners graduated at the age of 18 (or higher, in Africa), their production of "*table*" was still unclear to the speaking and hearing society they were being prepared to enter. In any event, they were never taught to produce coherent, fluent and meaningful utterances in a spoken language, but drilled in the production of sounds and words. Their general education did not extend much beyond this drilling. TC was designed to enable the Deaf learner to read and write proper English or any of the spoken (official) language(s) of the country in which s/he lived in order to facilitate "normalcy" and a better quality of adult life by integration into the hearing world. Despite this noble vision of producing "bilinguals", many students leaving these schools where teachers laboriously used TC had questionable written

skills. A case in point is the Department of Education (Special Education Section) in Kenya which officially decreed that the policy of TC be implemented in schools of the Deaf schools in Kenya. To facilitate the implementation of this directive, a pilot school, Machakos School of the Deaf in Eastern Province of Kenya, was specifically built and completed in 1986 for this purpose (cf. Akach, 1988; Lane *et al*., 1996). This school recruited deaf learners from the then 42 schools for the Deaf in Kenya (Akach 1988). The contrived system of Signed Exact English (SEE) with American signs as contained in *Joy of Signing* by Gustason *et al.* was used (cf. Gustason *et al*., 1992; Gustason, 1988). The success or otherwise of this policy is yet to be realised and documented. Not one of the learners from that school made it to any tertiary institution and/or university (Akach 1988).

The challenge posed by the Inclusion (mainstreaming) approach is that in a majority of cases, "inclusion" turned out to be "exclusion", at least in terms of education. This approach, although not aiming for oralism from the onset, had the consequence that it entrenched oralism. This was the case in particular in scenarios where there were no interpreters in mainstream classes of 40 hearing learners including perhaps one or two deaf learners. Although the strategy assumes the Deaf learner to have a powerful hearing aid, and sit right in the centre of the front row so as to be able to lip read the teacher, the jury is still out on the success of this approach. But, in the worst scenario, observed by the author (Akach, 2001) in northern Uganda, over 70 learners were crammed into a classroom with fewer desks than pupils; therefore, with some learners sitting on the floor. Amongst the 70 learners were four profoundly Deaf learners without an interpreter. In resource-constrained environments and in environments with pervasive negative attitudes toward the Deaf (especially based on the outdated notion that the Deaf are disabled), inclusive education for Deaf learners only serves to traumatise the Deaf learner with little beneficial effect.

5. Principles, Policies and Legislation in Deaf Education

In terms of the implementation of The United Nations *Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (UN 1993), the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)

conducted a survey by questionnaire on the legislation and actual position relating to deafness in countries around the world in 1997 (WFD 1997). Of the 29 countries that responded, only two (Sweden and Slovakia) had legislation on sign language use. In seven countries (Australia, Norway, Egypt, Benin, Belize, Belarus and Togo) sign language had official status. One country confirmed sign language was the main means of communication between the Deaf and others (Venezuela) and another indicated that sign language was used as first language by the Deaf (Burkina Faso). In the other 18 countries surveyed sign language had no official status.

Questions may be asked as to how this grim picture is to be interpreted. Is this an indication of the status quo of the past, for the most part, being maintained? At the WFD's quadrennial congresses in 1987 (Finland) and 1991 (Japan), a resolution affirming the supremacy of signed language(s) over speech as a medium of communication and teaching for the Deaf was passed within the ambit of the Commission on Sign Language. For obvious reasons these resolutions do not have the impact on Deaf education that the pervasive influence of oralism had over a century ago.

WFD resolutions always include suggestions on what plan of action should be adopted to reach the proposed goals of a general policy in favour of using signed languages as medium of instruction and the teaching thereof as a school subject. Top of the list of role players, besides teacher training colleges, are universities. The universities are tasked, as institutions of higher learning, to carry out research into the linguistics of the national signed languages. This is envisaged as the only way through which signed languages can gain recognition as human languages, if not at least the status of an official language. If one looks at countries where signed languages enjoy parity of esteem with spoken languages, the prominence of university involvement is clearly evident. A good example is Stockholm University in Sweden, the first university in the world to get a professorial chair in signed language. The university had been involved in signed language research and pedagogy long before the national legislation granting sign language parity of status in Sweden in 1981.

