Languages, Literacies, and Translations: Examining Deaf Students' Language Ideologies through English-to-ASL Translations of Literature

by

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same pace as my hearing siblings did. I owe everything to her and to the rest of my family, who gave me the foundation to go forth into this world as a Deaf person and as a Deaf teacher-scholar.

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

Abstract

Educators have long grappled with how print literacy might be best taught to deaf students and which language might best serve this purpose: spoken English, American Sign Language (ASL), or another communication mode. Over the decades, pedagogical approaches have been introduced and critiqued according to the various ideologies of different stakeholders. We know very little, however, about the ideologies that deaf *students* themselves carry about language and the complex ways these ideologies may be contributing to or interfering with their acquisition of print literacy. This dissertation, thus, explores deaf high school students' attitudes and beliefs about language and interrogates how their ideologies are confirmed, contradicted, or complicated through their encounters with English and ASL via ASL translations of literature in their English classroom.

This qualitative study collected data on how deaf students' ideologies played out when their teacher integrated a unit consisting of ASL translations of English literary works into their English class. The findings highlight how the students' language ideologies are neither predictable nor consistent, and that many students carry conflicting and even mistaken ideologies about each language that lead them to believe that ASL has no grammar rules and disparage English for being too strict. Moreover, the students' ideologies profoundly affect the degree of alienation or ownership that they feel towards each language, and especially towards print literacy, which nearly all of the students identify as being a "hearing" practice.

The students' complex relationship with each language is illuminated especially clearly in their reactions to ASL translations of English texts, an experience that many of them found to be enriching and deeply validating because for the first time, they could bring their literacy practices and linguistic strengths from ASL to the experience of reading in the English classroom, and thus achieve a more meaningful and evocative reading of the stories. The ways these students interacted with the ASL translations challenge us to broaden our understanding of *literacy* and *reading* so that it is inclusive of the literacy practices that they brought to the table while working with the translations.

Chapter 1
Introduction and Review of Literature

An Introduction to the Dissertation

I was drawn to this research because, as a Deaf individual who against all odds achieved fluency in print English literacy, I felt confused throughout my K-to-12 education because I didn't fit into the prevailing assumption that "most deaf kids can't read well," nor did a few of my deaf[1] friends. The question of why—and, indeed, how—I and a handful of my deaf peers were more successful with reading and writing than the majority of our peers has long haunted me, as has the question of how my deaf friends (and by extension, all deaf children) who struggle with print literacy might be provided equal access to the rich and invigorating body of literature that most hearing students are able to interact with throughout their educational experience. Explaining away the deaf students' general antipathy towards reading and writing by simply saying "they don't like it because English is hard for them" (which seems to be one of the general attitudes held by many stakeholders in deaf education) has always to me seemed a gross oversimplification that does not take into account the varied and complex perspectives that I encountered among my deaf friends growing up and, then later as an educator, among the deaf students whom I taught.

Anyone who has spent more than a few days working with deaf students will rapidly realize that a high percentage of them struggle mightily with acquiring print literacy. This seems to have led to a general assumption that most deaf student don't like to read and write. An oft-cited fact circulating in the field reports that the average reading

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[1] In this dissertation, I will use the term *deaf* to refer to any individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. A distinction can be made between those who identify themselves as culturally Deaf, with a capital "D" (engaged in Deaf culture, often via the use of American Sign Language) and those who identify themselves as having hearing loss, but do not identify with Deaf culture and consider themselves deaf with a lowercase "d." To facilitate the reading of this draft and to avoid cluttersome acronyms and phrasings like D/d/HOH, D/HH, or d/Deaf, I will simply use the term *deaf* to refer to the general deaf population and to individuals who have hearing loss. The only time I will use uppercase *Deaf* is when I am referring to myself, to specific individuals whom I know actively identify with Deaf culture, and when students in this study refer specifically to Deaf culture or Deaf identity.

level of a deaf high school graduate[2] hovers at about the 4th grade level.[3] Baffled by the frustrating consistency of this statistic across multiple decades, various stakeholders within the deaf education field have argued for years over the question of how print literacy ought to be taught to deaf students and which language (i.e. mode of communication) would best serve this purpose. As these stakeholders fight it out in an often hostile and ideologically-driven debate, the actual beliefs and values that deaf students hold about language and about print literacy seem to have, for the most part, fallen off the radar.

Instead, it seems to be widely accepted that deaf students struggle with learning English because they don't like to read and write, or, conversely, that they don't like reading and writing because they struggle with learning English. Either way, this type of assumption is dangerous, for it over-simplifies the complex variety of linguistic experiences that deaf students bring to the English classroom. Reams and reams of publications over a number of decades about the reading woes of deaf students, about various communication modes of choice, and about the merits of this literacy instruction method or that method have given us a comprehensive picture of the wide—and often conflicting—range of ideologies that the *adult* stakeholders carry about language and print literacy instruction. However, very little is empirically known about the *students'* ideologies—that is, the values, beliefs, and attitudes that they carry about the language(s) in their repertoire. What value do deaf students see in ASL? What value do they see in English? In reading? In writing? How have their linguistic experiences shaped these attitudes?

As things currently stand within deaf education, such a high percentage of deaf students do not read at grade level (or anywhere near grade level) that their literacy

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[2] It is crucial to remember that the "4th-grade average" is precisely that: an *average* of the wide range of reading levels with which deaf high school students graduate. It does not necessarily mean that the *average* deaf graduate reads at the 4th-grade level; rather, it means that a number of deaf graduates do read at higher levels, and likewise, a number of deaf graduates read at lower levels. The 4th-grade-level number is simply the average of a wide range of reading abilities among deaf graduates. With that said, however, it is still not all that common for a deaf student to graduate "at grade level" in print literacy (for more, see Marschark & Spencer, *Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies*, and Livingston, *Rethinking Deaf Education*).

[3] Spencer, Elizabeth, & Marc Marschark. *Evidence-Based Practice in Educating Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Livingston, Sue. *Working Text: Teaching Deaf and Second-Language Students to be Better Writers*. (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2010).

instruction tends to be limited to basal readers, emergent reader books, and children's books—even in high school settings where teenagers have little motivation or interest in the content of these books.[4] Very rarely do deaf students read—or even encounter—the kinds of literary works that are typically listed on state or national standards for their grade level: poetry, short stories, novels, plays, and such. Deaf students, particularly in the upper grades where texts become increasingly complex and beyond their reading ability, rarely get the opportunity to interact with the writers, ideas, and questions that characterize most regular education English classroom experiences. Thus, we do not know what kinds of responses—positive or otherwise—these struggling readers might have towards print literacy if they were able to access upper-grade level literary works in their stronger language (i.e. ASL) instead of only in English.

By bringing ASL translations of literature into the secondary deaf English classroom, this study provides high school deaf students with the opportunity to interact with stories that are neither childish nor over-simplified, stories that pose challenging questions for them to grapple with intellectually, something that both literacy scholars and veteran teachers Jeffrey D. Wilhelm and Carol Jago emphasize is crucial in fostering student engagement with reading and writing.[5] Since nearly all English-to-ASL translations to date have focused primarily on picture books and children's stories, very few—if any—middle- or high school texts have been made available in ASL. This study sought to fill this gap by presenting middle- and high-school level texts to students in ASL, and in doing so, it created a rich space for exploring the students' beliefs, values, and attitudes about both ASL and English. The findings of this study will be relevant to educators, administrators, parents, and stakeholders, all of whom have vested interests in finding ways to better language and literacy instruction for deaf students. And, importantly, the findings bring the voices of deaf students into the conversation about language ideology and help us begin to understand more deeply why so many deaf students seem hostile to reading and writing, as well as why a number of deaf students seem to take up print literacy practices more readily than others.

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[4] Livingston, *Working Text*, 8-10.
[5] Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *You Gotta BE the Book*. 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 47-48; Jago, Carol. *With Rigor for All: Teaching the Classics to Contemporary Students*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 2000), 2.

Research Questions

As stated above, very little scholarly attention has been given to deaf students' ideologies, and even though ASL translations of children's books and stories are becoming more prevalent now, largely due to the ease of sharing videos on DVDs and the internet, only a handful of studies have been done—again, entirely on elementary-aged children—on whether such translations are effective in the classroom. What is more, such studies have thus far tended to focus on various issues related to reading comprehension and not specifically students' ideologies about language and literacy. A number of studies do incorporate deaf students' voices into the conversation about literacy instruction, but the focus of these studies have been more on the students' prior experiences with print literacy and their current attitudes towards reading or writing, not on their language ideologies or how these ideologies may be shaping the students' literacy experiences in and out of school. I, therefore, designed this short-term qualitative study based on the theoretical constructs of literacy, language ideologies, and translation to help me explore deaf students' language ideologies and their responses to ASL translations. This study's two key research questions were as follows:

- What ideologies do signing deaf high school students carry about English, about ASL, and about print literacy?
- In what ways might these ideologies be confirmed, complicated, or contradicted by these students' experiences with ASL translations of English literature?

Underneath these two broad questions were several sub-questions that shaped the interview protocols. For the first question, the sub-questions were as follows:

- How have these students' prior linguistic experiences shaped their current attitudes, values, and beliefs about their language(s)?
- What values do these students place on spoken English, print English, and ASL?
- What are these students' perceptions of and attitudes towards print literacy and the purposes of print literacy?
- How do these students perceive, describe, and identify themselves as literate beings?
- What kinds of literacy practices do these students engage in, and for what purposes?

The second question yielded these sub-questions:

- In what ways might the experience of having access to ASL translations of English literature affect (or not) these students' language ideologies?

- In what ways will these students' ideologies affect (if at all) how they interact with, discuss, and respond to the ASL-English translations in the classroom?
- In what ways might having access to translations affect (or not) these students' attitudes towards reading, writing, and other print literacy practices?
- In what ways might having access to ASL translations affect (or not) deaf students' motivation (e.g. participation, attitude, effort, quality of work) in the English classroom?

These two research questions bring the theoretical frameworks of *language ideologies*, *literacy*, and *translation* into conversation with one another to offer a new perspective on the beliefs, attitudes, and values that deaf students place on language and various literacy practices, thus linking together the scholarly fields of translation, literacy research, and deaf education—and to some extent, sociolinguistics. The theoretical framework of translation (and the practice of translating texts into ASL) holds tremendous implications for supporting literacy instruction for deaf students, as well as for the linguistic standing of ASL as a language.

In fact, a cursory glance at the findings of this study suggest that ASL translations provide an intersection at which the students' two languages (English and ASL), their literacy practices in both languages, and their identities all meet in order to create for the students rich, meaningful literacy experiences beyond what they experience with reading and writing in English only. In creating this space, translation theory provides an invaluable lens for us to consider the wide array of ideologies and literacy practices that deaf students bring to the table when we ask them to take up reading and writing in English. As such, translation plays a crucial role in this dissertation, and will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, along with the theoretical frameworks of language ideologies and literacy, both of which are also essential for interpreting the findings of this study. The rest of this chapter provides a brief review of the relevant literature related to literacy pedagogy for the deaf, language ideologies, and ASL-English translations, highlighting the gaps in current research that this dissertation seeks to address.

A Brief Review of Literature: Teaching Print Literacy to the Deaf

A tremendous challenge in teaching deaf students print literacy lies in the fact that their access to spoken English is limited—or even non-existent—which means they must somehow learn to read and write without already having the same foundation in spoken English that hearing children do. Hearing speakers of English—regardless of whether they are native speakers, non-native speakers, or speakers of "non-standard" variants of English—can hear normally and can therefore acquire (for native speakers) and/or learn (for non-native or non-"standard" speakers) English largely through hearing, imitating, and interacting with fluent speakers. As linguist and deaf studies researcher Jacqueline Anderson reminds us, when hearing children acquire English, they do so through constant exposure to the spoken language, which allows them to break down words into the smallest parts of sound and then recombine these parts into meaningful words and sentences.[6] In the process of disassembling and reassembling these parts of English, hearing children naturally acquire the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the language.

Deaf people, in contrast, "cannot break English down into discrete sounds because they hear only isolated or sporadic sounds," if anything at all;[7] thus, they cannot reassemble the parts of language into meaningful utterances—spoken or printed—as deftly as their hearing counterparts. Even students with mild hearing losses have a harder time acquiring English: despite being able to hear words fairly well, they often fail to pick up on unvoiced sounds and inflectional endings on words, many of which carry important grammatical markers for the language. People who are "deafer" and who rely on hearing aids will often miss parts of words, whole words, and tone inflections. Also, in some cases, they hear nothing, or at best only indistinct sounds and cannot identify any individual letters, syllables, or words in an utterance.

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[6] Anderson, Jacqueline. *Deaf Students Mis-Writing, Teacher Mis-Reading: English Education and the Deaf College Student*. (Burtonsville, MD: Linstok Press, 1993), 44.
[7] Ibid., 44.

Being cut off from auditory English in this way severely limits—or in individuals with severe or profound hearing loss,[8] completely prevents—deaf children from acquiring English as a first language.[9] As opposed to hearing children who subconsciously internalize English as toddlers simply through daily exposure and interactions with fluent speakers, deaf children must be actively, repeatedly, and consciously taught individual features of spoken and/or print English until they achieve a degree of mastery. And doing so is difficult, as noted researchers Spencer and Marschark admit: "Perhaps the most long-term and vexing challenge in deaf education is the continuing difficulty experienced by students with regard to print literacy."[10] Educators of the deaf—not only in the United States but also in Europe and elsewhere—have been struggling for years to figure out how to best teach deaf students of all ages to read and write.

A Caveat: Dearth of Empirical Research

Before I proceed with this literature review, I must first pause briefly and note that many findings from various reading-related studies within the deaf education field should be taken with a grain of salt. As Livingston, Marschark and Spencer, and numerous other respected researchers point out, print literacy is so knotted up within the ideological debate about which language (or communication mode) ought to be used with deaf children,[11] that it is overwhelmingly common for studies on reading to be biased, unreliable, and skewed in order to support a particular language ideology.[12] In a meticulous review of literacy research within the field, deaf literacy scholar Susan Easterbrooks concludes, "…research available in the area of literacy, although improving in the last 5 or 10 years, is rife with speculation, pseudo-empirically based for the most part, deferential to a belief system, and characterized by many holes in the knowledge

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[8] **Degrees of hearing loss**: Hearing losses range from *mild* and *moderate* (hard-of-hearing, able to hear speech fairly well with hearing aids) to *severe* (very hard-of-hearing but able to hear some sounds with hearing aids) to *profound* (unable to distinguish speech and other sounds even with the aid of hearing aids).

[9] Ibid., 42-44.

[10] Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-Based Practice*, 81.

[11] The competing ideologies within the deaf education field will be discussed at a later point in this chapter, and also in Chapter 2.

[12] Livingston, *Working Text,* 3-5; Marschark, Marc, and Patricia Elizabeth Spencer, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*. Vol. 2. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

base."[13] In other words, teaching methods in language and literacy instruction (whether in reading, writing, or 'verbal' communication via sign or speech) are often grounded in seemingly 'commonsense' and ideological practices rather than in empirically-supported 'best practices.'

Marschark and Spencer, after compiling the invaluable *Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies*, ruminate on the unreliability of much research in the field, pointing out that many "studies" were done without control groups, with too-small student samples, and/or with obviously flawed—or biased—experiment design.[14] Indeed, Luckner et al.'s attempt in 2006 to do a meta-analytic research study of the existing language research corpus in deaf education resulted in sobering findings on the quality and rigor of the research in the field. Out of a grand total of 964 articles available for Luckner et al.'s review, over 500 had to be excluded because they contained opinions, descriptions and/or no empirical research, along with another 400-plus articles because they lacked control groups or other key criteria for an empirical study. To wit, Luckner et al. found themselves left with twenty-two empirical studies to review—*twenty-two*. Out of 964 studies, only twenty-two employed sufficiently rigorous experimental design to be considered reliable and empirical.[15]

Additionally, Easterbrooks reports that among the hundreds of studies she and her colleagues skimmed for inclusion in their review on literacy, only about a dozen could be confidently categorized as studies done with "research rigor."[16] The majority of studies available cling to what Easterbrooks disdainfully calls "sacred cows" in deaf education: beliefs and assumptions that hold little to no evidence of their efficacy.[17] When literacy-related research is often biased and misleading and when the studies that *are* rigorously-designed studies yield tantalizingly conflicting results, then it becomes an increasingly

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[13] Easterbrooks, Susan R. "Review of Literature in Literacy Development and Instruction for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing." (Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Georgia, 2005), 31.

[14] Marschark & Spencer, *The Oxford Handbook*, 25.

[15] Luckner, John L., Ann M. Sebald, John Cooney, John Young III, and Sheryl Goodwin Muir. "An Examination of the Evidence-Based Literacy Research in Deaf Education." *American Annals of the Deaf* 150, no. 5 (2006): 446.

[16] Easterbrooks, "Review of Literature," 31.

[17] Ibid., 32.

thorny process trying to comb out what actually works with deaf students in regard to print literacy instruction. In the next sections, I will outline what we *do* know from the handful of empirical studies that have been done on deaf students and print literacy, beginning first with reading.

Teaching Reading

From the reliable empirical research that we do have, we know that most literacy instruction for deaf students has revolved—and continues to revolve—around basal readers, picture books, and beginner chapter books, texts that are supposedly simplified and within the students' skill levels.[18] It is not uncommon for even high school students to work from the same basal reader series that third-graders in the same building might also be using.[19] This is a worrying trend, for basal readers have proven to be a far from perfect solution for hearing students and deaf students alike. Although these books do provide, in theory, incremental difficulty in the texts that students read, several studies found that deaf students, like hearing students do, struggled more with the contrived nature of basal readers than they did with regular trade books, and the intensive drill-and-practice associated with basal readers has been found to be a contributing factor in making deaf students highly dependent learners.[20]

Schirmer, along with Livingston, admits that teachers, unfortunately, have limited options for what to use with their students: the two primary choices are basal readers or trade books that are at the students' reading levels.[21] As a result, teachers who want to avoid the repetitive nature of basal readers—particularly with older deaf students—still have little choice in what kinds of texts to offer them for reading, which means that even deaf *high school* students will read elementary-level books and picture books. Even though these books may be at students' reading levels, educators have often observed the

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[18] Paul, Peter V. *Literacy and Deafness: The Development of Reading, Writing, and Literate Thought.* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1998), 219-221; Livingston, Sue. *Rethinking the Education of Deaf Students: Theory and Practice from a Teacher's Perspective. (*Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 48-49.

[19] Schirmer, *Language and Literacy Development*, 128-29; see also Livingston, Sue, *Rethinking the Education of Deaf Students,* 48-50.

