

Reflections on the Field

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Black Deaf Studies Symposium

Background

- Deaf people are everywhere across cultures, ethnicities and nations.
- Gestures and signs
- Establishment of places in 18th century

- Fast forward to the 1960's... Stokoe, Casterline and Croneberg
- *“If we can have Black studies, Jewish studies, **why not Deaf Studies?**”*
(Schrieber, 1971)

Beginning of Deaf Studies

- Linguistics studies of American Sign Language
- Method
 - **NATIVE SIGNERS** as informants for grammatical judgements
 - Research Assistants
 - Talking about and representing ASL

(71) _____qt _____cs _____nodding
KNOW+ P-A-T (addressee nods 'Yes'), RECENT BUY CAR

(Baker-Shenk & Cokely (1980) *American Sign Language: A Teacher's Resource Text on Grammar and Culture*. Silver Spring, TJ Publishers.P. 162)

- Language decontextualized—removal of the body

Emergence of the Field

- ASL classes in Academia
- National Symposium on Sign Language Research and Teaching (NSSLRT) 1977, 1978 and 1980
 - Information sharing between linguists and teachers.
- Seminal texts published in 1980
 - A Basic Course in ASL by Padden and Humphries
 - American Sign Language “Green Books” by Baker and Cokely
- If there is a language, then there must be a culture

Deaf Studies Programs and Departments

- First Deaf Studies undergraduate degree – Boston University 1981
 - University wanted UG degree in Deaf Education
 - Hoffmeister countered with UG degree in Deaf Studies
- Offer courses (36 credits):
 - ASL 1-4
 - ASL Structure
 - Deaf Culture
 - Deaf History
 - Deaf Literature
 - Psychology and the Deaf

Deaf Culture

- Deaf Culture discourse 1980's
 - Cultural Anthropology Matrix
 - Based on person observations (usually from native signers)
- Describing language, values, norms, and traditions
 - Indoctrination
 - Behavior and language used as “checklist”
- Deaf Studies Think Tank 2002
 - “Talking Culture” to “Culture Talking” Humphries

Deaf History

- Deaf History
 - Early works using History research method of using primary source:
 - Printed documents: LPF, written records, diaries and photos.
 - Who wrote those documents?
 - Leaving out those who do not write. Limiting the representation
- Oral history method— Stan Schuchman (1980)
 - Available technologies became better in the 1990s and beyond.
- Black deaf documents?
 - Overlea

Deaf as an Abstraction

- What is Deaf in the following context?
 - I SAW DEAF ENTER STORE
 - DEAF GOSSIP TALK ABOUT YOU
- DEAF in this context is imagined.
 - Is it a woman? A man?
 - Black? White? Asian?
- Deaf Culture? Deaf History?
- Is Deaf generic? Is Deaf white?

Ways of Looking

- Did these disciplines unconsciously shape the way we look?
 - Linguistics
 - Looks at phonology, morphology, syntax
 - Decontextualize the body?
 - Language teaching
 - Rules of grammar, NMS, etc.
 - Language matrix
 - Cultural Anthropology
 - Rules of Behaving
 - Culture Matrix
- Was difference scorned?

Challenges and Promises

- Culture as a problem
 - One Deaf Culture in the world?
 - Better framing: Ways of Being
- Innovations in Deaf Studies— 2017 edited by Kusters, De Meulder and O'Brien
 - Challenged established perspectives and ways of doing research
- Center on Black Deaf Studies
 - This symposium
- Gesture Literacy Knowledge Studio
 - Humans gesture: co-speech gesture and gesture only