Similarly, there are several universities in Africa that are involved in sign language research, including the University of Nairobi (since 1993). The Kenyan Sign Language Research Project was the first project between the Kenya National Association of the Deaf (KNAD) and the University of Nairobi funded by the Swedish Deaf Organisation (SDR). The University of Nairobi does not teach KSL as an academic course/subject within the mainstream university course offerings, but offers classes to interested students. In South Africa, several universities have entered into active research and teaching commitments regarding SASL in recent years (Akach & Naudé 2008). The most comprehensive programme is found at the University of Free State (UFS) where SASL has been offered as a degree course at undergraduate and postgraduate level since 1999. Interpreter training is also offered at postgraduate Diploma and Master's level. The University of Witwatersrand also offers SASL as an academic subject and an undergraduate diploma course in interpreting has been offered at this institution since 2000. The University of Stellenbosch offered a Master's degree in Signed Language Linguistics between 1996 and 2003. At a casual glance, the fact that there are four universities in Africa actively involved in the research and/or teaching of sign language might seem encouraging, with an additional university, the University of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, offering American Sign Language in MCE mode. However, with over 50 countries in Africa and the skewed distribution of the majority of these universities in South Africa, the future of sign language education on the continent looks bleak. However in 2010, the University of Ghana introduced Ghanaian Sign Language as an elective course in the Department of Linguistics.

It is important to emphasise the crucial necessity of legislation to ensure the success of Deaf education using sign languages because of the formalisation of national and institutional will. In Sweden, for example, legislation provides that parents of Deaf children be given support and be enabled to learn sign language from the time deafness is detected in a child. Teachers are given regular in-service courses to assist in the learning of sign language and those attending college are required to be fluent in sign language before being accepted to teach in a school for the deaf (Mahshie, 1995). Interpreters are provided by the government to enable the Deaf to access general social events and activities. Not much is known about Slovakia, the other

country with legislation on sign language use. In Denmark, according to a regulation by the Danish Ministry of Education, Danish Sign Language (DSL), with effect from 1992, was made part of the curriculum for all Deaf students, including those hard of hearing children placed in public schools (Mahshie, 1995).

In Uganda, there has been a visible effort by the Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) to implement the legal status of Ugandan Sign Language (USL). They have trained sign language instructors who instruct parents and members of the public in the use of USL. In schools, however, and indeed high up in the top hierarchy in the Ministry of Education and the Uganda National Institute of Special Education (UNISE), the propagation of TC continues (Akach, 2001). This is the result among other things, of the sheer lack of knowledge and interest in the difference between TC and natural Signed Language. And all this is despite the availability of relevant research material in Uganda arguing to the contrary. Mainstreaming (inclusion) as in the case of the school in northern Uganda mentioned earlier, without sign language interpreters and/or teacher(s) knowledgeable in the use of sign language is a malpractice and in fact abuse. In this kind of setting, the system has failed the Deaf learners, who learn nothing.

In South Africa, the change in the status quo initiated by the demise of Apartheid in 1994 brought a number of changes, including most importantly, the changes in linguistic human rights. In addition to the two official languages previously recognised, i.e. Afrikaans and English, formerly marginalised indigenous African Languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Sepedi and siSwati were elevated to official status (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996). This led to the present linguistic profile of South Africa where eleven official languages are recognised. Other languages, e.g. German, Hindu French, etc. (all termed as “Heritage Languages”) are also protected by the Constitution, although they are not regarded as official languages. The Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) was also established by an act of Parliament to act as overseer in order to assure that the official languages enjoy parity of esteem and are treated equitably. In terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, PANSALB must also promote and create conditions

for the development and use of the indigenous Khoi, Nama, San languages as well as South African Sign Language (*SA Constitution, Act no. 108 of 1996*). The fact that Sign Language was not given the status of an official language was a cause for great concern for the Deaf Federation of South Africa (DEAFSA) and the Deaf Community in general. The feeling was that the Deaf as a minority, language group, could not accept this. The Deaf seemed to have no choice but to use other languages. However, when *the South African Schools Act, no. 84 of 1996* recognised SASL as an official language for learning and educational purposes, this seemed to signal the necessary support because it is in education where the recognition of SASL is needed most in order to advance the plight of the Deaf, who are a linguistic minority, but not, in fact, the smallest minority in South Africa.