[20] Enns, Charlotte. "Critical Literacy: Deaf Adults Speak Out." *Exceptionality Education International* 19, no. 2 (2009): 3-4; Schirmer, *Language and Literacy Development*, 128.

[21] Livingston, *Working Text,* 12-13. See also Schirmer, *Language and Literacy Development.*

phenomenon of deaf students being able to accurately decode—and even sign—every word in an English sentence, but upon being asked what they just read, the students could not even explain the basic meaning of what they just read/signed, so detached were they from the content of the story.[22] Clearly, basal readers and emergent reader books are far from a perfect solution, and the field is still in search of one.

The question persists: how *do* deaf children learn to read, and why do so many fail to achieve even functional literacy? Studies on deaf students and reading (writing, the flip side of print literacy, has been largely neglected in research until recent years, and will be discussed in the next section) have yielded conflicting results about how deaf students learn to read.[23] For example, some studies found that deaf students who have more phonological knowledge of English tend to do better with the decoding component of reading; however, other studies found that deaf students who use alternative encoding strategies (e.g. visual word recognition or using signs) perform better than those who were taught phonetically. And yet other studies found no difference between the two performance groups.[24]

Similarly contradictory results have been found in other areas related to the reading process: mode of communication, language-specific knowledge, linguistic transfer between sign and English (or oral-based instruction and print English), reading comprehension, and vocabulary knowledge, to name a few.[25] Even when some studies identify certain areas as being essential for facilitating reading improvement, they struggle to translate these findings to actual classroom instruction. For example, a number of studies have found that explicit vocabulary instruction seems to be a key component for some of the more successful deaf readers, but due to conflicting findings within the study, the researchers could not pinpoint factors such as precisely how and when this instruction should be done to maximize the impact on deaf students.[26] With such inconsistent findings, even in well-designed studies, it is not surprising that pedagogical

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[22] Livingston, *Rethinking*, 60-66; Enns, "Critical Literacy," 4-5.

[23] Musselman, Carol. "How Do Children Who Can't Hear Learn to Read an Alphabetic Script? A Review of the Literature on Reading and Deafness." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 5, no. 1 (2000): 9-10.

[24] Ibid., 10-19. For more, see Musselman's article.

[25] Ibid,19-23; Enns, "Critical Literacy," 4-5; Easterbrooks, "Review of Literature," 31-34.

[26] Marschark & Spencer, *The Oxford Handbook*, 122-124.

solutions have remained frustratingly elusive, and even more so when it occurs frequently that the performance of a new group of deaf students completely confounds the findings from previous groups who underwent that same study—for no apparent reason.[27]

An important factor in successfully literate deaf students' acquisition of literacy seems to be the family—particularly the parents. A study done on profoundly deaf college students whose reading and writing scores were equivalent to those of hearing students found that, without exception, these highly literate deaf students all had parents who were "deeply involved" with their literacy development: these parents had acquired fluency in the child's communication mode, worked hard to meditate their print literacy development in the home, stayed consistently involved in the student's academics throughout their K-12 schooling, and maintained high expectations for their child's performance.[28] Indeed, students who come from families where they had access to clear, frequent, and consistent communication with their parents and siblings (in any language or communication mode) tended to fare better with print literacy compared to those whose families do not put conscious effort into including the deaf child into ongoing conversations consistently.[29] However, not every deaf child who comes from an involved and invested family achieves print literacy skills on par with those of hearing children: out of more than 1,000 deaf college students at a deaf college, many of whom came from supportive and involved families, Toscano et al. identified only about 30 students who qualified as being both profoundly deaf *and* who were on par with hearing students' literacy abilities.[30] This suggests that even though family involvement is exceedingly important, it is not a guarantee that a deaf child will achieve a "hearing-like" level of print literacy.

One thing that the larger field of literacy research has consistently found is that the *meaningfulness* of a text can make a tremendous difference in the motivation and achievement of readers from all levels. When students—struggling and fluent readers alike—find reading any given text to be a meaningful, engaging, and valuable activity,

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Toscano, Rose Marie, Barbara McKee, and Dominique Lepoutre. "Success with Academic English: Reflections of Deaf College Students." *American Annals of the Deaf* 147, no. 1 (2002): 9-14.

[29] Ibid., 12-13; Livingston, *Rethinking*, 45-47.

[30] Toscano, et al., "Success," 7.

they become much more invested and willing to read, even if the text is challenging.[31] Enns, in her 2009 study of a literacy class designed for deaf adults, found that the students' attitudes towards print literacy changed significantly when they were given the opportunity to interact with "real" books rather than with basal readers. She concludes, "Readers need stories that they can decode, but also connect to their own experiences and make truly meaningful."[32] Livingston, a long-time college writing instructor of the deaf, agrees: "Finding the right text is key [...and it is] utterly motivating for students to read something they actually enjoy."[33] As Wilhelm reminds us, literature is transcendent: it offers us possibilities and takes us beyond space time, and self, questioning the way the world is and offers possibilities for the way it could be.[34] Limiting struggling readers— deaf and hearing alike—to simplified texts and non-age-appropriate children's books strips away the meaningfulness from reading and reduces reading to a mere decoding activity.

The stakes are high: motivated students tend to read and write more. Livingston argues that teachers and researchers alike need to exploit every possible way of exposing deaf students to meaningful literary experiences, whether through print English, ASL, or a combination of both.[35] As Deborah Brandt reminds us, acquiring literacy is crucial because being 'literate' is, in her words, a valuable and volatile resource in American culture. "[It] has become one of the sharpest tools for stratification and denial of opportunity," Brandt explains, "The ability to read, and more recently, to write often helps to catapult individuals into higher economic brackets and social privileges."[36] She goes on to emphasize what it means to think of literacy as a resource:

> The status of literacy as a valued resource in this society accounts, then,
> for both the value of literacy for individual learners and the value that
> literate individuals have in wider areas of economic competition into
> which their skills are recruited. As a resource, literacy has potential payoff

[31] Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 52-54; Jago, *With Rigor*, 51-53; Appleman, Deborah. *Critical Encounters in High School English*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000), 8-9.

[32] Enns, "Critical Literacy," 17.

[33] Livingston, *Working Text,* 13.

[34] Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 53.

[35] Livingston, *Working Text*, 13-14; Livingston, *Rethinking*, 14-17.

[36] Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy in American Lives*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

in gaining power or pleasure, in accruing information, civil rights, education, spirituality, status, money.[37]

As Brandt points out, we live in a culture that values and rewards literate individuals; falling short in this area will, unfortunately, lead to disadvantages, social inequalities, and stigma. It would be easy to tick off a long list of negative consequences that await deaf graduates who enter the workforce (or enroll in college, for that matter) with reading and writing skills that are, on average, equivalent to that of nine-year-olds. And, unfortunately, their writing abilities tend to lag behind their reading skills.

Teaching Writing

Considerably less research has been conducted on deaf students and their writing, especially compared to reading. In her succinct article "Writing and the Deaf Writer*,"* Connie Mayer, a preeminent writing researcher in Deaf Studies, traces the history of the field's struggles to teach deaf students writing throughout the 20th century. During the first half of the century, most of deaf students' writing instruction revolved around rigid drillwork such as grammar "problems" to solve, self-contained sentence exercises like labeling parts of speech or sentence diagramming, and highly structured and controlled interactions with English texts.[38] Dissatisfaction with this type of instruction soon led to the rise of whole-language pedagogy, which, in theory, immerses students into meaningful, language-rich interactions that (akin to the process approach to writing) focus more on fluency and coherence than on correctness.[39] She reports that although the whole-language pedagogy did somewhat bolster the "content and idea space" of deaf students' compositions because they were not penalized for errors, it made no difference in most aspects of structure, organization, and linguistic form.[40] Put another way, deaf students wrote *more* content (which was a positive development), but the writing itself

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[37] Ibid, 5.

[38] Mayer, Connie. "The Demands of Writing and the Deaf Writer." In *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, vol. 2, eds. Marc Marschark and Patricia Elizabeth Spencer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 144-48.

[39] Ibid., 46-47.

[40] Ibid., 148.

did not improve syntactically or structurally, in spite of students being given large amounts of low-stakes practice.

Discouraged by the relatively unsuccessful results of the whole-language method for improving deaf students' grammatical issues[41], educators began toying with approaches from English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) pedagogies in the 1970s, and then especially in the 1990s, treating English as a second language for deaf students who sign. Teachers used ESL teaching methods to help deaf students master English, and ASL gained more popularity as the language of instruction in the classroom (rather than Signed Exact English, other forms of signing, and/or cued speech). Students were explicitly taught to analyze the differences between ASL and English and to use their analyses to code-switch between the two languages.[42] However, disappointingly few studies have been done on the effectiveness of the bicultural-bilingual approach on deaf students' writing thus far, so we do not yet know if this approach is an effective one for writing pedagogy.

One thing that researchers have been able to do is to construct a fairly comprehensive picture of what typical deaf students' writing looks like. In *Language and Deafness*, Peter V. Paul gives a typical sample from an 18-year-old profoundly deaf student:

> The family have plan to go to picnic, they packed the foods for lunch. Two children were exciting and will have a fun at there. Father puts a big basket in his car and all of they left the house but the boy saw a dog stay outside and excited with wagged his tail. He tamed and hug it then he took it in the car. They left to the Picnic. Father drove there fabout 6 miles away then arrived.[43]

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[41] I will note here that the whole-language approach to writing instruction was not entirely unsuccessful—not at all. Its emphases on the process of writing, on fluency rather than correctness, and on helping students find their voices *did* indeed have positive benefits for many deaf students (for more on this, see Albertini's (1990) and (1993) studies, as well as Mayer (2010), which suggests that whole-language instruction is a valuable approach to keep in writing teachers' pedagogical toolboxes, even though this approach was not found to entirely resolve deaf students' syntactical and grammatical issues with writing in English.

[42] Ibid., 149. See also Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-Based Practice*.

[43] Paul, Peter V. *Language and Deafness*. 3rd ed. (Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishing, 2001), 106.

Livingston, in *Working Text,* provides another writing sample, this one from a deaf student in community college:

> Image if I am Deaf peddler myself on the street….How do I do survive myself? I have to travel in the United States for peddler. If my friends saw me street sell to people. I could embarrassed myself because my friends already notice me. I know that is not very easily. But I feel sorry for them. I believe that their family don't care about their life. I prefer an education school [for my deaf children] then get good job for my goal… I want them very smart than them.[44]

Both excerpts show typical patterns of "deaf writing" errors, such as subject-verb disagreement, incorrect verb inflections, confusing pronoun references, mixed tenses, syntactical mistakes, and incoherent word choices. Also, the second sample shows a common tendency among deaf students to drift off-topic and/or fail to make connections between disparate strings of thought. As evidenced by these two samples, deaf students face many challenges in learning English grammar, and writing instructors and teachers of the deaf face an enormously daunting task in tackling the surface-level and deep structural issues in these students' writing.

Closing Thoughts on Literacy Pedagogy for the Deaf

Various studies have shown that deaf students' low reading levels are generally accompanied by even lower performance scores in sub-categories of language achievement in English, such as vocabulary comprehension, syntax production, and drawing inferences.[45] When a deaf student performs poorly in any combination of the above areas, they invariably also have a tremendously hard time with not only reading but also writing. Even deaf students who learn print English well enough to enter college typically do so with far weaker literacy skills than the average hearing student— especially in writing. They typically require a series of remedial reading and writing courses, and, unfortunately, the majority of deaf students who enter college never

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[44] Livingston, *Working Text*, 3.

[45] Anderson, *Deaf Students Mis-Writing*, 30.

graduate. In fact, perhaps as many as three out of every four students drop out,[46] a phenomenon that has remained virtually unchanged for decades even though more deaf students are going to college now, and a phenomenon that all stakeholders in deaf education are quite anxious to change. Various interventions and pedagogical approaches have been attempted over the decades, but with limited and mixed success,[47] and as discussed in more depth in Chapter 2, most of these interventions focus exclusively on *English* literacy without incorporating other kinds literacy practices that may be helpful and meaningful for deaf students, a gap that this dissertation attempts to address via the use of ASL translations in the classroom.

A Brief Review of Relevant Literature: Language Ideologies around Deaf Education

When linguists refer to language ideologies, they are referring not only to people's ideas about language but also to the deeply ingrained beliefs, values, and attitudes that people have about language and about how it ought to be used.[48] This theoretical framework will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, but for the literature review that follows, it is important to note that when it comes to deaf education, language ideologies play an especially significant role in the ways educators approach language and literacy instruction because when faced with a deaf child, parents and educators must choose which language to use for instruction and communication: spoken English, ASL, or other speech or sign systems.[49] As the review of literature below reveals, we know quite a bit about the language ideologies that the adult stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers, administrators, researchers) carry about language and literacy instruction, but we know very little about what the *students'* ideologies are.

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[46] Easterbrooks and Beal-Alvarez, *Literacy Insturction for Students Who are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2. See also Marschark and Spencer, *Oxford Handbook*.

[47] For a more detailed overview of the mixed successes of various interventions, see Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-based Practice*, and Livingston, *Rethinking*.

[48] See Irvine, Judith T., and Susan Gal. "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation." In *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity, (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2000), 35-84. Also see: Silverstein, Michael. "The Uses and Utility of Ideology: A Commentary." In *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, eds. Kathryn A. Woolard and Paul Kroskrity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 123-148.

[49] These communication and language options will be discussed in the literature review.

Nowhere is the deeply ingrained nature of language ideology more clear than in the long, unyielding debate within the deaf education field about which language deaf students ought to be taught to use for communication. The sharpest divide falls between those who support the use of some form of sign language and those who hold that deaf children should learn to lip-read and speak English, with all of the stakeholders assuming that the communication mode supported by their ideologies will lead to stronger literacy skills for deaf students.

On the one hand, supporters of oralism insist that deaf children ought to be taught to use whatever residual hearing they have left (facilitated by the use of hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems, or other technological devices) to learn how to speak English. These deaf children, from as early an age as possible, are typically outfitted with some form of hearing aid and placed in speech therapy where they are taught how to identify sounds, to pronounce individual speech sounds and words, and to lip-read.[50] Speech classes tend to occupy a significant chunk of instruction time throughout grade school, and often in secondary school, as well. All classroom instruction—regardless of subject—is done via spoken English only. Students are expected to lip-read the teachers and respond orally, just like "regular" hearing students, under the belief that using English as close to "the hearing normal" as possible will result in better literacy skills.

On the other hand, the manualism side of the debate upholds visual language (i.e. sign language) as the native language of deaf children on the grounds that sign language is fully accessible to them, unlike spoken English. For deaf people in America and in many parts of Canada, that visual language is American Sign Language (ASL),[51] which was proven to be a complete language—with its own grammatical rules, morphology, and syntax that is independent of English—in the 1960s by linguist William Stoeke. Supporters of ASL argue that deaf students should be taught ASL as a first language, which can then be used to teach them other subjects, including English and, in some

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[50] Anderson, *Deaf Students Mis-Writing*, 42-46; Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-Based Practice*, 53-58

[51] Note: Other countries have developed their own sign languages, such as British Sign Language (BSL), French Sign Language (LSF), and so forth. This dissertation focuses only on ASL.

cases, speech and lip-reading.[52] In an ASL-driven classroom, all instruction is given via ASL, and students are taught English—and print literacy—as a separate language (often as a second language). According to this philosophy, deaf children should be taught to negotiate the two cultures (hearing and Deaf) and the language differences (English and ASL);[53] moreover, supporters insist that deaf children should be taught how to sign as soon as they are identified with hearing loss so they can have immediate and complete access to a whole language to facilitate normal stages of language acquisition, which, they argue, leads to stronger reading and writing skills later in life.

Between these two extremes falls a variety of philosophies and pedagogical approaches to language-through-the-air: Signed-Exact-English, cued speech, Pidgin Signed English, and the Rochester method, to name a few.[54] Regardless of which communication mode and which language particular stakeholders subscribe to, they tend to, in loud and confident tones, assert that their language of choice will lead to better literacy rates among deaf children. However, research suggests that when it comes to literacy, the mode of communication may not matter as much as we think it does. Numerous studies have shown that the "typical 4th-grade average" among deaf graduates in reading and writing has remained virtually unchanged over the decades, *regardless of whether they were taught via oralism, manualism, or a combination of both*.[55] Long-time Teacher-of-the-Deaf educator Peter V. Paul agrees that no communication method seems superior for literacy purposes; in his meticulous analysis of deaf students' writing, he demonstrates striking similarity in error patterns among oral deaf students and signing deaf students,[56] which underscores the notion that language-through-the-air, although important, may not be the fail-safe for achieving print literacy.

Even though the assumption that the "correct" communication mode will lead to better literacy has already been debunked by empirical studies done by leading scholars

[52] Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-Based Practice*, 66-75.
[53] Padden, Carol. A. "Folk Explanation in Language Survival." In *Deaf World: A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook*, ed.Lois Bragg (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001), 110-11.
[54] For a more comprehensive treatment of these communication approaches, see Paul, "Language and Deafness."
[55] Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-Based Practice*, 6-8, 514-15; Mayer, "The Deaf Writer," 144-146. Italics added.
[56] Paul, *Literacy and Deafness*, 106-112.

in the field, most educators and stakeholders seem to ignore these findings. Livingston blames what she terms "the language wars" for both the stakeholders' iron-fisted grip on the language debate and their tendency to disregard findings that contradict their ideological positions. She writes, "We have screamed at each other, shaken fingers in one another's faces, and written diatribes about the virtues of one language/ communication system over another…" and, coming from the perspective of a college writing instructor, she adds, "…the fact remains that when our students arrive in college, mostly all communicate through the air in fairly competent ways and some are good readers, but few are competent writers."[57] Indeed, very few deaf students can write well—perhaps because, as Marschark and Spencer flatly declare, "no current approach for supporting language development has been found to resolve deaf and hard-of-hearing students' difficulties with written language."[58] No single approach has been found to resolve deaf students' reading struggles, either, so various stakeholders, propelled by their ideologies, continue to mulishly insist that their preferred language-through-the-air is the best way to teach print literacy to deaf students.

Interestingly, Spencer and Marschark along with leading expert in deaf literacy Susan R. Easterbrooks, point out that the *quality* of communication seems to be key to stronger language and literacy development, rather than which language mode is used.[59] "It appears," writes Easterbrooks, "that children who have hearing loss […] their brains do not care how or what their mothers communicate with them; they just care *that* their mothers and important others communicate with them," consistently and in-depth, starting as early as possible.[60] Spencer and Marschark concur, arguing that there seems little need for researchers to keep belaboring comparisons of language-through-the-air modes, and they suggest that the field should instead work on developing empirical methods for enhancing print literacy regardless of which language approach is used.[61] Unfortunately, ideologies die hard, and many stakeholders in the field continue to allow

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[57] Livingston, *Working Text*, 10.