Another milestone in Deaf education, South Africa was the overhaul of the school curriculum from a content-based to an outcomes-based curriculum. This was supposed to have been phased in from 1998 until 2005, hence the name *Curriculum 2005 (DoE 2005)*. The fact that SASL had not been in the curriculum as a subject forced DEAFSA into action. The other languages had the old curriculum or syllabus to follow as the new curriculum was phased in. At that time (1996-8), the author was working as Director of Sign Language and Interpreter Development at DEAFSA. He put together a team in order to design the curriculum for SASL from Grades 0 to 12 using the outcomes-based format. The team consisted of teachers (Deaf and hearing), linguists and Deaf leaders. On 18 December 1997, the author and a colleague presented the first and only language curriculum written in the new outcomes based format to the Director of Further Education and Training. The immediate response was to inquire as to who had commissioned the curriculum. The design of the curriculum proved a huge proactive step for DeafSA and the Deaf community, but the lukewarm reception from the Department of Education was disappointing. That curriculum is yet to be implemented. In the meantime the status quo in language use is maintained in the 32 schools for the Deaf and 9 Units for the Deaf. No-one uses SASL because “there is no curriculum, and no training, and the teachers of the Deaf cannot sign” (Akach & Aarons 1998). A handful of teachers with signed language capability are scattered thinly across the country. They mostly work in isolation. Even when found at the

same school, lack of continuity from year to year lets them and their learners down. The TC and oral policies are still in use. The Board of Governors of the Transoranje School for the Deaf in Pretoria, for example, recently declared their school to be "an Afrikaans-medium school" (all learners are deaf). In some schools, the policy has been and remains pure oralism. The real question, given this state of affairs, then becomes, why the policy to use sign language is so difficult to adopt in an educational environment where the law not only protects it, but encourages it?

It seems that, irrespective of the progressive nature of the kind of policy in place for sign language, the historical status quo in terms of policies, oralism and/or TC are preferred. In this there is no difference between Uganda and South Africa (where sign language is supposed to enjoy constitutional protection) and Kenya, the DRC, and Sudan (where sign language has no official recognition). Additionally, the author has visited and observed the situation in classrooms in Namibia (cf. Akach, 1997), Ghana (cf. Akach & Trier, 1996; Akach, 1999), Uganda (cf. Akach, 2001), Saudi Arabia (cf. Akach, 1994) and South Africa. Everywhere the scenario is the same. TC and oral policies continue to be implemented and practised, irrespective of alternatives that have been promulgated.

6. A Case Study

The last 20th. century saw the transition from oralism (propagated by the Milan Congress of 1880 [Lane *et al*., 1996]) to signed language (Stokoe, 1960), but with a significant compromise, which entailed signing and speaking simultaneously. This variously became known as Total Communication or Manually Coded English (or any spoken language). Rarely does a naturally occurring signed language reached and used in a bilingual-bicultural mode as educators may agree (Reagan, 2008) without the transition elucidated.

With the above in mind as to the policies and principles discussed above a case study of Thiboloha School for the Deaf in the eastern part of the Free State Province of central South Africa is presented in order to describe the way in which it functions within the current policies and principles of South Africa.

The author knows this school well because in October 1996 he addressed a meeting of all the principals of schools (primary, high and vocational) for the Deaf in South Africa. The talk focused on what Sign Language is and on South African Sign Language (SASL) in particular, as well as the controversy between Oralism and Manualism in schools for the Deaf. The talk touched on how signed languages had been marginalised, even though they were the languages through which the Deaf could realise their potential. Lastly, the talk dealt with how SASL could be used as a medium of instruction and taught as a school subject. The principals were asked why the learners in their schools were not making the same educational progress as the hearing learners at regular schools. They were also asked whether they had ever thought that the reason for this might be linguistic in nature rather than anything else. Most were convinced and many promised to look into the matter and take action. Subsequent to the meeting, the author gave a series of workshops to teachers at all the major schools of the deaf in South Africa. Whether these workshops were fruitful, is yet to be seen in the long term. Earlier, implementation of SL (SASL) policy is always clogged with impediments.

The principal of Thiboloha School for the Deaf, the school in this case study, stood out above the rest. He was convinced of the argument for SL (SASL) as the language of the way forward in communication and medium of instruction for the Deaf. He diligently attended the two workshops at his school. By then he not only signed fluently, his attitude towards SASL and the Deaf was exemplary. He once remarked that when he started using signed language and not TC, the Deaf asked him whether he was “angry” with them. This, he said was a great compliment to him and encouraged him. He recognised that when he used their language to communicate or teach them, they felt he really took them seriously. This demonstrates that in the eyes of the Deaf learners, teachers tend to move to signed language mode when “angry” in lieu of TC as the educational policy/principle requires.

Subsequently, the principal commissioned the researcher and two colleagues to evaluate the signing skills and English skills of both the teachers and the deaf learners at Thiboloha. This, he believed, was necessitated because of a need expressed by both the deaf learners and the hearing teachers for higher grade levels to be introduced into the school. The school until then

functioned only up to Grade 7, the principal also believed that the teaching and progress of learners was not on par with hearing learners of the same level. Thus, he commissioned an independent evaluation to confirm or discount his suspicions about the level of education in his school before contemplating further expansion.

The stated policy of the school was already that SL should be the medium of communication and instruction. Nevertheless, even if the will, attitude and desire were there, putting it into practice was not easy. The principal and two or three of the teachers at most, signed fluently. The rest of the teachers purported to use signed language while in reality they used TC with either English and/or Sesotho, the language of the region, on their lips.

The school has two sections, one for the Deaf and the other for the Blind. In the section for the Deaf there were 21 hearing teachers: of these only seven allowed the evaluators into their classrooms. Those who refused to be observed gave reasons that were of no relevance to the exercise. The seven who consented, apparently were those who had attempted to use signed language in the past and had a positive attitude towards SL.

Besides the hearing educators, there were seventeen Deaf adults employed by the school to perform various functions ranging from gardeners to house mothers/fathers (menial jobs in much the same way as was accorded to the Deaf teachers who were left in the schools after the Milan Congress [Lane *et al.,* 1996]). Most importantly though, there were ten Deaf classroom assistants to assist the hearing teachers. In a school that has a signing only policy, these adults can serve as role models for the learners and as signing models for the teachers. Whether at this school, they were used optimally and fruitfully was another matter. The evaluators saw a teacher who struggled to sign a story to her class with two fluent Deaf signers (assistants) watching helplessly. Why did the teacher not allow the assistants to tell the story? The laborious attempts by the teacher clearly indicated how good intentions can unwittingly go astray.

With most of the teachers refusing the evaluators entry into their classrooms, the evaluators went ahead and nonetheless evaluated the learners' SL skills and English skills. For the English skills, the learners' workbooks were considered and they were asked to "read aloud" sentences

therein. They were also asked what the sentences meant. In most instances this elicited a negative response of “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure”. This was despite the fact that they were able to sign the sentences word for word. The evaluators therefore soon realised that learners could “bark at print” without understanding meaning.

For instance the learners had written down grammar notes such as **“did + say = said**”, they spelt “**did**” and signed **“SAY”** but did not know how to sign “**SAID**”, nor did they know what it meant or the meaning of the tense.

Furthermore, the evaluators asked a common classroom question relating to “news”. They asked the learners to read the sentence, “What did you eat in the morning?” Although they signed it word for word, the majority did not know what it meant, or were too shy to sign it in the SL structure. However, when one of the evaluators signed the same question using SASL structure, it was soon possible to continue the conversation with the learners with follow-up questions such as, “Was it the same as yesterday?” and with learners making statements such as, “It is not enough and we need this and that,” and so forth. When we pointed out to them that the question was the same as the one written on the blackboard, they could not believe it. It was evident that they did not understand the difference between SL and English or actually understand English at all.

The evaluators quickly realised from their own experience knowledge of the language and the evaluation, that the learners’ communicative SL skills were brilliant. If SL were taught as a subject, the benefits to the learners would be enormous, and further, if SL were truly used as a medium of instruction, how much more would they learn at school. In this context the learners were asked, “Do you like school?” The answer was unanimous: “Yes, but the teachers don’t teach us.” “What do they do?” was our automatic response, with the following range of responses received:

- **They chat to each other in or out of class;**
- They sleep on the desk and if we don't alert them when the principal approaches, we are punished;
- They talk on mobile phones in the classroom;
- They put make-up on in the classroom;
- They sit in front of the heater when it is cold;
- They write sentences on the board and we copy it down. If we do not know a sign or meaning of a word we are told: "Just copy";
- When a teacher is sick and a deaf assistant substitutes for him/her, we enjoy learning;
- Friends visit them in the classroom and chat for a long time;
- Teachers use corporal punishment. The boys are beaten on the buttocks and girls on their fingertips; and
- We are all beaten for a small mistake made by any one of us.