[58] Marschark and Spencer, *The Oxford Handbook*, 111.

[59] Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-Based Practice*, 32; Easterbrooks, "Review of Literature," 32-33.

[60] Easterbrooks, "Review of Literature," 33.

[61] Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-Based Practice*, 118.

their print literacy pedagogy and their interpretation of research findings to be driven by their own language ideologies.

The Ideologies of Deaf Students: What Do They Believe about Language?

Even though adult stakeholders have been heatedly debating the merits and downfalls of this language or that communication mode for decades, very little attention has been given to the ones around whom the furor centers, the ones who have to actually live with the consequences of the decisions made by the adults: the deaf students themselves. Interestingly, the students' perspectives on language do not seem to be on the radar of experts in the field; indeed, it is difficult to find scholarly or even *non*-scholarly work that explicitly deal with deaf *students*' beliefs and attitudes about either English or ASL. In the 1990s, Anderson touched on deaf students' attitudes towards writing—not towards English or languages per se, but towards writing specifically—in her study of deaf students in college English classes, and she reported that deaf students typically view writing as being hard and English as being "small words and grammar."[62] But she does not explore the implications of these views (to be fair, this was not the focus of her study), and aside from her work and Bonnie Meath-Lang's 1980 study (which I will detail shortly)[63] very few scholars in the field have chosen to take an approach that would have allowed them to delve into the beliefs and attitudes deaf students hold towards the languages they encounter.

In their survey of deaf college students who had, against all odds, achieved literacy skills on par with their hearing peers, Toscano et al. asked students to reflect on their experiences with print literacy throughout their education. Many participants reported enjoying reading and writing as young children, saying that they had early exposure to books and reading both at home and in school. They described their literacy experiences as "fun," "lively," "challenging," and "enjoyable."[64] Clearly, from early ages, these students liked reading and saw value in it; however, because the goals of this study were not focused explicitly on language ideologies, the researchers were able to only identify "enjoying reading and writing" as a factor in these students' subsequent

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[62] Anderson, *Deaf Students Mis-Writing*, 31-32.
[63] Meath-Lang, "Deaf Students' Perceptions."
[64] Toscano, et al., "Success with Academic English," 15-16.

successes. While their findings provide a good foundation for future research, this particular study was not designed to examine what these students believe and value about reading or about their language(s) and the roles these values may have played in their achievements.

In a similar way, Strassman's fascinating study[65] of deaf adolescents' metacognitive knowledge about school-related reading touches on deaf students' perceptions of reading, but like the previously mentioned study, it barely scratches the surface of their attitudes and ideologies. Although Strassman does ask students to explain why they perceive themselves as 'good' or 'bad' readers, the remainder of her questions focuses on combing out the metacognitive moves behind the strategies that these adolescents use while they read, not on their ideologies or on their perceptions of themselves as literate beings.[66] Her findings provide valuable information about what the students do while they read, but very little can be gleaned about what these students actually thought about English, about ASL, or about print literacy—only about what they thought about a particular reading strategy or about the text itself.

A small number of other studies have already begun the work of bringing deaf students' voices into the conversation about print literacy and/or their reactions to a specific writing pedagogy (although these studies do not focus on ideologies per se). For example, Bonnie Meath-Lang conducted her dissertation study on deaf college students' experiences with English by analyzing their written responses to a prompt asking them to describe their feelings toward English and to describe their past experiences with English.[67] Meath-Lang's findings provide tremendous insights into the types of pedagogical practices that these students had encountered growing up (grammar books, grammar drills, diagramming sentences, and so forth), their perceptions on the challenges of learning English as deaf students, and even their general dissatisfaction with their current English skills.[68]

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[65] See Strassman, Barbara K. "Deaf Adolescents' Metacognitive Knowledge about School-Related Reading." *American Annals of the Deaf* 137, no. 4 (October 1992).

[66] Ibid., 326-328.

[67] For more, see Meath-Lang, "Deaf Students' Perceptions."

[68] Ibid.

Meath-Lang's findings do indeed bring deaf students' perspectives into the larger conversation about how to approach teaching print literacy, and her discussion of the implications of these students' often conflicting feelings and attitudes towards English (based on their written responses) provide a rich beginning for future studies (such as this one). Meath-Lang's study was designed to capture and analyze deaf students' experiences with learning English, so it does not delve into the students' attitudes towards sign language, nor does it tease out the underlying strands of language ideologies lurking underneath these attitudes.[69] This was not the focus of her study; as such, this study picks up on her work by examining deaf students' language ideologies and how these ideologies might be affecting their responses to various literacy practices.

Similarly, Albertini's studies (1990, with Hees, on German deaf students,[70] and 1993,[71] a reanalysis of essays from Meath-Lang's abovementioned study) of deaf students and their attitudes towards spoken and written language—such as spoken German and written German, for example—found that most students did not like to write and had negative attitudes towards writing. Albertini argues that teachers need to be more cognizant of their own cultural and pedagogical assumptions in the writing classroom, and posits that a valuable way to do so is for teachers to carefully examine their students' attitudes towards writing (a suggestion that the findings of this study also support).[72] Put all together, these studies, including Meath-Lang's, give us thought-provoking insights into what deaf students think about the ways they were taught to write and how they feel about writing in the dominant culture's language (e.g. German or English; and for the record, most of their feelings and memories of classroom learning related to spoken and written language were negative, which the findings of this study also indicate).

As valuable as their findings are, the chosen scopes of these studies did not allow the researchers to fully unpack the beliefs and values underlying the attitudes and varying

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[69] For more details about her findings, see Meath-Lang, "Deaf Students' Perceptions."

[70] See Albertini, John Anthony, and B. Hees. "Lehrer-Schüler Dialog: Schrieben als Kommunikation, nicht als lästiges Übel [Teacher-Student Dialogue: Writing as Communication, Not as Loathsome Burden]." In *Neuere Entwicklungen in Lehre und Lehrerbildung*, ed. A. Abele (Weinheim, Germany: Deutscher Studiën Verlag. 1990), 261-264.

[71] Albertini, John. "Critical Literacy, Whole Language, and the Teaching of Writing to Deaf Students: Who Should Dictate to Whom?" *TESOL Quarterly* 27, no. 1. (1993).

[72] Ibid., 70.

'weights' that these students attach to each language (for example, sign language versus spoken language, or spoken language versus written language, and so forth). Nor do these studies explore the complex ways that such ideologies might enhance, interfere with, or come into play in the English classroom beyond examining the deaf students' less-than-positive experiences with formal literacy instruction and their generally negative attitudes towards reading and writing.

It is unfortunate that so few scholars in the field have elected to pursue this strand of inquiry further in the 20-odd years since these studies were conducted, aside from a scant handful of studies that look at deaf students' literacy stories and/or their reactions to specific English pedagogies (for example, Nickerson's 2003 study[73] of deaf college students' experiences with a portfolio in the writing classroom, and Wood's 2004 discussion[74] of deaf students' literacy experiences, which focused on their *experiences*, not attitudes or beliefs). One study (Tomkins 2001) comes very close to discussing students' language ideologies.[75] Here, six participants filled out surveys and were interviewed about their bilingual experiences (ASL and English) growing up and also in school; more importantly for my purposes, at one point in their interviews, the students were asked to talk about situations where they would use one language or the other.

These participants' narratives revealed a rich and variegated array of choices they make everyday about using their two languages—decisions that echo those mentioned by the students in this study who are also strong bilinguals—but Tomkins' study was not intended to probe the students' responses to discover the reasons or ideologies underlying their choices. Also, this study focused only on Deaf-of-Deaf (that is, Deaf children of culturally Deaf parents who grew up using ASL in the home), a group that makes up only approximately 10% of the deaf student population as a whole, so their linguistic experiences growing up do not share much in common with the 90% of deaf children

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[73] Nickerson, Jane Freiburg. "Deaf College Students' Perspectives on Literacy Portfolios." *American Annals of the Deaf* 148, no. 1 (2003): 31-37.

[74] See Wood, Kathleen M. "English Literacy in the Life Stories of Deaf College Undergraduates." In *Literacy and Deaf People: Cultural and Contextual Perspectives*, ed. Brenda Jo Brueggermann (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2004), 192-209.

[75] See Tompkins, Lillian Buffalo. "Cultural and Linguistic Voice in the Deaf Bilingual Experience." In *Literacy and Deaf People: Cultural and Contextual Perspectives*, ed. Brenda Jo Brueggermann (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2004), 139-56.

who come from hearing families. Tomkins' study provides a valuable foundation for future studies on different populations of deaf students, and it is hopeful that Tomkins and other researchers will continue this strand of inquiry.

Even though the studies mentioned thus far have examined the attitudes and the narrated experiences of deaf students, they were not designed to provide much insight into the language ideologies that lead the students to align with or distance themselves from one language and not the other, nor do they help us understand why students choose to use components of one language in a certain way. For instance, many deaf students tend to overuse articles and prepositions when they try to write in English, as Mayer discovered in her analysis of deaf students' writing under the whole-language approach to writing instruction (in which students were encouraged to write copiously without being penalized for errors). She found that even though the deaf students reported enjoying not being penalized for errors, they continued to "make liberal and indiscriminate use of derivational morphemes and functors (sic), more to signal 'this is English' than to carry semantic or grammatical information",[76] which puzzled her and her fellow researchers.

In other words, the deaf students consistently overcompensated in their writing by using too many articles (purely for fun, here is an example I remember from a childhood friend of mine: *red a fire the truck*), prepositions, and conjunctions to show that they were "speaking" English, or as Anderson calls it, using "small words and grammar."[77] But why did those students feel that they had to do things like that when writing in English? What ideological attitudes, beliefs, or motivations about English prompted them to do this? This study hopes to address questions like these about deaf students' ideologies, and hopefully, begin to move us closer to finding some answers.

A Review of Relevant Literature: English-to-ASL Translations

The notion of ASL translations is not a new one; ever since the rise of the National Theater of the Deaf in the 1970s, and the boom of ASL poetry during the late1980s, many stories and books have been translated—or if not translated per se, then re-told—from English into ASL. However, the overwhelming majority of these

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[76] Mayer, "The Deaf Writer," 148.

[77] See Anderson, *Deaf Students Mis-Writing*.

translations have been children's books, fairy tales, and songs, stories like *The Princess and the Pea, Jack and the Beanstalk, The Three Pigs,* and their ilk. Only a handful of more 'mature' works—that is, short stories, poems, and novels at middle- and high-school levels—have been rendered into ASL. Two notable examples come to mind: Patrick Graybill's ASL version of Poe's short story *The Black Cat* and Bernard Bragg's translation of Whitman's poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," both of which were translated during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Unfortunately, their excellent translations were not distributed widely, nor have they been used in deaf classrooms (as evinced by the findings from surveys conducted in the Tomkins study and Toscano et al. study, in which no students reported having encountered ASL translations at school). This is probably because, until recent years, videos were more costly to produce and were considerably less portable than books, but today, even with the advent of technology that facilitate sharing videos, English-to-ASL translations still tend to be made on the whims of scattered ASL literature aficionados, continue to be distributed individually (or scattered across YouTube, or worse, locked up in expensive ASL curriculum sets that virtually no lay person knows how to procure), and are seldom made available in easily-accessed collections.

For the past few years at the Georgia School for the Deaf, the Accessibility Materials Project (AMP) has started an ambitious project that aims to change this phenomenon. This group, under grant funding, is working tirelessly to translate various texts—literary texts and expository texts alike—into ASL. Their work chiefly centers around texts for elementary-aged children: mathematic texts, science texts, literature texts, and so forth. Although their ever-growing library of free ASL translations is exciting and is slowly expanding into middle-school level texts, the work has only just begun; likewise, the research on these translations in the classroom is in its infancy. In fact, only one study has been published so far using the AMP materials: Cannon et al.'s 2009 study of four elementary students who received math vocabulary instruction through a DVD that contained an ASL-translated expository book about math.[78] Findings

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[78] Cannon, Joanna E., Laura D. Frederick, and Susan R. Easterbrooks. "Vocabulary Instruction through Books Read in American Sign Language for English-Language Learners with Hearing Loss." *Communication Disorders Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2010).

indicated that simply watching the DVD alone did not help students acquire very many new math vocabulary words. However, when the viewing of the DVD was accompanied by a brief pre-teaching of target math vocabulary words, then the students performed the best on the vocabulary test compared to other conditions.[79] I will note that this study did not compare pre-teaching+DVD with pre-teaching+reading-an-English-only-text. However, that study represents the first of (hopefully) many studies that will emerge from the AMP project.

Additionally, this study raises and explores a number of questions not only about using translations with deaf students in the classroom but also concerning the following issues surrounding ASL translation: the differences and similarities between ASL translations and traditional print translations, the process of translating texts into ASL, and the unique challenges that the visual nature of ASL places on the translation process. In Chapters 2 and 3, I will offer some examples from my own experiences to help illustrate the unique challenges that ASL translators face on top of the already-existing difficulties inherent in any translating task, and, importantly, how these unique challenges might, in turn, complicate the ways scholars theorize about translation.

Conclusion

The deaf education field stands to gain much from research that explores the language ideologies of deaf students and the various ways these ideologies might surface when we require these students to engage in literacy practices in the English language. English, as the dominant language in our culture, and therefore the one with the most social and cultural capital among hearing people, is the language that parents and teachers alike wish deaf students to achieve mastery of—and particularly mastery of print literacy. While this is an admirable and very much a worthy aspiration, the fact remains that English is a language that is never fully accessible for any deaf student at all times, so these students bring a set of vastly different linguistic experiences to the act of learning print literacy in English.

Intertwined with these students' experiences are their ideologies: unpredictable, self-contradictory at times, and often contrary (implicitly or explicitly) to the reading and

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[79] Ibid., 103.

writing practices that we are asking them to do in English. Deaf students—and to some extent other bilingual students who must also mediate their identity, literacy practices, and ideologies between two languages and two cultures—could also benefit from this type of research because they live daily in a world where the most easily accessible language for them (e.g. ASL) tends to be ideologically marginalized (by them and by others) as being just a mode of communication rather than a full language. This prevailing view not only limits the sets of linguistic skills these students could bring to their print literacy practices but it also devalues—or even overlooks altogether—an integral part of their identities as bilingual students and as deaf persons. In this dissertation, I offer translation as a way of creating a concrete space in which we can explore the students' identities and their literacy practices side-by-side with the various ideologies that they carry about both English and ASL—as well as the ways these ideologies shape their reactions to reading and writing practices in either language.

Roadmap for the Dissertation

In this chapter, the first of two introductory chapters, I provide an overview of relevant literature related to print literacy pedagogy, language ideologies, and ASL-English translations, and I point out how deaf students' beliefs and attitudes about language have not received the attention it deserves from the adult stakeholders in the deaf education field. This dissertation seeks to build on what we already know about deaf students' attitudes towards print literacy through its examination of deaf students' language ideologies and how their ideologies shape their responses to various literacy practices,

In Chapter Two, I explore the theoretical frameworks of literacy and identity, language ideologies, and translation that underlie the aims and design of this study and shape the analysis of the findings presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. In its exploration of print literacy and ASL literacy, this chapter also lays out how past and current approaches to literacy instruction within deaf education do not give deaf students the opportunity to bring their full arsenal of language and literacy practices to the act of reading and writing in English. I offer translation and translation theory as a way of creating a space in which deaf students' languages, literacy practices, and identities can intersect in powerful ways as they engage in reading and writing.

In Chapter Three, I outline the methods and underlying the design and implementation of this study, as well as the development of the intervention unit used with the students in this study. I describe the translation process behind the development of the translated texts for this study, and I also discuss the qualitative theoretical approaches that inform and drive the analysis of the data derived from this research.

In Chapter Four, the first of four findings chapters, I explore the complex and often self-contradictory language ideologies of deaf students in this study. Using Rosina Lippi-Green's language subordination model as a guiding framework, I make the argument that even though all of the study participants believe that English is important, their beliefs and attitudes about English and ASL lead them to distance themselves from English and view print literacy practices as "hearing" practices from which many of them feel excluded.

In Chapter Five, I examine how the students' language ideologies—particularly their subordination of ASL in comparison to English—lead them to construct skewed understandings of how both languages are supposed to work, which in turn leads them to believe that ASL is "simple" and "easy" without any grammar, whereas English abounds in grammatical rules and is therefore "hard" and "too complicated." I argue that these misconceptions drive many students to distance themselves from English even further, finding it too cumbersome a language.

Chapter Six describes the results of using English-to-ASL translations of high school-level literary texts as a part of a six-week-long intervention unit in a classroom that consists of struggling deaf and hard-of-hearing readers. This chapter explores the ways the students reacted to the translations and makes the argument that the translations not only made the texts far more accessible to the students but also that they provided the students with a taste of the powerful, imaginative experience that literature—and reading—could be, an encounter that deeply affected the students' motivation and investment in the work they were doing in the classroom.

In Chapter Seven, the last of the findings chapters, I discuss the reactions that students who are stronger readers (i.e. stronger bilinguals) had towards a brief encounter with the ASL translations, exploring the meta-cognitive and reading strategies these students use with the translations (thus bringing their ASL literacy skills to the act of

reading). I also discuss how the students' language ideologies surfaced during their discussion of the translations and how these ideologies—and the students' personal identities—either drove students to embrace the translations as a learning tool or led them to distance themselves from the translations due to the ASL-ness of them.

In the final chapter, I discuss the implications of these findings for our understanding of not only literacy pedagogy but also our conceptualization of what *reading* and *literacy* are. It makes the argument that in addition to being cognizant of how deaf students' language ideologies push them towards certain literacy practices and not others, we also need to recognize the literacy practices that are a part of ASL and find ways to allow deaf students to bring these practices to the table when working with texts in the English classroom. I offer translation and translated texts as a possible approach to bridging together/bridging between deaf students' print literacy and ASL literacy practices. I also make recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2
Theoretical Frameworks: Language Ideologies, Literacy, and Translation

Introduction

Unlike most literacy-based dissertations, translation and translated texts play an important role in this dissertation study, its design, and its findings—in fact, one of the overarching arguments of this dissertation relies on the recognition of translation as a possible point of convergence where deaf students' languages, literacies, and identities all meet and (potentially) combine together to create meaningful literacy experiences in the English classroom. Therefore, I will use this chapter to lay out a number of theoretical frameworks related to language ideologies, literacy, and translation, and in doing so, I will underscore the profound implications that the act of translation itself carries for both languages involved—and by extension, the literacy practices that accompany said languages. In fact, I intend to show that translation illuminates our thinking about reading and what it means, about the ideologies that surround English and ASL, about access to literacy, and about the nature of language itself, all of which have tremendous implications for further establishing ASL as a language with a literacy, a language amongst equals, rather than just a communication mode.