The Deaf adults in the school confirmed these allegations about the teachers and added that sometimes a deaf child turned to them crying breathlessly. When they reported this to the principal and the teacher was summoned, the incident would be either denied or the story would be changed completely. Because of this they stopped reporting such incidents, but comforted the learner.

The learners were also asked what they wanted to do after they had completed their schooling. The responses included: carpenter, driver, hospital worker, member of police force, ambulance driver, nurse. One or two said they wanted to be teachers. One boy said he wanted to go to university and come back to the school as a teacher. Most, however, did not show much ambition. This could be attributed to the adult Deaf people they saw around them who did not have much to show for themselves after school. Their ambitions were very low, probably because the goals set for them were very low. This is a repeat of the history as noted by Lane *et al*. (1996) after the Milan Congress.

Asked for their opinion on the upgrading of the school to Grades 8 and 9, the learners were in favour, but cautioned against the use of the teachers who were currently in the school: “The teachers do not sign and they do not want to teach.” The learners recommended Deaf teachers who had been to university and/or hearing teachers who signed well. In specifying what they wanted, they were very articulate about who and which type of qualification one should have to give them the quality education they were hitherto denied. The policies and principles of the school were not supporting their goals in life after school and thereby denying them their constitutional right to equal education.

Asked what they would do if the school did not offer grades higher than Grade 7, some of the learners indicated that they would go to another school for the Deaf in the Province. Others did not know what they would do, but considered coming back to the same school and do sewing or other vocational courses and activities.

The learners were very clear about not wanting to go home permanently. At home there would be nobody to communicate with (including members of the family), they remarked. No matter how bad the teachers were, they preferred the communicative environment offered by their peers at the school.

In a school like this, with a principal with a positive attitude towards a SL policy and who also is a role model to the hearing staff around him, much good may be achieved. Yet, the question had to be asked why SL policy still proved so unpalatable to the teachers and difficult to implement. In a quest to find the reasons, the evaluation team considered the nature and attitudes of the teachers as derived from their own observations and the feedback from learners. The teachers may be described as:

- Educationally lazy and therefore preferring to stay within their comfort zone (i.e. their speech environment);
- Not convinced of the nature of SL as equal to any other human language;
- Having inadequate signing skills;
- Not competent as teachers and therefore “hiding” in a school for the Deaf where their performance cannot be evaluated;

- Ignorant;

It is clear that part of the reason for so little change is that school inspectors, education officers and managers of schools of the deaf are completely ignorant of what goes on in a school for the Deaf learners and/or what should be done to improve the learning situation. These are the people who should reinforce and supervise the implementation of any policy, including the use of Sign Language. This is understandable if one takes into consideration that it is very difficult to address in the without knowledge of SL, let alone how to teach it. Ignorance is to be found at all levels, from Directors of Education, Inspectors, Education Officers, Managers of Schools, Teachers and Parents. There is a need for education and training at all levels by competent trainers. This means an initial collaboration between SL researchers (deaf or hearing) who can sign, Deaf adults, and language teachers fluent in SL.

In summary, it may therefore be stated that there is a big divide between policy, principles and laws and what is actually happening on the ground. It is a cause for great concern and collective strategising is called for in order to address this lamentable situation.

7. From Policy to Practice

It should be emphasised here that the failure to implement a SL policy is not necessarily because people intentionally wish the Deaf ill. Rather, most often the Deaf people fall victim to the patronising good intentions on the part of the hearing majority. Failure in implementation may be the result of ignorance about the nature of SL as language, but also a possible sense of helplessness in the face of a seemingly insurmountable challenge in how to change the present status quo, namely, to end ignorance on the part of the individuals, parents, teachers, organisations, institutions, schools and the government sector.

It is proposed here that the only way to address this is a firm and proactive approach focused most prominently on the educators. For the teachers without the required signing skills but already in the system, in-service training should become compulsory. These training sessions should focus on:

- The structure of SL, signing skills, the use of SL as a medium of instruction and teaching SL as a school subject (time span: 2 years, after which they make an educated exit if they cannot cope). This training should be regularly followed up and supported.
- The inspectors and education officers who visit and administer school for the Deaf are trained in the use of SL as medium of instruction and as a school subject
- The Deaf adults are trained to be SL teachers to later teach SL to the hearing, including parents of deaf children.
- The Deaf classroom assistants are to be empowered to take charge of enhancing the signing skills of deaf children and teaching SL as a subject in schools
- The Deaf house mother/fathers are to be trained in story-telling, etc in SL so that they can tell stories to the deaf children at night and be role models for them as well.

Universities and other tertiary institutions, in the absence of FET colleges, should be able to design and offer an SASL curriculum in order to train:

- potential teachers of the Deaf to be fluent in SASL so as to curb the current trend which allows for teachers who do not know SASL to be randomly posted to schools for the Deaf;
- teacher training intake to admit both hearing and Deaf l teacher trainees; and
- interpreters who must be fluent in SL and one spoken language. They can be used to interpret at high schools and tertiary institutions where Deaf students are to be found.

The universities and technical universities should be encouraged to carry out research in SASL and be able to produce teaching and academic materials as a result.

8. **Intervention and monitoring:**

- A SL curriculum should be developed and its implementation monitored and, where possible, revision is carried out as informed by the implementation process
- The use of SL as a medium of instruction should be closely monitored in line with the curriculum above.

- Administration of schools for the Deaf at school level, divisional district level, provincial and national level should ensure quality education for Deaf learners.
- Parent-Teachers' Associations and Boards of Governors of the schools for the Deaf should ensure that the linguistic and educational integrity of Deaf learners is respected and applied in spirit and to the letter.
- Teachers' performance should be evaluated regularly in line with performance management processes to sustain optimum and equitable levels of Deaf education.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the preceding discussion it is evident that Deaf education in the world, in Africa, and South Africa in particular, is a victim of the same fate that has visited MTE in the developing world. There is an apparent non-recognition of the primacy of sign language as the mother tongue of the Deaf and therefore a failure to use sign language in education. There are glaring failures that the often well-intentioned principles, policies and legislation on Deaf education have certainly not remedied. Further, it has been argued that some of the failures in Deaf education are attributable to the previous principles, policies and legislation that have guided Deaf education. Policies setting out the requirement that the Deaf are taught through the medium of signed language have not been heeded nor implemented. With regard to the South African situation, the preceding discussion concurs with the recommendations of Reagan (2008) that:

(e) SASL should be utilised as a recognised medium of instruction in deaf education. In many instances, this will ensure that students have a solid foundation in SASL. It also means that all teachers of the Deaf should be required to demonstrate communicative competence in SASL. Further, it is also obviously desirable that Deaf individuals be recruited for teaching positions in deaf education, as well as in other educational settings, and appropriate action should be taken to encourage such efforts.

(f) There should be provision for the teaching of SASL for hearing groups and individuals. Special provisions should be made for hearing parents of Deaf children, as well as for future teachers of the Deaf and for other professionals likely to come into contact with the Deaf. Furthermore, SASL should be offered as a second/additional language option for students at both government schools and in university settings.

(g) SASL should be elevated to one of the official languages of South Africa, and should be accorded the same status as the other official languages.

(h) Language planning and policy efforts targeted at SASL by the Pan South African Language Board and other appropriate governmental agencies should be increased, and support should be provided, especially for the teaching and learning of SASL and for its use in public settings (including in the media).

When applied to other countries, the above recommendations for South Africa point towards a situation whereby:

(e) Sign languages should be utilised as a recognised medium of instruction in deaf education. To facilitate the use of sign languages as medium of instruction in deaf education, it is important that sign languages are introduced to Deaf learners at the earliest stages of schooling. It is also important that all teachers of the Deaf be required to demonstrate proficiency in sign language(s). This can only be achieved if teacher training programmes organized in the schools of the Deaf. Teachers should have proficiency in sign language as an integral qualification requirement.

(f) Sign languages courses should be made widely available in education systems so that even hearing persons can access them. However, special attention should be paid to hearing parents of Deaf children and other professionals likely to come into contact with the Deaf.

(g) Associations of the Deaf in each country should lobby respective governments so that sign language becomes an official language in all countries.

(h) Language policy and planning efforts by language planning agencies in respective countries should target the sign languages for special promotion.

Despite the above, it is important to remain cognisant of the fact that principles, policies and legislation only represent signposts towards implementation. As this paper has shown, in practice, implementation is fraught with hesitation, uncertainties, fear of social stigma; ignorance and downright lack of political will. Principles, policies and legislation require hard work and commitment in the form of human and economic resources, but most importantly, a persistent demand from parents and the community which should be coupled with political will on the part of government. Without this, principles, policies and legislation about language policy in education have little effect for the average Deaf person.