Because ASL has no written form, it does not align neatly with traditional definitions of literacy (which have largely been print-bound, particularly in educational circles, as I will discuss shortly). Most lay people, as well as many in the education field, hold ideologies about language that prevent them from perceiving ASL as a whole language and/or leading them to believe that ASL has no literacy whatsoever. These two factors have contributed to what Tomkins calls "the unique bilingual condition"[80] of deaf students being taught to read and write in English—a spoken language they do not have

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[80] Tompkins, Lillian Buffalo. "Cultural and Linguistic Voice in the Deaf Bilingual Experience." In *Literacy and Deaf People: Cultural and Contextual Perspectives*, ed. Brenda Jo Brueggermann (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press 2004), 153.

full auditory access to—while living and communicating in their daily lives using an entirely different language that resides in a spatial and visual medium.

As I will discuss in this chapter, ASL *does* have a vibrant body of literature, as the work of Lerner and Feigel in chronicling the cultural boom of ASL literature in the 1980s and 1990s indicates,[81] as well as the countless videos of ASL literary works currently circulating the Internet. The problem is that, despite the escalating output of ASL literature in recent years and the general consensus that ASL literature is such a thing, the concept of *ASL literacy*[82] has not been as widely acknowledged or as clearly defined by scholars. It may be that it has unintentionally gotten buried under the mountains of ideologically-driven effort put into getting deaf students to master English literacy, which has prevented scholars from devoting much attention to the conversation about what ASL literacy is. As such, this concept still remains not fully articulated, and the literacy skill sets and practices that the deaf students *do* have in ASL have rarely, if ever, been given any space in the English classroom. Instead, deaf students must engage in literacy practices solely in English—a language that many of them find hard and inaccessible— without being able to fully build on the literacy practices they already have in ASL, which is for many of them their stronger and/or more accessible language.

In the sections that follow, I will discuss language ideologies and how these ideologies have powerfully shaped—and in many cases, limited—the ways teachers go about teaching print literacy to deaf students. Then I will explore literacy scholars' ever-expanding definitions of literacy and how their variegated understanding(s) of literacy open the door for us to consider how ASL literacy might fit into, and even complicate, what we believe literacy to be. Finally, I will offer translation and translation theory as a potentially powerful point of convergence that not only brings English and ASL together into one text but also invites the students to bring their literacy practices and linguistic experiences with *both* languages (all of which is, of course, tightly intertwined with their identities) to the act of reading and writing in the English classroom.

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[81] Lerner, Miriam Nathan, and Don Feigel. *The Heart of the Hydrogen Jukebox*. Directed by Miriam Lerner and Don Feigel, 2009. Rochester, NY: Rochester Institute of Technology, 2009. DVD.

[82] In the "ASL Literacy" section of this chapter, I will discuss ASL literacy and its various emergent definitions in more detail.

Language Ideologies

The Deeply-Entrenched Role of Language Ideologies in Deaf Education

As explained in Chapter One, language ideologies have long run rampant in the deaf education field. Because deaf children's hearing loss severely limits—or even completely prevents—them from accessing spoken English fully, the English language becomes one that is *learned*, not *acquired* naturally.[83] Thus, when parents and educators are confronted with a deaf child, they must make a weighty decision, as swiftly and as early as possible, about *which* language will be used with that child and *how* that language will be taught—a choice that carries vast ramifications for the child's identity, education, and future. Such a choice means that there are sides to take, and take sides people do—vehemently.

I have already explained the competing communication methods in the previous chapter, so now I will simply reiterate a crucial point made by Livingston: a widespread assumption—on either side of the divide—is that once reasonable conversational fluency has been achieved in the communication mode of choice, it will in turn lead to better language, reading, and writing skills for deaf students.[84] Both sides, thoroughly convinced that they are right, will insist that their method is best, even without empirical data to support their beliefs.[85] Because the ideologies of various stakeholders have played such an important role in shaping language and literacy instruction for deaf students over the years, this section will set forth a theoretical framework for understanding language ideologies in general and then briefly explore the main ideologies that have long dominated the debate on teaching reading and writing to the deaf.

Language Ideologies, from a Linguist's Point of View

Whether they are explicitly acknowledged or not, language ideologies are pervasive in the everyday lives of people—educators and ordinary speakers alike—and the ideologies people carry bleed over in virtually all aspects of their daily experience. As

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[83] Anderson, Jacqueline. *Deaf Students Mis-Writing, Teacher Mis-Reading: English Education and the Deaf College Student* (Burtonsville, MD: Linstok Press,1993), 32-33.

[84] Livingston, Sue. *Working Text: Teaching Deaf and Second-Language Students to be Better Writers* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2010), 8-9.

[85] For more on the ideological battles within deaf education, see Marschark & Spencer, *Oxford Handbook*; Livingston, *Rethinking;* and Paul, *Language and Deafness.*

linguists Irvine and Gal emphasize, the ideologies people hold about language profoundly affect how they think, act, and justify these thoughts and actions.[86] Ideologies are more than merely ideas about language: they are sets of deeply ingrained and seemingly commonsense beliefs, attitudes, morals, and values that users and observers construct, hold, and pass on about language and about what "correct" language ought to be. For example, many Americans assume that standard English is the most correct—and therefore superior—form of the language and thus make negative judgments about speakers who use variants of English that differ from their conceptualization of what standard English is. Speakers of different dialects that might permit the use of *ain't* or double negatives are often viewed as being backwards and less intelligent.[87] Most people pass these kinds of judgments without being aware of why they are doing it, and because our language ideologies are so deeply embedded in our consciousness, they often seem commonsense and are taken for granted.[88]

Several linguists have offered various definitions of "language ideology," with some emphasizing the ways people enact and rationalize their ideologies (e.g. Silverstein), and others highlighting the cultural, social, and political purposes ideologies are made to serve (e.g. Kroskrity, Irvine and Gal). I find these definitions exceedingly helpful for understanding the ideological battleground in deaf education; for the purposes of this study, I also borrow from Pierre Bourdieu's argument that different languages carry varying amounts of *linguistic capital, social capital,* and *cultural capital* for their speakers.[89] This concept helps to illuminate the seemingly instinctual and powerful beliefs that parents, educators, administrators, and deaf people hold about which language is best for deaf children in terms of achieving communication, learning literacy, and

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[86] Irvine, Judith T., and Susan Gal. "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation." In *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity, Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2000, 37.

[87] For more, see Lippi-Green, Rosina. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (London: Routledge Press, 1997), especially p. 53-73.

[88] Silverstein, Michael. "The Uses and Utility of Ideology: A Commentary." In *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, eds. Kathryn A. Woolard and Paul Kroskrity, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 125.

[89] Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson, New York: Greenwood, 1986, 241-58.

succeeding "in the real world." Thus, when I use the term *language ideologies* in this dissertation, I am referring not only to the culturally- and socially-meditated beliefs, values, and attitudes that people carry about language and the ways they enact their ideologies but also to their beliefs about which language will provide the most *capital* for deaf students.

In his "The Forms of Capital," Bourdieu explains how people tend to accumulate cultural capital (knowledge, skills, education, attitudes, and advantages) and social capital (resources based on group memberships, networks, and relationships), all of which fluctuate in value as people move in and out of various spheres throughout their lives.[90] The 'capital' that Bourdieu describes is not necessarily material and tangible, nor is it something that can be counted, folded up neatly, and put into one's pocket like money can be (although some types of capital *can* be quantified, such as financial capital like income, property, and resources). Rather, cultural and social capital, as Bourdieu describes them, are a largely invisible amalgamation of socio-cultural knowledge, experience, and connections that each person carries with them (often unknowingly), all of which can help or hinder them in successfully attaining their goals.

People tend to accrue most forms of their social and cultural capital from their family and their education (thus, those who come from upper-class or highly-educated families tend to have more advantages in our society than those who do not), and those forms of capital can benefit people in many ways, whether the profits are tangible (e.g. wealth, possessions, opportunities) or abstract (e.g. prestige, respect, membership).[91] More relevant to my discussion here, Bourdieu identifies *linguistic* capital as a subcategory under cultural capital: language is often used not only to symbolically encode the other forms of capital but also to negotiate and represent power relations between speakers. He goes on to argue that speakers can use language to define

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[90] Ibid.

[91] Bourdieu also explores how cultural and social capital (one or the other, or both) can lead to higher economic capital, but that discussion is not what I want to focus on here. For more details about Bourdieu's ideas about capital, see his "The Forms of Capital."

themselves and one another, to include or to exclude others, to enforce or grant authority, and to represent (perhaps even enforce) social structures.[92]

Thus, the ability to effectively use the language of a dominant group can be a powerful tool, and here in the United States, English is far and away the dominant language. Mastery of English (particularly standard written English in schools and the workplace) or the lack thereof can enhance or severely limit how much linguistic capital, and in turn cultural capital, an individual can accumulate. Even though all stakeholders in deaf education agree that learning to read and write English is a most valuable skill to learn, they cannot agree on which language is the best path towards achieving print literacy (and thus better chances of accumulating more cultural capital): spoken English or sign language. And the stakes are high, for the failure to master standard written English carries a stigma in our society, as non-standard and/or non-fluent speakers and writers are perceived as being less intelligent and inferior.[93]

Moreover, the ideologies surrounding language choice obviously have a tremendous impact on deaf children's lives. The choices their parents and educators make during their early childhoods—even during their infancy—will often ultimately determine which language these children speak (English or American Sign Language, or a different manual system), which school they go to (oral or signing schools, mainstreaming in public schools, or attending deaf-only schools), the communication mode in which their academic instruction takes place (spoken English only, signed ASL only, Signed Exact English, or simultaneous communication, to name a few), how these children perceive themselves as deaf individuals, and which culture they ultimately identify with. Thus, a solid understanding of language ideologies and their far-reaching effects on not only stakeholders but also the deaf students themselves provides a crucial theoretical lenses for examining these students' beliefs and values about not only the language(s) they use but also about reading and writing.

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1, we know very little about the ideologies that deaf students carry about language; thus, the deaf education field stands to

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[92] This is only a short list of the many uses of language that Bourdieu explores. For more, see Bourdieu, Pierre, and John B. Thompson. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press, 1991.
[93] Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent,* 54-59.

gain much from research in this area. English, as the dominant language in our culture, and therefore the one with the most social and cultural capital among hearing people, is the language that parents and teachers alike wish deaf students to achieve mastery of— and particularly mastery of print literacy. While this is a worthy aspiration, the fact remains that English is a language that is never fully accessible for any deaf student at all times, so these students bring a set of vastly different linguistic experiences to the act of learning print literacy in English.

Intertwined with these students' experiences are their ideologies: unpredictable, self-contradictory at times, and often contrary (implicitly or explicitly) to the reading and writing practices that we are asking them to do in English. Deaf students—and to some extent other bilingual students who must also mediate their identity, literacy practices, and ideologies between two languages and two cultures—could also benefit from this type of research because they daily live in a world where the most easily accessible language for them (e.g. ASL) tends to be ideologically marginalized (by them and by others). This prevailing view limits not only the sets of linguistic skills these students could bring to their print literacy practices but it also devalues—or even overlooks altogether—an integral part of their identities as bilingual students and as deaf persons. In this dissertation, I explore the various ideologies that signing deaf students carry about both English and ASL, as well as the ways these ideologies shape their reactions to reading and writing practices in either language.

Literacy and Identity

High percentages of deaf students struggle with reading at low levels, which prevents them from fully accessing age-appropriate literary texts in the middle- and high school classrooms, so for them, reading and writing has been reduced from an elevated and imaginative form of language enrichment to simply a means of communication that they either get right or wrong.[94] The findings of this study also suggest that for many deaf students, even those who can read well and enjoy it, reading and writing (and by extension, the English language) feel largely like "hearing practices" that they are

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[94] Brueggemann, Brenda Jo. *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* (Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 41.

required to engage in, and some of them do so unwillingly. Comments from several of the students indicate that print literacy is something that is far from their identities—particularly their identities as deaf individuals.

Instead, many of them spoke of their experiences with ASL and with ASL literature, including the translations they saw during this study, as being a deep and crucial part of who they are, and upon interacting with the translations, they incorporated a sophisticated set of linguistic skills from ASL into the act of interpreting, comprehending, and analyzing the translated texts. In other words, they were able to (and for many of them, for the first time) bring their ASL literacy practices to the table when they sensed that the translations provided them with the opportunity to do so, and, importantly, they found the experience to be deeply validating of their identities as deaf persons. These responses, which will be detailed in later chapters of this dissertation, point to a number of ways that these students' literacy practices in ASL might complicate our understandings of what *literacy* and *reading* are, and move the larger field of literacy even closer in the direction—as it has already begun to shift towards in recent years—of defining *literacy* in ways that are not bound to print texts only.

Literacy studies has many sub-fields (e.g. print literacy, digital literacy, cultural literacy, numeracy, and so forth), and because literacy is so tightly intertwined with individuals' languages, cultures, and identities, I have highlighted in this chapter specific aspects of various literacy theories that provide a relevant and useful lens for considering the findings of this study and exploring how these findings contribute to the larger field of literacy. This is not meant to be a comprehensive treatment of literacy theories or identity theories; instead, I will focus on the following components of literacy and identity, which I have organized in this way: (1) Reading; (2) Cultural Literacy; (3) Literacy and Identity; and (4) ASL Literacy.

Reading—A Theoretical Framework

To be literate could mean a number of things, depending on how one perceives *literacy*. I will, therefore, begin with what first comes to mind for most lay people when they hear the word *literacy:* reading. In the following sub-section, I will discuss what reading theorists say about reading, about what readers do, and what constitutes a successful act of reading. From there, I will then move on to explore various facets of the

larger concept of *literacy*, tracing how scholars of literacy studies have already begun to distance themselves from print-bound definitions of literacy, and in doing so, I will consider how ASL literacy aligns with and/or complicates current understandings of literacy. Also, as seminal literacy scholar Brian Street emphasizes, we cannot consider literacy without also considering identity, for "the ways in which people address reading and writing themselves are rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being."[95] His point makes perfect sense when we consider the ways that students in this study assertively aligned with or distanced themselves from certain literacy practices in either language, so in the following discussion, I will also briefly explore the tightly-bound relationship between an individual's identity and literacy practices.

Reading theorists have long known that reading is far more than simply decoding ink symbols on a page. As Goodman explains, it seems almost common sense to assume that reading is a process that relies on "exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns, and large language units," or put another way, as "a series of word perceptions."[96] However, he goes on to argue that reading is far more than this: it is actually a sophisticated "psycholinguistic guessing game" in which readers bring the sum total of their experience and their language thought and development to the act of perception.[97] The psycholinguistic perspective of reading maintains that, readers—rather than simply identifying meaningful units and attaching them to meaning—also rely on semantic and syntactic information, combined with their prior linguistic experience, to predict and anticipate what is coming next based on cues in the text.

Similarly, the transactional theory of reading, even though it uses different terminology, also emphasizes what readers *bring* to the text. "Every reading act is an event, or a transaction," explains Rosenblatt:

> …involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text,
> and occurring at a particular time in a particular context. Instead of two

[95] Street, Brian. "What's "New" in New Literacy Studies? Critical Approaches to Literacy in Theory and Practice." *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 5, no. 2 (2003), 77-78.

[96] Goodman, Kenneth. S. "Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game." In *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, 2nd ed. Eds Harry Singer and Robert B. Rudell, [S.l.]: Distributed by ERIC Clearinghouse, 1970, 1

[97] Ibid., 5.

fixed entities acting on one another, the reader and the text are two aspects of a total dynamic situation. The 'meaning' does not reside ready-made 'in' the text or 'in' the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text.[98]

Indeed, the act of reading is more than just knowing vocabulary and decoding graphological symbols and representations printed on the page (although both skills are essential for good readers to have, as Oakan et al. and Golinkoff remind us).[99]

Successful readers go beyond identifying words and connecting them to meanings by actively making connections with the text in a variety of ways that help them construct "live" meaning out of what they read, a meaning that, as Rosenblatt points out, is formed in a particular context and at a particular time, and continually changes over time as the reader works through the text and, afterwards, reflects on the text.[100] The forms that this meaning takes depend not only on the text itself (and by extension, the author) but also on *who* the reader is (e.g. identity, social, and cultural contexts) and *what* the reader's purpose is (e.g. to learn, to enjoy, to analyze, to criticize, and so forth). As Rosenblatt scholar Elizabeth Hutton astutely emphasizes, this theory of reading is not merely a meaning-making process for the individual reader but also maintains that:

> [R]eading was itself a system of cultural *meaning-making*—not merely as readers absorb produced language (or become enculturated), but as reading itself reactivates such language with continuing and mutable significance [...Further, Rosenblatt suggests] that the practice of reading might also constitute a form of *culture-making*: enabling the changes in habit and value that provide a culture, at one or another specific moment, with its particular definition.[101]

Thus, it is important to understand reading as an culturally-embedded practice that places readers, texts, and situation in an active, constant conversation that both "informs" and

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[98] Rosenblatt, Louise M. "The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing." In *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, 5th edition, eds. Robert B. Ruddell & Norman J. Unrau, International Reading Association, Article 48, 2004, 1369.

[99] Oakan, Robert, Morton Wiener, and Ward Cromer. "Identification, Organization, and Reading Comprehension for Good and Poor Readers." *Educational Psychology* 62, no. 1 (1971), 71-78; Golinkoff, Roberta M. "A Comparison of Reading Comprehension Processes in Good and Poor Comprehenders." *Reading Research Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1975-76), 623-59.

[100] Rosenblatt, Louise M. "From Literature as Exploration and the Reader, the Text, the Poem." *Voices from the Middle* 12, no. 3 (2005), 27.

[101] Hutton, Elizabeth. "Informing Culture: Rosenblatt's Model of Transactional Reading and the Practice of the Literary." Manuscript submitted for publication in *Special Topics: Cultures of Reading*, 2016.