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CONCLUSIONS

After contextualising the challenges of deaf education in the twenty-first century in the global context, this study focused on sign language in the environment of bilingual-bicultural education for the deaf in South Africa. Each of the five essays pinpointed particular challenges and as a result the study ventures to use empirical research to demonstrate conclusively that the issue of sign language in a bilingual-bicultural education for the deaf in South Africa, as is the case elsewhere, is a complex matter in which a motley intersection of dynamics is to be taken into consideration.

Fundamentally, the study indicates that sign languages in many polities in general, and in South Africa in particular, despite positive constitutional, legislative and policy developments, are subject to a particular challenges coined as “double linguistic imperialism”: sign languages are not only marginalised by the former colonial languages that have been adopted as official languages in many states in the developing world; they are also marginalised by the dominant indigenous languages in these societies. Language policy in general and educational policy and concomitant systems in particular are some of the mechanisms that can be deployed to redress this state of affairs.

In addressing the issue of sign languages acquisition and deaf education, the discussion establishes that the deaf child, in order to fully integrate into a predominantly hearing world, is faced with a particular challenge of adapting to an education system that provides for bilingual education. In such circumstances, sign language should ideally feature as first language, or mother tongue, as well as language of instruction. However, for purposes of reading and writing, the deaf child should also be exposed to a second, spoken language. This approach, the thesis argues, should lend emphasis on the so-called “critical period” in the child’s development. This relatively obvious solution to the challenges that bedevil deaf education poses a particular challenge, given the ill-informed preconceptions of parents and society at

large regarding the Deaf, Deaf culture and sign language, as well as its status as a natural language, and thus whether it is found “appropriate” as alternative medium of instruction.

The study thus also challenges one of the fundamental issues in educational linguistics, namely language attitudes with particular reference to parents’ and teachers’ attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction for deaf learners. Empirical research conducted and published here for the first time reveals that parents’ attitudes towards sign language as medium of instruction are as a rule at variance with particular situations, conditions and circumstances prevalent at any given time. However, the parents surveyed tend to agree that signed language should be used in instructing the Deaf child at school. They further agree that signed language holds the key to a deaf learner achieving higher levels of education. Overall, from an attitudinal perspective, parents of deaf learners would prefer signed languages to be the languages of instruction for their children. By contrast, educators seemed to find themselves unable to distinguish between the use of SASL and alternatives in the classroom, calling all methods of communication “SASL”. The abundance of experience the teachers have plus the fact that they believe they have acquired SASL without any structured training is detrimental to the learners not only as it is detrimental to their communicative abilities in the classroom, but also as it devalues the need for formal training in SASL in the minds of the teachers, and this is transferred to their learners. The conclusion is that teachers are in dire need of formal training in order to appreciate the true complexity of signed language and by extension therefore realise the current limitations in the education of the learners. Despite current attitudes it was found that most of the teachers (60,5%) indicated a desire and intention to study further and such study should inter alia include the study of SASL.

With regard to policy, the study establishes that Deaf education is a victim of the same fate that has been visited upon MTE in the developing world. There is an apparent non-recognition of the primacy of sign language as the mother tongue of the Deaf and therefore the failure to use sign language in education. This is a glaring failure which the principles, policies and legislation on Deaf education have certainly not remedied. Further, it can be posited that some of the

failures in Deaf education are attributable to the same principles, policies and legislation that have guided Deaf education over time, Policies setting out the requirement that the Deaf are taught through the medium of signed language have certainly not been heeded nor implemented on the continent of Africa.

The last paper in the study also establishes that sign languages, caught between negative societal perceptions, lethargic educational policies and an outdated pedagogy, suffer from a paucity of the development of instructional/learning materials. It is therefore important to recognise that there is need for materials development for sign languages so that they can become entrenched in the curriculum as taught subjects and in educational policy and practice as a media of instruction for Deaf learners.

Admittedly, a lot of work remains to be done in the area of Deaf education. The issues addressed in the various papers in this study could serve as pointers to the critical issues that need redress if there is to be any hope of entrenching sign language in bilingual-bicultural education of the deaf, not only in South Africa, but elsewhere.