"reforms" not only the individual reader but also the culture(s) in which these readers and texts reside.[102] Wilhelm recognizes this, describing reading as an "evolution of understanding" through the constant co-construction and re-construction of cultural and textual meaning that occurs in the interactions between author, text, and reader.[103]

Indeed, the words on the pages do not have a single meaning to be decoded; rather, the reader—who brings a reservoir of knowledge from prior linguistic, social, and cultural experiences—interacts with the text to create meaning.[104] Good readers do so through combinations of a variety of strategies. A fair number of researchers and theorists have pointed to background knowledge as one of the most important things that strong readers bring to the act of reading.[105] This background knowledge, or schemata, when activated while reading, plays a crucial role in helping the reader to engage in some of the following meaning-making processes, all of which strong readers utilize at various times:

- Accurately organizing the words into meaningful units, phrases, and chunks for comprehension and later recall.[106]
- Making connections between self-and-text, self-and-author, text-and-other-texts, and text-to-world.[107]
- Refining and revising existing schemas to build and refine comprehension.[108]
- Making inferences—or "reading between the lines"—and predictions based on what is explicitly stated in the text and what is not.[109]

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[102] Ibid., 3.

[103] Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry: Promoting Deep Understanding in Language Arts and the Content Areas with Guiding Questions* (New York: Scholastic, 2007), 134.

[104] Rosenblatt, "The Transactional Theory," 1369. See also Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension*. (New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2002).

[105] Palincsar, Annemarie Sullivan, and Kristine M. Schutz. "Reconnecting Strategy Instruction With Its Theoretical Roots." *Theory into Practice* 50, no. 2 (April 2011), 87; McKeown, Margaret G., Isabel L. Beck, and Ronnette GK Blake. "Rethinking Reading Comprehension Instruction: A Comparison of Instruction for Strategies." *Reading Research Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (July 2009), 220; Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy*. (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2001), 97-98.

[106] Golinkoff, Roberta M. "A Comparison of Reading Comprehension Processes in Good and Poor Comprehenders." *Reading Research Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1975-76), 633; Palinscar and Schultz, "Reconnecting Strategy," 88.

[107] Wilhelm, *Strategic Reading*, 126-129; Palinscar and Scultz, "Reconnecting Strategy," 88.

[108] Recht, Donna R., and Lauren Leslie. "Effect of Prior Knowledge on Good and Poor Readers' Memory of Text." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 80, no. 1 (1988): 16-20; Wilhelm, *Strategic Reading*, 97.

[109] Wilhelm, *Strategic Reading*, 132-33; Palinscar and Schultz, "Reconnecting Strategy," 89.

These examples are but a handful of the strategies that readers might use to construct meaning out of a text. As Rosenblatt notes, when readers interact with the text, the specific situation, the purpose of the reading, and readers' linguistic-cultural-experiential equipment all also enter into the meaning-making process—in a dialogue of sorts—and affects the way the reader processes, interprets, and responds to the text, and "reader and text are involved in a complex, nonlinear, recursive, self-correcting transaction."[110] Good reading is not a simple process of interpreting symbols and cues on a page; rather, the reader actively and deliberately interacts with the text in order to create dynamic meanings that continually evolve over time.

For deaf students, however, who have limited access to linguistic features of English and thus bring a different set of linguistic and cultural experiences to the act of reading, even the most basic parts of the reading process—i.e. decoding, interpreting, connecting symbol to meaning, acquiring vocabulary—can be extremely challenging for them to learn, which in turn makes the more advanced reading processes—e.g. activating schemas, connecting prior knowledge to text, organizing input in chunks for comprehension—even more difficult for them to learn and use effectively.[111] Many deaf readers struggle to create meaningful transactions with the text, to achieve what Wilhelm describes as the goal of reading: "A story is really just ink on a page, but a reader takes that text, infuses it with meaning, and creates a full and complete secondary world that can be lived through, deeply experienced, elaborated upon, enjoyed, used to think with, and much more."[112] For many weaker deaf readers, reading has typically remained limited to a decoding activity that consists of identifying individual words and finding the "correct" answer, using a language and culture that they do not have full access to.

Cultural Literacy and Socio-Cultural Knowledge

Even though most lay people think of print literacy when they hear the term *literacy*, the fact is that being "literate," as numerous theorists remind us, constitutes far

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[110] Rosenblatt, "The Transactional Theory," 1371-72.

[111] Musselman, Carol. "How Do Children Who Can't Hear Learn to Read an Alphabetic Script? A Review of the Literature on Reading and Deafness." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2000, 19-20.

[112] Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry: Promoting Deep Understanding in Language Arts and the Content Areas with Guiding Questions*. (New York: Scholastic, 2007), 70.

more than simply being able to read and write.[113] "Literate abilities," Brandt explains, "originate in social postures and social knowledge that begins *well before* and extend *well beyond* words on a page"[114]; in other words, being literate means much more than merely being able to decode and scribble symbols on paper. It also comes with certain types of social knowledge, or as E.D. Hirsch terms it, cultural literacy.[115] In short, this socio-cultural knowledge makes up a body of knowledge—about history, about literature, about philosophy, and about the sciences—that all educated citizens are expected to have. If someone says of a particularly macabre movie, "Oh, that is like something out of Poe," or if a newspaper headline makes a pun on Shakespeare with "To eat or not to eat," many Americans will understand the allusions and what they mean. Indeed, any American adult with a high school education is expected to have at least a passing familiarity with, say, the Alamo, Sir Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin, Geoffrey Chaucer, The Emancipation Proclamation, and so forth—enough knowledge to understand everyday references to those ideas, events, and people. According to Hirsch, citizens who do not have sufficient familiarity with the major ideas and works that undergird our society are greatly disadvantaged.[116] Put simply, they are viewed as ignorant or backwards, and the resultant stigma can profoundly affect how successful those individuals are in various spheres of society.

To an extent, I find Hirsch's argument useful when thinking about literacy because I have seen firsthand the detrimental effects that socio-cultural knowledge gaps have had on many deaf people as they struggled with succeeding in college and in the workplace—and even with the simple act of reading a text containing cultural references. There *is* something valuable in Hirsch's concept of cultural literacy, because it can also be a resource (to use Brandt's term) that grants or withholds access to privilege, other resources, status, and so forth. However, Hirsch's work has fluctuated in and out of favor

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[113] Heath, Shirley Brice. *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 230-31, 234; Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy in American Lives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4-8; Hirsch, E.D. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 11-14; Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *You Gotta BE the Book*. 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 197-99.

[114] Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*, 4 (italics added).

[115] Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy*, 2-3.

[116] Ibid., 21-22.

over the past two decades because he takes such an unwavering stand on the importance of reading and literature for supplying this socio-cultural knowledge. In fact, one major criticism leveraged against Hirsch is that his argument has strong leanings towards teaching literary works that are overwhelmingly "traditional" and "canonical," and even "too White"; some of his critics also complain that 'cultural literacy' can be essentially boiled down to a prescriptive list of works and terms to memorize.

In spite of these well-deserved criticisms, however, Hirsch does bring up a valuable point: many literary works have endured over time and become "commonsense" knowledge in our culture, to the point where our society can take parts of that knowledge for granted. With this said, though, I have also come to question Hirsch's claim that reading and reading alone is the path towards cultural literacy. Indeed, reading a wide variety of literature *is* valuable, not only for cultural literacy but also for many other purposes. In reality, however, very few Americans have read every single canonical work on any list and yet, they are *still* culturally literate. One need not to have read *Alice in Wonderland* (or even to have seen the movie version) in order to know who Tweedledum and Tweedledee are, or to understand what the phrases "she's a Queen of Hearts" and "down the rabbit-hole" mean, for example. This socio-cultural knowledge resides not only in books but also in the English language itself, fossilized in idioms, phrases, and allusions; in fact, it saturates English and lives in everyday conversations and even in pop culture ("The Simpsons," anyone?). When the phrase "with one fell swoop" comes up, hardly anyone knows which Shakespearean play it came from, but we all understand what the phrase means, as we know what a Catch-22 is without having ever read the novel. Native English speakers amass cultural literacy largely from listening to and interacting with other speakers.

And this language is, of course, English, which is spoken, and which deaf children cannot hear. Even if a hearing person has never read Shakespeare, they still know at least something about Shakespeare and his plays because this knowledge has come to them incidentally through spoken language, but deaf children do not have this kind of access.[117] And since many deaf children do not achieve print literacy proficiency

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[117] Literary allusions and phrases like "one fell swoop" are exceedingly rare in ASL, in part because many deaf people have never read these works, in part because such phrases are quintessentially English and do

beyond the 4th grade level, they also have little chance of accessing this socio-cultural knowledge through most print texts that their age-equivalent hearing peers read in middle- and high school. Thus, they are cut off from crucial resources—both spoken English and print texts—for amassing socio-cultural knowledge (and in turn, social and cultural capital) in the hearing world. Even though Hirsch may overemphasize literature's role in cultural literacy (as opposed to the role of spoken language) for hearing people, his arguments do take on a special significance for deaf children, many of whom have no other viable way to access either cultural literacy or the English language.

Literacy and Identity

Individuals' experiences with literacies—print, cultural, and other forms of literacy—are deeply intertwined with their sense of selfhood and identity. Early definitions of literacy focused not on language and identity but rather on the separation between oral language and print, positing societies that read and write print texts as progressively superior compared to those without print (the so-called "great leap," as described by Walter Ong as well as Jack Goody and Ian Watt, for example).[118] However, literacy scholars in the past two decades have moved into the direction of recognizing *literacy* as a complex set of identity-bound practices that can differ widely in various contexts. In this vein, Street emphasizes the connection between an individual's identity and what he calls the "multiple literacies" that people have, and, importantly, how these literacies can vary according to time, space, and culture.[119] Scribner also argues that literacy is "an outcome of cultural transmission," an entity that has "neither a static nor universal essence."[120]

She, however, still clings to a more print-based understanding of literacy when she says that literacy is acquired largely through socially organized activities with written

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not translate well to ASL, and also in part because Deaf culture is one that expects its speakers to expound upon any references to pop culture or stories or references in some detail—passing references are not as much of a cultural norm as they are for hearing people.

[118] See Ong, Walter. "Writing is a Technology that Restructures Thought." In *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Baumann (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), 22-50; Goody, Jack, and Ian Watt. "The Consequences of Literacy." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, no. 3 (1963), 304-45.

[119] Street, Brian. "What's 'New' in New Literacy Studies? Critical Approaches to Literacy in Theory and Practice." *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 5, no. 2 (2003), 77.

[120] Scribner, Sylvia. "Literacy in Three Metaphors." *American Journal of Education* 93, no. 1 (1984), 7-8.

language. A number of literacy scholars similarly assume that a *written* text is included in most literacy practices (see Olsen, Brandt and Clinton, and Gee, for example),[121] but the language they use when talking about literacy—such as when Street calls it "particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts"[122] or when Wilhelm defines literacy as a "meaning-making process" and "the ability to traffic in meanings"[123], or when Brandt and Clinton explore the concept of literacy as technology—[124] suggests that their definitions *do* allow the space for a form of literacy that does not include an interaction with some form of written symbols, even though many of them do not appear to consciously consider this possibility yet.

Bruggemann, a deaf scholar and researcher in the composition and literacy fields, applauds the field's movement towards more inclusive understandings of literacy, but she cautions against separating literacy into literacy-for-and-as-communication (which appears to be the prevailing definition in most of literacy education) and literacy-for-and-as-language.[125] She argues that the former view sets literacy up as a product and the latter as a process, and that the current trend in literacy education—and especially deaf education—to perceive literacy as a means of learning to communicate reduces it to a skill to be obtained:

> [Literacy as a means of learning to communicate] tends to hold literacy in stasis, setting it up as an end in and of itself. Moreover, such a perspective makes literacy an *individual* attribute rather than a *social* achievement and also foregrounds what Deborah Brandt calls the "strong-text account of literacy," in which becoming literate is becoming text-like—"logical, literal, detached, and message-focused." Literacy as a communicative product turns the individual into either a *have* or a *have-not*.[126]

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[121] See the following: Olson, David. "From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing." *Harvard Educational Review* 47, no. 3 (1977): 257-81; Brandt, Deborah, and Katie Clinton. "Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as Social Practice." *Journal of Literacy Research* 34, no. 3 (2002): 337-56; and Gee, James Paul. "What is Literacy?" *Journal of Education* 171, no. 1: 1989. 18-25.

[122] Street, "What's 'New,'" 79.

[123] Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 198.

[124] Brandt and Clinton, "Limits of the Local," 354.

[125] Brueggemann, Brenda Jo. *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness*. (Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 33.

[126] Ibid., 34.

She further argues that we need to recognize literacy as both a form of learning to communicate *and* also as a process in which students can become involved with language by interacting with it, fashioning it, and changing it.[127] In this way, she aligns somewhat with Gee, who considers literacy the "control over secondary uses of language" beyond merely learning the language[128] and also Wilhelm, who argues that literacy is "both the willingness and the ability to evoke, conceive of, express, receive, reflect on, share, evaluate, and negotiate meanings, *in the various forms that meanings may take.*"[129] By re-conceptualizing literacy as a meaning-making process and a secondary way of engaging with language, these literacy scholars have moved far away from the parochial traditional definitions that limited literacy to reading and writing print symbols, and, importantly, these expanded definitions go further than print-based definitions in recognizing the essential role that individuals' cultures, languages, and identities play in their literacy practices.

McCarthy and Moje,[130] as well as Holland et al.[131] and Sfard and Prusak[132], have done much work with theorizing about literacy and its effects on identity, arguing that it is impossible to separate out language, literacy, culture, and identity into individual entities. Moje et al. argue that identity—however one might define it, as a narrative, a label, an act, a social construct, a positioning, or an encoding, to name a few—matters when thinking about literacy because "both what and how one reads and writes can have an impact on the type of person one is recognized as being and how one sees oneself […] in other words, texts and the literate practices that accompany them not only reflect but may also produce the self."[133] And what is more, people can also use literacy—print or

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[127] Ibid., 37.

[128] Gee, "What is Literacy?" 23.

[129] Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 196, italics added.

[130] McCarthey, Sarah J., and Elizabeth Birr Moje. "Identity Matters." *Reading Research Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2002): 228-38.

[131] Holland, Dorothy, William Lachiotte, Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain. *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

[132] Sfard, Anna, and Anna Prusak. "Telling Identities: In Search of an Analytic Tool for Investigating Learning as a Culturally Shaped Activity." *Educational Researcher* 34, no. 4. (2005): 14-22.

[133] Moje, Elizabeth Birr, Allan Luke, Bronwyn Davies, and Brian Street. "Literacy and Identity: Examining the Metaphors in History and Contemporary Research." *Reading Research Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2009), 416.

otherwise—to enact their identities.[134] Sfard and Prusak emphasize the concept of identity as a narrative told (and enacted) by us and told *about* us by others, narratives that morph over time and can change altogether in different contexts.[135]

Moje[136] maintains that it is crucial for any scholar who wishes to study the literacy beliefs and practices of a given group to recognize identities as things that are fluid, ever-changing, rooted in social contexts, and as things that position and are positioned by others. "Who people are, or who they are allowed to be," writes Moje, "is shaped in part by their literacy practices.[137] Indeed, if individuals are considered illiterate in the eyes of our culture (as are many deaf students), then it can have a powerful impact on how they—and others—perceive the so-called "illiterate" persons' abilities, intelligence, and even the very essence of their self. Cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa makes a powerful point about how crucial her language is to her identity:

> So if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—*I am my language*. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.[138]

Anzalúda's point is powerful: she *is* her language, and I will point out that it is a language that comes with its own set of literacy practices. Like many deaf people who claim ASL as an essential part of who they are, Anzaldúa's native language cannot be separated from her identity, and I would—along with Moje—argue that neither can her literacy practices be separated from her language or her identity.

This calls for a more comprehensive view of 'literacy' that includes students' home literacy practices (which may not always be in English), the various texts they choose to interact with in their free time (such as online texts, magazines, social media, and so forth)—texts and practices that typically are not represented in the classroom.[139] Moje and other literacy scholars (for instance, Holland et al.) also emphasize that

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[134] Ibid., 416.

[135] Sfard and Prusak, "Telling Identities," 16.

[136] Moje, Elizabeth Birr. "Youth Cultures, Literacies, and Identities In and Out of School." In *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through the Communicative and Visual Arts*, Vol. 2. Eds. James Flood, Diane Lapp, and Shirley Brice Heath (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 207-208.

[137] Ibid., 208.

[138] Anzaldúa, Gloria. "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." In *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, Vol. 4. Eds. Richard Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 205-206.

[139] Moje, "Youth Cultures," 208, 214-15.

literacies can shape people's identities (and vice versa), as well as their experiences in acquiring "school" literacy. This is very much true of deaf students, whose linguistic experiences differ vastly from those of hearing students and whose ASL literacy practices do not fit neatly into what most people imagine *literacy* ought to look like in English. Such students often find themselves frustrated and limited by their struggles with the acquisition of print literacy, and the field of literacy studies, in their recent push for more inclusive conceptualizations of literacy, have set the stage for us to consider what ASL literacy is, and how it might further enhance our understanding of what it means to be literate beings.

ASL Literacy: Adding a Twist to Our Conceptualization of Literacy

It is important to note that what it means to 'be literate' is in the eye of the linguistic beholder and is often defined by the linguistic majority (i.e. those in power who determine which language—or variant—has the most capital in our culture). In her landmark study of literacy practices (of hearing people) in different rural communities, Shirley Brice Heath found that each community had its own distinctive "way" of using English (both spoken and in print), and these "ways with words" did not always align with the types of reading and writing done in schools.[140] Each community valued different kinds of literacy practices; children coming into school from communities whose language and literacy practices differed the most (from the schools) invariably struggled to acquire the "correct" type of literacy to succeed in school and beyond.[141] With this in mind, Heath describes various ways teachers might foster literacy by recognizing the diverse ways their students use language. "Changing and changeable, words are the tools [people] use to create images of themselves and the world they see," explains Heath.[142] And this insight is especially true for deaf children who use ASL, a language with its own form of literacy that differs vastly from print literacy.

I have bandied about the term *ASL literacy* several times now, so before I proceed further, it behooves me to pause a moment and explore what precisely ASL literacy is, how it compares to print literacy in English, and—importantly—how it might complicate

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[140] Heath, *Ways with Words,*" 325 and 348.

[141] Ibid., 348.

[142] Ibid., 235.

our understanding of what the practice of reading/literacy is. As Harmon and Hoffmann-Dilloway both discuss in length, ASL has a rich history of visual literature, poetics, and many genres of narratives, including jokes and even rap, all of which are enjoyed, treasured, and shared by the Deaf community—whether they enjoy and share the literature itself as a live performance of the original signer, as a re-telling amongst friends, or in captured form on a video.[143] For many Deaf individuals, the ability to create and appreciate ASL literature is one of the most valued literacies among deaf people.[144] Indeed, with the advent of YouTube, camera phones, and numerous video-capturing and video-sharing technology, it has become infinitely easier to produce and share ASL literature with a wide audience. Renowned ASL performers like Peter Cook, Rosa Lee, Patrick Graybill, Ben Bahan, Wink, and Ella Mae Lentz (to name a few) have multiple works of ASL literature circulating the web in video form.

However, in spite of the rapidly-growing body of ASL literature, the concept of ASL literacy, as Czubek[145] and also Christie and Wilkins[146] point out, is a one for which we still don't have a clear explanation. Even though ASL was officially declared a bona fide language in the 1960s, many people have long persisted in viewing it as being a simplified code or sign system (especially compared to English, and this is still a widespread ideology held by non-signers), and this, combined with the fact that ASL has no official written form,[147] continues to make it difficult for the idea that ASL could have a literature or even literacy practices to really gain traction—and it is still not universally agreed upon exactly what ASL literacy means.

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[143] Harmon, Kristen. "Writing Deaf: Textualizing Deaf Literature." *Sign Language Studies* 7, no. 2 (2007), 200-207; Hoffman-Dilloway, Erika. "Writing the Smile: Language Ideologies in, and through, Sign Language Scripts." *Language & Communication* 31 (2011): 345-55.

[144] Lerner, Miriam Nathan, and Don Feigel. *The Heart of the Hydrogen Jukebox*. Directed by Miriam Lerner and Don Feigel, 2009. (Rochester, NY: Rochester Institute of Technology, 2009), DVD.

[145] Czubek, Todd A. "Blue Listerine, Parochialism, and ASL Literacy." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 373-74.

[146] Christie, Karen, and Dorothy M. Wilkins. "A Feast for the Eyes: ASL Literacy and ASL Literature." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 57.

[147] Although there have been multiple efforts to develop a symbol system for writing ASL—including an ongoing effort at Gallaudet University right now with their Si5s system—all of these efforts, useful as they may be for linguistic analysis purposes, are operating under the assumption that a language must have a traditional print form in order for literacy to be possible.

Clearly, ASL has a literature—and a growing body of literature at that—but what is ASL literacy? It does not involve reading and writing symbols on paper, so it does not fit into the traditional understandings of literacy. Because of this, a few scholars have struggled with what to *call* ASL literacy. Should it be called *literacy* or something else? Nover raises the idea of separating expressive and receptive ASL skills from English skills by using the term *signacy* to denote an individual's ability to engage with ASL literature. Arguing that using the word *literacy* in relation to ASL is a misunderstanding of what literacy means, and arguing that because ASL has no written form, Nover suggests having a different term (other than *literacy*) will make it possible for ASL and ASL literature to align better with more traditional definitions of literacy in literacy studies, especially those that relate to the so-called oral-written cultures divide as proposed by the theoretical frameworks of Ong, Bench, and Baker.[148]

Czubek, however, points out—and rightly so—that this type of compartmentalized thinking drastically reduces the potential role that ASL and Deaf Studies could have in helping to redefine and revolutionize the field of literacy studies. "We cannot mindlessly accept old notions and simply create new categories because they do not fit in with historical approaches," Czubek argues.[149] And he goes on to say that treating literacy simply and exclusively as the ability to read and write print symbols obscures the multiple forms of literate behaviors that are necessary for effective communication in a diverse world.[150] And what is more, as noted literacy scholars Street, Gee, and Smith all point out separately, using different terminology to describe non-traditional literacy behaviors that do not fit in the traditional, parochial definition of

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[148] Nover, Stephen M. (2004, October 22). "The Road to Success: ASL is the Key!" Presentation at the ASL Specialist Conference, St. Paul College, St. Paul, MN, October 22, 2004, quoted in Todd A. Czubek, "Blue Listerine, Parochialism, and ASL Literacy." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 373-381. See also: Nover, Stephen M., Kathee M. Christensen, and Li-Rong Lilly Cheng. "Development of ASL and English Competence for Learners Who are Deaf." *Topics in Language Disorders* 18, no. 4 (1998): 61–72. Also see Ong, "Writing as Technology"; Bench, John. *Communication Skills in Hearing-Impaired Children*. London: Whurr Publishing, 1992; and Baker, Colin. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 3rd ed. Clevendon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2001.

[149] Czubek, 377.

[150] Ibid., 377-378.

literacy essentially marginalizes the language and literacy practices of minority groups (check citations).[151] Czubek puts it well:

> Being satisfied with new categories [such as *signacy*] simply casts Deaf people and ASL, yet again, as the ''other.'' Smith, in her work, calls it systematic fragmentation, and she demonstrates that oppressed cultures and their features are always characterized as ''the other'' and not part of a comprehensive epistemology.[152]

As long as we use different terminology for ASL literature and what it means to engage with ASL literature, we are setting the language (and its users) apart from our epistemology of literacy, which only serves to perpetrate and further marginalize ASL and the deaf people who rely on that language.

How then might we incorporate ASL into our understanding of "literacy"? The overwhelmingly common form of capturing, sharing, and disseminating ASL literature is in video form either online or on DVDs. Czubek and Paul both insist that ASL is already a literate language—e.g. a language with a literature and a set of practices for interacting with said literature—and should be recognized as such.[153] (Although Paul also points out that even though he agrees with the use of the word *literacy* for ASL, ASL literacy does not have as much currency in our society as does, say, English literacy or digital literacy, for example.)[154] Paul toys with the idea of re-conceptualizing our general understanding of literacy by defining it as a form of "captured verbal information," a broad definition within which we could distinguish between script literacy (verbal information captured in written symbols—i.e. print), performance literacy (capture of pre-rehearsed spoken or signed words through audio or video), and other categories depending on the language and cultural practices of various languages. This move, he argues, makes it clear that ASL *is* a literate language even though it does not have a traditional print written form because it allows us to distinguish between the use of ASL in live face-to-face mode

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[151] See Street, "What's 'New'"; Gee, "What is Literacy"; and also: Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples.* New York: Palgrave, 1999.
[152] Czubek, "Blue Listerine," 377.
[153] Ibid., 379-80; Paul, Peter V. "New Literacies, Multiple Literacies, Unlimited Literacies: What Now, What Next, Where to? A Response to 'Blue Listerine, Parochialism and ASL Literacy.'" *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 383.
[154] Ibid., 385.

(which would be roughly similar to the traditional concept of oral literacy) and the capture of carefully scripted, rehearsed, and revised ASL performances via video technology (i.e. performance literacy).[155]

This interesting concept sorely needs to be further explored—as Paul is quick to admit—but essentially, his point is that ASL *does* have literacy; we just need to figure out how to better understand what these literacy practices consist of and how said practices might refine our broader understanding of *literacy*. To this end, Christie and Wilkins divide ASL literacy into three components, as follows:

> *Functional Literacy:* basic language skills that enable a person to communicate effectively in the DEAF-WORLD.
> *Cultural Literacy:* the values, heritage, and shared experiences necessary to understand and interpret the relationships of ASL literature to Deaf people's lives.
> *Critical Literacy*: the use of ASL literature as a means of empowerment and an ideological awareness of the DEAF-WORLD in relation to other worlds.[156]

They point out that studies done on educational programs involving a linguistic minority group have consistently found that when a program focuses only on the development of functional literacy skills in the minority language (and not on cultural or critical literacy), these programs result in disempowerment and limited educational success among the students.[157] In other words, the programs that used the minority language (for example, ASL) as simply a means for communication and did not devote any time to developing the students' literacy skills in their native language actually ended up constraining the students' success in the longer run. Thus, Christie and Wilkins unequivocally argue for the inclusion of the cultural and critical components of ASL literacy in deaf education programs, where the priority has long been almost exclusively functional literacy in ASL and print literacy in English. This is a vital point for this dissertation because this study explores ways that translations might, in addition to providing access to English texts, also be used to enhance deaf students' cultural and critical literacy skills in ASL.

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[155] Ibid., 385-87.
[156] Christie and Wilkins, "A Feast for the Eyes," 57-58.
[157] Ibid., 58.

Importantly, in Christie and Wilkins' definition of ASL literacy above, we see them distinguish between being conversationally fluent in ASL (i.e. functional literacy) and being literate in relation to ASL literature (cultural and critical). This is a crucial distinction, and one not unlike Paul's distinction between oral and captured performance literacy. Both of the proposed definitions recognize that there is a difference between knowing how to sign in ASL and being able to successfully engage with ASL literature. Such attempts at making this distinction are important avenues to explore further because it does take a certain set of linguistic skills to be able to accurately *read* and *comprehend* and *compose* ASL stories and poetry, skills that go beyond being able to carry on a conversation fluently in ASL. Simply knowing ASL vocabulary and syntax does not guarantee that a person will be able to fully understand an ASL story or poem (in a similar way that knowing how to speak English or knowing how to identify print English symbols on a page does not mean that one will be able to read English).

For example, in order to successfully engage with an ASL story or a poem (such as Peter Cook's recent poem "Need" or Ben Bahan's iconic short story "The Ball"), one must be able to read facial expressions, classifiers, and role-shifting (down to the mannerisms and personalities of each character) in order to successfully visualize and comprehend the story in question. During this process, the majority of grammatical information, emphasis, tone, characterization, and emotions are conveyed largely through the storyteller's facial expressions and use of classifiers rather than through regular ASL sentences.[158] Unique to sign languages, classifiers are arbitrary hand-shapes that a signer selects to either represent or describe a person, an object, a part of a whole, or a place. For example, CL: 1 (which is basically the universally-known sign for the number "1") can represent a solitary figure walking upright, something slithering on the ground, the projectile of a flying object, tears rolling down a cheek, or (with two hands) the legs of a person walking (or skipping, running, trembling, wrapped around a tree trunk, and so forth), among many other things. This classifier, along with many others in the language's arsenal (CL: V, bent-V, and C, to name a few), can be combined in new and imaginative ways with facial expressions, emotions, visual grammatical cues, and normal

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[158] Lerner and Feigel, *The Heart of the Hydrogen Jukebox*, DVD.

ASL signs to create a moving tapestry in which the story comes to life in the three-dimensional space in front of the signer.

I would argue that engaging with ASL literature could be constituted as an act of *reading* because, unlike in everyday ASL conversations, the audience must interpret complex moving symbols and vantage points[159] to create, refine, and maintain their mental representation of the story-world. ASL stories—like those in print English—require their audiences to decode, interpret, visualize, and make meaning out of arbitrary symbols that are not necessarily identical to what occurs in the spoken version of the language. Handshapes, gestures, facial expressions, and classifiers typically dominate ASL narratives and poetry (rather than literal signs for individual words), and they are frequently distorted and manipulated for effect, or even invented over the course of the story or poem. Indeed, any given classifier may be used to represent multiple objects at any time in the story (and oftentimes, the only cue that a classifier has changed to mean something else may be a *slight* difference in how the hand moves, in the shape of the hand, or in the location of the hand itself), and it is not unusual for the signer to blur a classifier and an actual sign together to add layers of meaning to the signed text.

Further, ASL performers spend extraordinary amounts of time creating, rehearsing, and revising their poems and stories before they perform them—unlike the impromptu, colloquial ASL used in spoken conversations. To be critically literate in ASL means that one must be able to accurately pick up on non-conversational kinds of linguistic usage and creative language play, as well as read the slightest nuances in the ASL narrative in order to correctly visualize the story-world and its characters, comprehend the story, and appreciate the depth of linguistic innovation in the act of the signed performance itself. Even though these works are physically embodied in performance and do not reside in print symbols on the page, they are far more than merely oral renditions of a story, for as Bruggemann points out, unlike oral literature,

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[159] **Vantage points**: Because ASL signers will create the landscape from their own vantage point (i.e. as they would see the scene if it were in front of them), the audience has to watch the description and simultaneously "flip" the whole 3-D picture when they visualize it so they can "see" it from the signer's perspective. Or, in other words, they must visualize themselves in the signer's shoes as they re-create the scene in their heads. For example, when a signer indicates that a certain tree is on the right, the audience must also visualize the tree as being on the *right* side of the scene in their heads, even though it *looks* like it is on the left when they look at the signer's hands. The same goes for background and foreground, up and down, and every kind of directionality in a 3-D landscape.

ASL also takes place in space—a dimension no other written/print-based or oral language occupies.[160] Also, in captured video form, ASL literary works become a tangible *object* that—like traditional books—multiple audiences in different times and places can do things with, such as reread, analyze, or borrow from. Engaging critically with these literary works require a set of literacy skills that are at a level above being conversationally fluent in ASL, and for many Deaf people, being highly literate in ASL—that is, having the ability to appreciate and create ASL literature—is a tremendously valuable part of Deaf culture.

The findings of this study strongly indicate that many of the students are, indeed, engaging in a variety of meta-linguistic and readerly behaviors to construct and enhance their understandings of the story-worlds while they interacted with the ASL translations (which will be discussed in more depth in Chapters 6 and 7), behaviors that parallel those used by readers of print texts. This suggests that there is such a thing as ASL literacy, and what is more, it suggests that these students already have a set of skills and practices rooted in ASL literacy. In some cases, their ASL literacy skills are stronger and come more naturally to them than print literacy practices in English do, leading a number of these students to be able to achieve deeper and more meaningful reading experiences when working with the ASL translations than they had ever achieved with print texts. I will discuss these findings more in Chapters 6 and 7, but ASL literacy remains an area that direly needs to be further researched.

However, ASL literacy is not a literacy that offers a lot of mileage (i.e. capital) outside of Deaf culture because American society puts most—if not all—of its stock in print literacy skills, and more specifically, print literacy in English. In fact, Brandt describes literacy not only as a set of skills but also as "a resource—economical, political, intellectual, spiritual – which, like wealth or education, or trade skill or social connections, is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially grants it seekers."[161] She goes on to explain that the attainment of this resource has many potential payoffs: gaining power or pleasure, accruing information, gaining access, furthering

[160] Bruggemann, "Deaf Subjects, Between Identities and Places," in *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness,* ed. Brenda Jo Bruggemann (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 68.
[161] Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*, 4.

education, asserting civil rights, earning privileges, establishing status, and accumulating money, to name a few. And literacy, as a resource, is something that can be tremendously beneficial and something that can be exploited. "Calling literacy a valued resource," she writes:

> …is not meant to imply that reading and writing are morally or functionally superior to other forms of human activity. Rather, this way of treating literacy simply acknowledges the practical meaning that literacy has for most citizens at the start of the twenty-first century. Literacy counts in life as people find it, although *how much it counts, what it counts for, and how it pays off varies considerably.*[162]

As Brandt argues, not everyone values literacy in the same way, and having this particular resource does not always guarantee beneficial payoffs. This concept of literacy is helpful because it highlights that not all resources are equally beneficial—or rather, not all forms of literacy have equal potential (or equal mileage, one might say, which hearkens to Bourdieu's concept of cultural and linguistic capital). Some forms of literacy (print English, for example) are more "wealthy" than others (ASL, for example, or Spanish, French, and so forth) in the United States, where English is by far and away the dominant language. Even though many Deaf people may value their ASL literacy highly, it is a resource that does not go very far in the hearing world, for not all literacies possess equal "wealth": some literacies go further than others, benefits-wise, in our society, and not all literacies are widely recognized as a form of literacy in their own right.

The concept of ASL literacy, practically or theoretically, is not universally agreed upon yet, even among ASL scholars. In fact, I did not enter this study intending to discuss ASL literacy with my participants, nor did I expect this concept to recur so frequently in the data during coding and analysis. Committed to letting the data speak for itself, however, I began exploring the references—implied and otherwise—to ASL literacy throughout the data set: what it was for the students, what it meant to them, and how they brought it to the act of engaging with the ASL translations. In this process, I gradually came to find ASL literacy to be a powerful lens for interpreting and analyzing the literacy experiences of the students in this study.

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[162] Ibid., 4-5, italics added.

Most—if not all—literacy instruction for deaf students has long revolved around English and English texts, thus subscribing to a restrictive understanding of what *literacy* is and, importantly, what literacy *could* be for these students. Bruggemann argues that this is a serious problem, because:

> [Education] is a system that, for deaf students, tends to separate out *language* from *communication*, emphasizing the latter over the former; in doing so, by its own "audist"[163] terms, it leaves deaf students linguistically lacking, audiologically disabled, civically crippled, culturally deprived. These communicative portraits are most often drawn by what Harlan Lane disdainfully calls "the audist establishment"—a colonial mechanism that keeps the deaf dumb, unable to communicate, never speaking (let alone writing) well enough, while hearing people remain in power, victorious always through a violence of literacy that sets communication and language against one another…"[164]

In Bruggemann's eyes, the separation of language from literacy—or more specifically, the separation of literacy from ASL—in education has deprived deaf students of a vital component of their language and literacy development, setting their communication mode(s), literacy practices, and language(s) against one another in a perpetual struggle that yields little productive fruit.

This study offers up English-to-ASL translations of literary texts as not only a way of refining our conceptualization of reading and literacy but also as a potential meeting point in which English, ASL, print literacy, cultural literacy, ASL literacy, and the students' identities all converge into a powerful and meaningful literary experience for deaf signing students. By giving deaf students opportunities to interact with literary texts—rich and substantive texts rather than basal readers or children's books—in their stronger language (ASL), and by bringing students' voices about their opinions, values, attitudes about languages, and about print literacy into the conversation, this research has the potential to contribute valuable insights on current pedagogy practices and perhaps even point into the direction of new practices. In the next section, I will explore what

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[163] **Audism**: A concept frequently cited in Deaf Studies that refers to the institutional or individual belief that people who can hear are superior to deaf people, and that deaf people should strive to be as much as hearing people as possible. It can also refer to the negative stigma hearing people have towards anyone who does not hear, or the hearing way of talking about, dominating, structuring and restructuring, and exercising authority over deaf people. It is considered a form of oppression, and people who subscribe to any of the above ideologies (unintentionally or not) are called audists.

[164] Bruggermann, *Lend Me Your Ear*, 45.

translation theory and the process of translation may offer us in terms of creating this convergence point at where deaf students' literacies, identities, and languages might meet.

Translation—A Theoretical Framework

Introduction

As the translator Wilhelm von Humboldt puts it, translation "is one of the most necessary tasks of any literature, partly because it directs those who do not know another language to forms of art and human experiences that would otherwise have remained totally unknown."[165] It is impossible to learn every literate language fluently enough to engage in each of their literary traditions, so translations open up a world of literature that would be otherwise inaccessible to us. Beyond this, however, the act of translation also holds profound implications for the languages involved because translation itself assumes—and indeed, relies upon—the belief that even though the two languages may be radically different in vocabulary and structure, they are both equally competent for expressing ideas.[166]

For ASL, in particular, with its long history of ideological devaluation and oppression by many stakeholders in deaf-related fields and lay people who resist accepting ASL as a full-fledged language, the translation of English texts into ASL (or vice versa) is more than simply a way of providing deaf students with access to other literatures: it is also a deliberate and powerful act of asserting the linguistic competence of ASL. Because very little theoretical work has been done on English-ASL translation of texts, I will first briefly lay out components of translation theory in order to establish what it is that translators do (or attempt to do) in the process of translation. In doing so, I will explore some of the challenges translators face and show how translation theory applies to ASL translators and their work. In addition to this, ASL's literature is visual and spatial rather than print-bound, so the act of translating a print text into ASL differs

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[165] von Humboldt, Wilhelm. "From the Introduction to His Translation of *Agamemnon*." Translated by Sharon Sloan. In *The Theories of Translation*, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 56.

[166] Bellos, David. *Is That a Fish In Your Ear?* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011), 309, 322; Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." Trans. Harry Zohn, In *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge Press, 2000), 18.

slightly from "traditional" print-to-print translations, which complicates a number of concepts that translation theorists have long taken for granted. In short, the fields of translation and ASL studies have much to offer one another, and the findings of this study suggest that this connection is a vital one to explore further as we consider ways to enhance literacy instruction for deaf students.

A Brief Discussion of General Translation Theory: What It Is That Translators Do

A very common misconception amongst lay people and scholars outside of the translation field alike is that a good translation is a literal, one-on-one correspondence with the original text, and that a faithful translation is exactly the same as its source in virtually every way except for the fact that it is "dressed" in a different language. To those who hold this assumption about translation, it is difficult to believe that a language like ASL—which appears at the surface to have fewer words in its sentences than English does, seems to "flip" all of its sentences around, and looks like a simpler language or even broken English[167]—could ever come close to achieve a faithful translation of an English text because the "ideal" one-to-one correspondence simply is not possible (unless one signs exact English, that is—a sign system that the Deaf community has long rejected and continues to disparage as cumbersome, confusing, and inadequate for their linguistic needs). In fact, I myself often encountered such skepticism when I described my study to people, with questions like, "But is it even possible to translate everything in an English story into ASL?" Believing that ASL does not have all of the same features as English does, it was difficult for these people to buy into the notion that ASL might have *different but equivalent* features (as does any other language that English might be translated into) that can just as effectively communicate the meaning of a text even though they are not "literally" identical to English in structure, vocabulary, or grammar.

It is here that translation theory can help dispel these ideology-driven skepticisms. Experienced translators and translation scholars have long resisted the view that a good translation is a one-to-one correspondence to the original, pointing out that the most servile of translations in any language—the ones that try to render word-for-word or

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[167] These are all misconceptions held by many deaf students in this study, and also, in my experience, among people in general who have not studied ASL or ASL linguistics.

rhyme for rhyme from the source to the translation, for example—generally result in stilted, unnatural constructs in the target language. As Schopenhauer reiterates several times, many words and concepts in one language do not have an exact equivalent in the other,[168] and attempting to translate an entire document word-for-word would trap the translator into a fruitless, never-ending cycle of searching for an exact word or phrasing that does not exist naturally in the translating language. Ironically, "the more a translation strives towards [literal] fidelity, the more it ultimately deviates from the original," von Humboldt argues, pointing out that the constant attempt to translate exactly only creates new problems and different nuances in the target language that are not present in the original.[169]

Instead, translation theorists think of *fidelity* in translation not by lexical pairings or by how closely the form and syntax mirror the original but rather by the translation's faithfulness to what Grossman identifies as "contextual significance": the implications and echoes of the first author's tone, intention, culture, and level of discourse. She explains:

> [Good translations] are not necessarily faithful to words or syntax, which are peculiar to specific languages and can rarely be brought over directly in any misguided and inevitably muddled effort to somehow replicate the original. This is a literalist trap, because words do not *mean* in isolation. Words *mean* as indispensable parts of a contextual whole that includes the emotional tone and impact, the literary antecedents, the connotative nimbus as well as the denotations of each statement.[170]

Indeed, words do not *mean* in isolation, and, as Grossman points out, translators work by *analogy*—finding comparable (not identical) forms of expression in the target language. Bellos likewise emphasizes that translators strive to find the best approximate *matches*, not *equivalences,* for the ideas within a text*,* and a faithful translation "seeks to *preserve the force of the original utterance*—not only the overall meaning of what has been said

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[168] Schopenhauer, Arthur. "On Language and Words." Trans. Peter Mollenhauer. In *The Theories of Translation*, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 32.
[169] von Humboldt, "From the Introduction to His Translation," 56.
[170] Grossman, Edith. *Why Translation Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press. 2010), 71.

but the meaning that the saying of it has, and to do so in a way that is appropriate to the specific context."[171]

In fact, many translators speak of the choice-making process within translation in terms of deconstructing and reconstructing the meaning of the text. Peden uses the analogy of an ice cube to explain what she does when she translates:

> I like to think of the original work as an ice cube. During the process of translation the cube is melted. While in its liquid state, every molecule changes place; none remains in its original relationship to the others. Then begins the process of forming the work in the second language. Molecules escape, new molecules are poured in to fill the spaces, but the lines of molding and mending are virtually invisible. The work exists in the second language as a new ice cube—different, but to all appearances the same.[172]

Similarly, Schopenhauer speaks of ideas being "dissolved into [their] most basic components and then reconstructed in a new language" and "melting down our thoughts entirely and recasting them in different form."[173] Thus, skilled translators do not perceive themselves as slavishly reproducing the source text, but rather as dismantling, rearranging, and re-creating the text to, in Venuti's words, decontextualize and recontextualize it for a different linguistic and cultural audience.[174]

These views of translation, with their metaphors of "melting down" and "recasting," clearly and utterly reject the notion that a good translation must be a literal one-to-one correspondence between Language A and Language B. Understanding translation in this way makes it possible for a good, faithful translation to be achieved even when the two languages concerned differ radically in form and syntax, as do English and ASL. And—this is important—such an understanding neatly circumvents the language ideologies that drive people to elevate one language as being linguistically superior above another. It underscores the fact that even though ASL and English do not share many identical linguistic features, the *ideas* and *meanings* expressed in English can

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[171] Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*, 308, italics added.

[172] Peden, Margaret Sayers. "Building a Translation, The Reconstruction Business: Poem 145 of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz." In *The Craft of Translation,* eds. John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 13.

[173] Schopenhauer, "On Language and Words," 33 and 35, respectively.

[174] For more on decontextualizing and recontextualizing, see pages 180-84 in Venuti, Lawerence. *Translation Changes Everything*. London: Routledge Press, 2013.

also be expressed—differently to be certain, but still just as artistically, creatively, and loquaciously—in ASL. I will return to this point in more depth at the end of this chapter because it is a point that will be better illuminated after I discuss the challenges that translators face when working with two languages. For now, it is important to note that translation theory makes it clear that skilled translators of ASL (or translators of any language) do not need to rely on the English language and English features (such as the ones that signed exact English attempts to capture, for example) to successfully translate texts into ASL. Instead, they can—and should—rely on the repertoire of linguistic features within ASL to recast the original text's meaning into ASL: to wit, to achieve a faithful translation that holds cultural and linguistic significance for an ASL audience.

Challenges Translators Face—and ASL Translators, Too

Translation theory is invaluable to ASL in the way it rejects the ideological blindness that many people have towards ASL's standing as a language. When we examine some of the challenges that translators grapple with—and theorize about—in their work, we rapidly see that the ASL translator is, indeed, a *translator* and not merely someone who re-tells or signs the stories.[175] Because many people, influenced by ideologies that devalue ASL as a language, are quick to diminish the work that ASL translators to do (as one student in this study does with her comment, "So the stories are just signed in ASL, that's all?"), it seems important for the purposes of this dissertation to briefly discuss some of the challenges that all translators face—including ASL translators. Also, because ASL translations are visual and performative in ways that "traditional" (that is, print-to-print translations) are not, it is worth mentioning a few challenges unique to ASL translations, for these challenges have much potential for complicating the ways that scholars in translation studies theorize about translation and the role of the translator.

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[175] I frequently get comments from people like, "Oh, you're just signing the stories?" or "That's not really translating—that's re-telling the stories," which suggest that their language ideologies prevent them from perceiving the process of translating stories into ASL as an act of *translation*; rather, they call it by other names ("retelling," "signing," "simplifying into ASL," and so forth), names that resist accepting the notion of full-fledged ASL translations.

As any experienced translator will tell you, the task of translation is an extraordinarily challenging one, for language is "slippery, paradoxical, ambivalent, and explosive," to use Grossman's description, and translators must deal with not one but *two* languages, the second of which is "just as elusive, just as dynamic, and just as recalcitrant as the first one."[176] On top of this, translators, as Hugo Friedrich declares, must often cope with the reality of untranslatability from one language to the other,[177] a statement which lies at the heart of what makes translation so difficult: perfect, or even close, matches between languages are not often possible. Thus, the translator must make choices at many levels, such as at the lexical level and at the syntactical level: Which word best fits the meaning of the original? Which sentence structure, metaphor, or turn of phrase would best communicate this idea?

For instance, when translating the French title *Monsieur le Baron Pontmercy*[178] into English, a translator might opt for the more native-sounding "*The Baron"* or "*Baron Pontmercy"* when writing in English instead of rendering the phrase more literally into the stiff and unnatural "*Mister The Baron Pontmercy"* or "*Mister Baron."* However, if the translator wants to emphasize the foreignness of the character or the Frenchness of the story, then the phrase *Monsieur le Baron* might be left untouched in the English translation (as it is in several translations of the Victor Hugo novel). It is a conscious choice the translator must make, and such decisions can affect how the target audience perceives the character or the story.[179] Similarly, the English idiom "you've missed the boat" might be translated into ASL using a different ASL idiom that has a similar meaning ("TRAIN-GONE") instead of signing the English idiom word-for-word. And even individual words that appear to be simple are fraught with choice for the translator. For example, when faced with the Spanish *la muchacha bonita,* the English translator must decide between several possibilities: "the beautiful girl," "the pretty girl," "the cute girl," "the gorgeous girl," and so forth, depending on which adjective best fits the context and

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[176] Grossman, *Why Translation Matters*, 68.

[177] Friedrich, Hugo. "On the Art of Translation." Trans. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet. In *Theories of Translation,* eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 11.

[178] *Monsieur le Baron Pontmercy:* The inherited family title of Marius, one of the protagonists in Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*.

[179] Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?,* 51-54, 58.

meaning of that particular sentence. Thus, translators make choices every step of the way with each word, phrase, and sentence, sometimes radically rearranging sentences and even paragraphs in order to achieve the best possible match to the original's meaning.

Finding a "good match" can be a never-ending journey. Gregory Rabassa describes translation as a transformation, an adaption that "can never [fully] equal the original; it can approach it, and its quality can only be judged as to accuracy by *how close it gets*."[180] Thus, translators work towards a finish line that they never reach. Bellos explains that translators live in hope—they choose the best matches for the units of which a work is made, "in the hope and expectation that their *sum* will produce a new work that can serve overall as a substitute for the source."[181] Indeed, any translator will affirm that the process of translation is a process of choice, and the best they can hope for is not something identical to the original text but rather a "good match." To do so, translators have to make difficult choices about which features of the original to keep, to modify, to reinvent, or—with much hand-wringing—which to let fall through the cracks.

Translating into ASL is no exception. Like any other translator, the ASL translator must make a series of interpretative decisions. The English word *madness*, for instance, presents complications for ASL translators—indeed, and for translators of any language—in Emily Dickinson's poem, "*Much madness is divinest sense.*" In this poem, the precise meanings of *madness* and also the word *sense* remain ambiguous, and perhaps even change, from line to line. Does Dickinson use *madness* to refer to insanity? Or illogical thought? Or the emotion *angry*? Or all of the above? Translators traffic in meanings, so when an author deliberately leaves the meaning of a word or phrase in the original text ambiguous, the translator must either find a way to keep the meaning equally ambiguous in the translation (by inventing a new metaphor or finding a corresponding word that is equally ambiguous in the target language, a rare feat in translation), or choose one possible definition and translate the rest of the poem accordingly. The ASL translator can either sign the word *madness* with a different sign each time it occurs in the

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[180] Rabassa, Gregory. "No Two Snowflakes Are Alike: Translation as Metaphor." In *The Craft of Translation*, eds. John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1-2, italics added.

[181] Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*, 308, italics added.

poem, select (or invent) a sign that is also ambiguous, or choose one interpretation of the word and translate the rest of the poem based on that interpretation.

It is a challenging—and often frustrating—task. "The matter of choice in translation always leaves the door open to that other possibility," admits Rabassa, "We cannot be sure of ourselves. Translation is a disturbing craft because there is precious little certainty about what we're doing."[182] He goes on to discuss how translators must always be dissatisfied with their work because ideally, there is a perfect solution, but they will never find it and must thus give up at some point and declare their work to be good enough for now.[183] Like any translator, the ASL translator decides between this word and that word, always agonizing over which phrasing best captures the intent and meaning of the original, always aware that their translation is but one possible and imperfect interpretation of the original. At this level, the transformative work and processes that a skilled ASL translator engages in is virtually identical to what translators of other languages do. They are not "just signing the story" but rather engaged in what Felstiner calls "the utmost case of engaged literary interpretation,"[184] a process in which they strive to grasp the first version of the work as profoundly and thoroughly as possible and then recast it in another language in such a way that the readers of the translation will "perceive the text, emotionally and artistically, in a manner that parallels and corresponds to the esthetic experience of its first readers."[185]

Challenges Unique to ASL Translation, or Why the ASL Translator is Even More of a Translator than Most Translators

Because the process of translating from written English to ASL requires not only translating between languages but also carrying the message across to a different medium (i.e. from print to the spatial and kinesthetic), ASL translations add new layers of complexity to a number of ideas that translation theorists have long taken for granted. In this section, I will briefly discuss two concepts from translation theory that are complicated by the visual nature of ASL translations, and in doing so, I will show that the

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[182] Rabassa, "No Two Snowflakes," 12.

[183] Ibid., 12.

[184] Felstiner, John. "'*Ziv, that Light*': Translation and Tradition in Paul Celan." In *The Craft of Translation*, eds. John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 94.

[185] Grossman, *Why Translation Matters,* 7.

ASL translator must, indeed, engage with their translations at a level beyond that of "traditional" print-to-print translators.

The Invisibility of the Translator

In most translations, the translator is largely unseen by the audience, working behind the scenes to produce and publish a translated work that, in the eyes of most readers and critics, still belongs to the original author, not the translator. In fact, as Venuti explains, a translated text is considered praiseworthy by publishers and readers when it "reads fluently" and "reflects the foreign writer's personality" without any stylistic or linguistic peculiarities—indeed, the good translation gives the appearance of being "not in fact a translation, but the 'original.'[186] Norman Shapiro famously compares a good translation to a pane of glass:

> I see translation as the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass. You only notice that it's there when there are little imperfections— scratches, bubbles. Ideally, there shouldn't be any. *It should never call attention to itself*.[187]

Essentially, most people—including many translators—believe that in a good translation, the translator *should* be invisible to the audience, and, indeed, as Grossman observes, translators tend to be ignored by most readers even when they are aware that they are reading a translation.[188]

Labeling this invisibility a "weird form of self-annihilation" on the part of translators, Venuti sees it as a double-edged sword: when a translator is invisible in the text, then that means the job was done well, but this very invisibility also makes the translator largely overlooked and marginalized.[189] Look at virtually any translated text, and you will see that typically the translator's name appears in tiny print underneath the author's, and oftentimes not even on the title page at all. In print texts, it is the author

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[186] Venuti, Lawrence. *Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. (Florence, KY: Routledge Press, 1994), 1.

[187] Shapiro, Norman. Introduction, *Fifty Fables of La Fontaine*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985, quoted in Lawrence Venuti, *Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (Florence, KY: Routledge Press, 1994), *xiii,* italics added.

[188] Grossman, *Why Translation Matters*, 27.

[189] Venuti, *Translator's Invisibility*, 8.

whose name is splayed across the cover, and the translator remains obscured in the shadows; hardly anyone remembers—or even notices—the translator's name. Venuti laments this trend, arguing that keeping the translator invisible essentially obscures the complex interpretative process that underlies translation, which in turn perpetuates the marginalization of translators in academic disciplines.[190]

Other translators also resist their invisibility in their translated works and especially the notion that their translations are considered the same as the original. In his musings about the role of the translator, Octavio Paz quotes a fellow translator:

> Arthur Waley has put it well: "A French scholar wrote recently with regard to translators, 'They should make themselves invisible behind the texts and, if fully understood, the texts will speak for themselves.' […But] I have always found that it was I, not the texts, that had to do the talking."[191]

Even though translators are not creating original content, the *writing* itself (in the target language)—every word of it—is theirs, so in a way, they are creating an original work. In spite of this, however, their translations are generally viewed as being a part of the original author's work and not their own. Grossman wrestles with this concept, as well:

> The question that lurks in the corners of my mind as I work and revise and mutter curses at any fool who thinks the second version of the text is not an original, too, is this: what exactly am I writing when I write a translation? Is it an imitation, a reflection, a transposition, or something else entirely? In what language does text really exist, and what is my connection to it? I do not mean to suggest that a translation is created with no reference to an original—that it is not actually a version of another text—but it seems clear that a translated work does have an existence separate from and different from the first text, if only because it is written in another language.[192]

 What lies at the heart of Grossman's struggle is the fact that as a translator, she is rendered invisible in the translated product; therefore, in spite of the highly inventive process that went into writing the translation, her work is viewed not as original but as something belonging to the author. She and her fellow translators are writing, but not

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[190] Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything*, 230.
[191] Paz, Octavio. "Translation: Literature and Letters." Trans. Irene del Corral. In *Theories of Translation*, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 158.
[192] Grossman, *Why Translation Matters,* 74.

really writing, creating, but not really creating, inventing, but not really inventing, and their readers rarely acknowledge them or any of the work that they invested into the translations.

The translator's invisibility is, however, not at all true of the ASL translator, who must not only translate the text from one language to the other but also perform their translations, which means appearing in front of an audience or on-camera for the entire duration of the translation. Unlike traditional translators, the English-to-ASL translator does not have the luxury of time and privacy that invisibility affords conventional translators: sitting alone, crossing out words, re-writing lines, crafting the translation to satisfaction, sending it off to the publisher, and kicking back with a well-deserved drink. After going through this whole process of sitting alone, crossing out words, re-writing lines, and crafting the text to satisfaction, the ASL translator still needs to *perform* the text by signing it. In a live performance or while the camera is running, one mis-sign or one wrong facial expression can ruin a whole line (or even the whole translation). Thus, the translator must do all the legwork of translating, and then take two additional steps (rehearsing and then performing the translation). This adds another dimension to the translation process, and a challenging one, for the physical performance itself can be time-consuming in that its execution must be spot-on in order for the translator's vision to be achieved, and often requires multiple rehearsals and camera takes before a satisfactory performance is accomplished.

Whether the ASL translator performs the translation or hires another signer to sign it, there is a *face* attached to the text, and importantly, this face does not belong to the author of the original. The audience therefore *sees* the signer—who is most likely the ASL translator—inside the text itself, as opposed to being transparent or invisible behind it. Because translating the short stories for this study required me (or someone else) to physically sign—on video—the text, my hands and my face become part of the translation itself, almost as if I were "wearing" the poem or story.[193] Much of ASL grammar is conveyed via facial expressions, so it is impossible to divorce the signer's face from the text. Thus, when the audience reads a translation, they cannot help but to

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[193] Many thanks to my friend and colleague Miriam Lerner for coining this metaphor.

see the person signing it. Indeed, it is impossible to take a text, translate it into ASL, and then fade back into safe anonymity and let the author take center stage—as is expected with print translations—rather, the translator (or the hired signer) *is* in the limelight *with* the author. In fact, the translator is perhaps more prominent than the author, who remains faceless.

Benjamin Paloff argues that for most of us, "the first translation of a [text] we encounter is, for all practical purposes, the original": that is, it will always be the "first" for us, and the one we compare all other versions to in the future, even if we never read the actual original.[194] If we accept this argument, then for those in the audience who experience any translated text for the first time via an ASL translation, the translator's face and signing will forever be a part of their mental representation of that text—a thought that is both deeply humbling and nerve-wracking for the ASL translator. In all translations between any languages, it is the translator who makes all of the stylistic and interpretive choices that go into the translation; only in ASL is this made explicitly visible because the translator is at front and center, which makes their face, signing style, and interpretive choices forever the most visible part of the translation in the minds of the audience. In this way, ASL translations resist and upturn the translator invisibility that general translation theorists have long lamented and taken for granted.

Translators as Actors and Interpreters: The Performative Nature of ASL Translations

The ASL translator, in performing the text, makes a number of interpretive decisions not unlike those that stage actors make when interpreting texts and characters to perform them on stage. All translators make interpretive decisions while translating, and a few have gestured in the direction of performance, as well-known translator of German Ralph Mannheim did when he famously said that translators are like actors who speak the lines as the author would if the author could speak English (or whichever language is the target language of a translation).[195] These translators were thinking in terms of writing as performance; they did not expect to actually *perform* the text themselves, but it is

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[194] Paloff, Benjamin. "I Am One of an Infinite Number of Monkeys Named Shakespeare: or Why I Don't Own This Language." In *The Monkey & the Wrench: Essays into Contemporary Poetics,* eds. Mary Biddinger and John Gallaher (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2011), 87.

[195] Grossman, *Why Translation Matters*, 7.

intriguing to consider how ASL translations take this metaphor even further by incorporating actual, physical performance into the translation process.

For instance, nuances in the text like mood, tone, and irony, or the emotions and countenance (implied or otherwise) of a character as described in a story are conveyed through printed words on the page in English (or in any print language), and print words have the luxury of being arbitrary symbols. As such, they lie on the page, inert, until readers decode them and attach them to meaning in order to create a mental representation of what is happening in the story. If, for example, the author writes that a character says something "angrily," readers will read the printed word *angrily* on the page, attach the abstract word to their own mental representation of what to speak *angrily* means*,* and thus proceed to visualize the character speaking in such a manner. The print word *angrily* itself is abstract and suggests little about what its meaning might be. ASL signs, however, are often much less arbitrary: where English uses words to describe—or imply—such things, ASL instead relies on facial expressions, personification[196], and depiction[197] to convey these nuances in the text. In ASL, the manner in which a character speaks is shown visually when the signer role-shifts into a character and takes on the persona of that character; the emotion is instead shown on the signer's face and style of signing rather than told to the reader through a literal word.

This renders a particular meaning of the word highly visible to the audience: no longer is the word an abstract concept for them to interpret according to their own representations. Instead, it is a visual series of movements in the signer's face and body that the audience must interpret, and the translator's choices (not unlike those of a stage actor's) of how to interpret the English words in order to convey that emotion can profoundly affect how the audience might interpret the story. How angry is the character? Is it a blinding rage? Anger on the verge of bubbling over? Cold anger? Hot anger?

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[196] *Personification:* Also called role-shifting; in ASL narratives, the signer takes on the role of various characters and, essentially, becomes the character—down to the posture, facial expressions, emotions, reactions, and so forth—for a short space of time. In other words, the signer "puts on" a character and acts like the character, and then takes the character off and either returns to the narrator role or "puts on" another character. This is how dialogues are presented in ASL narratives, with the signer role-shifting back and forth between different characters.
[197] *Depiction*: When the signer takes a "bird's eye view" of the story-world by manipulating classifiers—combined with facial expressions—to physically show characters and/or objects (in miniature) located in and/or moving through the 3-D space in front of the signer.

Repressed anger? Or simply mildly annoyed? And when personifying the character in dialogue, should the translator sign the character's angry statement rapidly, slowly, out-of-controlledly, or jerkily, depending on the type of anger being conveyed? The translator must choose an intensity and degree of the emotion to convey while signing; it is impossible not to do so. To be faithful to the conventions of ASL, the translator cannot simply sign "angrily" neutrally, for the sign in itself, by definition, necessitates facial expression. When personifying multiple characters in a dialogue, the translator will shift back and forth from one persona to another, embodying the emotions, moods, manner, and countenance of each character throughout the dialogue.

Thus, the translator must make deliberate decisions about how to interpret and "perform" each character—and also the narrator's voice—at various points in the story. For instance, if I, as an translator, interpret a character—such as the unstable narrator of the *Tell-Tale Heart*—as being more evil or more insane or more collected or more on the verge of a breakdown (or vice versa) than the author might have intended (or if the author meant to leave it ambiguous for the readers), my interpretation becomes a part of my translation. If my interpretation—and my subsequent performance—is biased or misinformed or inaccurate, will the translation skew the audience's understanding of the story? An ASL translation—like any translation—is a profound act of interpretation; however, due to its highly visual and performative nature, the language forces its translators to make higher degrees of interpretative choices that traditional translators typically do not need to confront as often when working between print languages where the words in both languages are printed in ink symbols that lie flat on the page.

In this way, ASL translations embody the metaphor of a translator-as-actor and take it even further by literally putting translator on center stage—highly visible—and requiring the translator to also perform the work. Clearly, the ASL translator (who does the translation task well) is not merely summarizing or simplifying the text into a crippled version of the original due to the paucity of ASL as a language. Rather, the ASL translator works to grasp the meanings of the original text, renders the thoughts and ideas expressed therein in ways equally richly and evocatively in ASL as they were in English, and then strives to achieve their translation through its performance.

Conclusion

The uniquely visual nature of ASL translations[198] is a largely unexplored area that has much to offer the field of translation studies in rethinking various aspects of translation theory, but as mentioned earlier, translation also has much to offer towards affirming ASL as a language. A number of translation theorists point to translation as a vitalizing force for a language and a culture, arguing that that the act of translation—whether it is of a literary text or an instruction manual or a legal document—carries profound implications for both the original language *and* the target language.[199] For centuries, literary works have been translated into countless languages, which implicitly recognizes the fact that even though a translation is never identical to the original, it is an acceptable substitute.[200] American students are most certainly not expected to read *Don Quixote* in the original Spanish, nor are they assigned to read Dante's *Divine Comedy* in Italian. These works, along with *Les Misérables, One Hundred Years of Solitude, The Alchemist,* and countless others, have been translated into American students' native English (and vice versa, for works originally printed in English and translated to other countries' native tongues).

The fact that "an acceptable equivalent" is possible for the original work recognizes that, as Walter Benjamin puts it, "Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, *a priori* and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express."[201] Also, the act of translation "makes both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel."[202] A novel written in French *can* be translated in English because we accept that the two languages, although not identical, are functionally equivalent for expressing ideas. Even though any given translation will not be an exact match, it will preserve the force of the original[203] and it also will produce, in its own language, the reverberation of the work

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[198] Or indeed, translations into any signed language, not only ASL.

[199] Grossman, *Why Translation Matters*, 17; Paz, "Translation and Letters," 160; Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything*, 5.

[200] Bellos, *Is There a Fish In Your Ear?,* 308-309.

[201] Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 17.

[202] Ibid., 21.

[203] Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?,* 309.

from the alien one.[204] In other words, translating literature from *x* language to *y* or *z* languages recognizes the capacity of *y* and *z* to fully capture, in their own ways, the power and beauty of the original *x*.

Translations between English and French, German, Greek, Spanish, and numerous other languages tend not to elicit comment or hesitation, because these languages have long been accepted as full-fledged languages. As I briefly mentioned earlier, ASL has had more of a shaky road towards complete acceptance. Even though ASL was developed in the early nineteenth century from French Sign Language (which dates to the mid-1700s, and then even earlier to medieval monks who used signs to quite adroitly circumvent their vows of silence), it was not until the 1960s that linguists finally recognized ASL as a bona fide language, complete with its own grammar, lexicon, and syntax. Even today, many people mistakenly assume that ASL is simply "English on the hands," which leads to the oft-tacit belief that ASL is a code, a simplified way of communicating, or an inferior language that should not be used in the classroom.[205]

A number of deaf people cherish ASL as their "home" language, but may not necessarily perceive it as being a language of scholarly merit or as an indicator of intelligence (as my findings in this study indicate). The act of translating English literature into ASL might go a long way in reasserting—to the students in this study, to other deaf people, to hearing people—the linguistic validity of ASL as a bona fide language that is on equal terms with spoken languages. But I am aware that to people— deaf and hearing alike—who carry these assumptions about the "lacking" nature of ASL, translating English texts into ASL may seem illogical, counter-productive, or even anathema to deaf students' acquisition of print literacy.

Thinking about these objections brings up, once again, Bourdieu's discussion of linguistic and cultural capital.[206] As I have already explained earlier in this chapter, ASL carries immense cultural capital within the Deaf community: extremely skilled signers are valued and revered among Deaf people, and often are the lifeblood of the community. However, outside of Deaf circles, ASL has very little capital; in fact, it is often

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[204] Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 20; Rabassa, "No Two Snowflakes," 2.

[205] For more on this, see Padden (1990) or Lerner & Feigel (2010).

[206] See Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 241-58.

marginalized, looked down upon, and even reduced to the status of a pidgin. Even though it is one of the most widely used languages in the United States (third after English and Spanish, respectively), most of American society devalue ASL as being a simplified version of English. With very little linguistic value attached to ASL in the hearing world at large, it would not be surprising to encounter objections about English-to-ASL translations, especially along the lines of "if deaf students have the stories in ASL, they'll never learn to read in English."[207]

However, Brisset emphasizes that the act of translation not only recognizes a language as being one among equals but also that translation implicitly grants a "linguistic birthright" of sorts to a language or dialect:

> The task of translation is thus to replace the language of the Other by a native language. Not surprisingly, the native language chosen is usually the vernacular, "the linguistic birthright, the indelible mark of belonging."[208] Translation becomes an act of reclaiming, of recentering of the identity, a re-territorializing operation. It does not create a new language, but it elevates a dialect to the status of a national and cultural language.[209]

As the situation currently stands, deaf students are expected to read literature in a vernacular that they do not have full access to, a language that is not native to them. As long as this situation remains unchanged, literary works may always remain, for the majority of deaf students, something that belongs to a distant Other, a dominant culture from which they are already cut off in many ways. Livingston, in her call for reform in deaf education, argues that language exposure—in *both* ASL and print English—is key to successful language and literacy development for deaf students.[210] Charlotte Enns agrees, pointing out the limitations of the current system and calling for a more socio-cultural approach, one that takes into account the impact of natural language learning and

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[207] An argument I have often heard from people and one that, may I mention, bilingual research has long debunked. For more on bilinguals and their literacy, see *Understanding Second Language Acquisition* by Lourdes Ortega (2009).

[208] Note from the translator of this article: Brisset is giving her own translation of Gobard (1976). Here is the citation from Brisset's article: Gobard, H. (1976) *L'Aliénation linguistique*, Paris: Flammarion.

[209] Brisset, Annie. "The Search for a Native Language: Translation and Cultural Identity." Trans. Rosalind Gill and Richard Gannon. In *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge Press, 2000), 346.

[210] Livingston, *Rethinking*, 89-90.

exposing children to the full range of interaction, discourse, and language across multiple genres in a way that values their (linguistic) experiences.[211]

Translating English literature into ASL would not only make literary works accessible to deaf students in their own language (a potentially powerful form of validation for them) but also the implicit power underlying the very act of translation could go a long way in asserting ASL's status as a proper language. As Grossman puts it:

> Translation expands our ability to explore through literature the thoughts and feelings of people from another society or another time. It permits us to savor the transformation of the foreign into the familiar and for a brief time to live outside our own skins, our own preconceptions and misconceptions. It expands and deepens our world, our consciousness, in countless, indescribable ways.[212]

Similarly, Octavio Paz describes translations as "intercrossings" between different languages, literary traditions, and cultures.[213] Indeed, for the students in this study, the translations did create a tangible space for such intercrossings: a point of convergence that allowed them to bring both of their languages—along with their literacy practices from both English and ASL—to the act of reading and writing in the English classroom. As the findings of this study indicate, this "intercrossing" resulted in a powerful and meaningful literacy experience for many of the students, suggesting that ASL literacy and ASL translations may be valuable paths to pursue as we work towards better understanding the complex ways that deaf students' languages, identities, language ideologies, and literacy practices affect their literacy learning experiences.

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[211] Enns, "Critical Literacy," 5.

[212] Grossman, *Why Translation Matters*, 14.

[213] Paz, "Translation: Literature and Letters," 160.

Chapter 3
Study Methods

Study Design

In the previous chapter, I laid out the theoretical framework and presented a review of literature to make the argument that the use of ASL translations with deaf students may create a space in which the students can bring both English and ASL— along with the identities and literacy practices accompanying each language—to their literacy learning experiences in the classroom. In this chapter, I will explicate the ways I went about eliciting high school deaf students' voices and perspectives on their experiences with print literacy, with languages (both English and ASL, plus any additional languages they may have been exposed to) and with the ASL translations in this study.

This chapter will cover my study design, development of the intervention unit, research site, participant selection, data collection procedures, methods of analysis, and also the ethical considerations that I had to be cognizant of throughout the study implementation. In this qualitative case study, I had two overarching goals: (1) to fill the gap in current deaf literacy research by bringing in deaf students' own voices into the conversation about their own print literacy and linguistic experiences, which includes exploring in some depth the students' language ideologies and how such ideologies may factor in their experiences with literacy; and (2) to explore how various deaf students reacted to having ASL translations of literary works available to them in the English classroom, as well as how their language ideologies were confirmed, complicated, or even contradicted outright by the ways they interacted with the translations.

Because part of the study design called for the students to experience ASL translations of literature in the English classroom, I also had to develop a stand-alone unit consisting of lesson plans, assignments, instruction materials, and translated texts for the participating teacher to implement in the classroom. The primary purpose of this study was not to develop a curriculum, nor to prove that a teaching method using translations

will lead to higher literacy achievements. Rather, my goal was to investigate the deaf students' perspectives about language and about their experiences with the translations. Therefore, even though developing the translations and creating the intervention unit required considerable time investment during the early stages of this study, most of my data collection ultimately centered not on the successes and failures of the intervention unit itself but instead relied more on detailed qualitative interviews with each participant before, during, and after the duration of the eight-week study.

Development of Teaching Materials for Study

In this section, I will briefly describe the process of developing the lessons and assignments for the translation intervention unit, the overall goals of the unit, and the theoretical framework underpinning the scope and sequence of the unit. I faced a number of significant challenges in creating this unit of study, especially because at the time, I had no information about the students or the teacher(s) who would be involved in the intervention part of the study. I did not know whether the participating class(es) would include stronger readers who might already have had some exposure to literary discussions and analyses, or whether the classes would consist of struggling readers and/or intermediate readers or any combination thereof. Even though I anticipated that the class would, ideally, have a few weaker readers, I could not predict whether that meant these students would read at the first grade level or at the fifth grade level. This made it difficult to design assignments and activities, for I did not know how independently the students could work in reading or writing, nor did I know what the students' *zone of proximal development (ZPD)* would be, as Vygotsky puts it[214]—the "sweet spot" between what the students can and cannot do independently (in other words, the level at which they can work with some help from the teacher). Not knowing the students' levels, I could not "pitch" the assignments and lessons at a specific degree of difficulty, nor could I predict how much scaffolding the students would need prior to each activity. Instead, I had to design classroom activities and coursework that the

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[214] Vygotsky, Lev. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, quoted in Richard Beach, Deborah Appleman, Susan Hynds, and Jeffrey Wilhelm, *Teaching Literature to Adolescents* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 6-7.

teacher could easily modify up or down, depending on the students' needs, and with multiple options for scaffolding, difficulty levels, and literacy skills. The fact that I did not tailor the implementation unit for a specific class speaks to the strength and potential for broader implementability of this intervention unit and similar units

To further complicate matters, many—if not most—Teachers of the Deaf (TOD) are certified in general deaf education, but not necessarily in a specific subject area (not unlike elementary teachers who are expected to be able to teach most subjects). As a result, it is fairly uncommon for a TOD to be certified specifically in English/Language Arts on top of their deaf education credentials.[215] Beyond one or two literacy classes required for the deaf education degree and the occasional literacy-related professional development workshop, TODs who find themselves teaching English/Language Arts typically do not have any formal training in the structure of the English language, reading and writing pedagogical methods, or literature instruction comparable to the training that typical public school English teachers are required to undergo for their teaching degrees.[216] Very much aware of this, I knew that the participating teacher would most likely not have much pedagogical experience or training in teaching literature (which was an essential part of the intervention unit).

Therefore, as I designed the unit, I could not assume that the teacher would be familiar with common pedagogy methods for teaching literature like think-alouds, leading class discussions, analyzing texts with students, noticing recurring themes in stories, modeling reading behaviors like making inferences and predictions, and so forth. Essentially, I had to develop the intervention unit in such a way that it provided enough background information and guidance for any given teacher to be able to understand and implement easily without prior knowledge of high school literature or literature pedagogy. This turned out to be another strength in this study because the design of the

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[215] Luft, Pamela. "Examining Educators of the Deaf as 'Highly Qualified' Teachers: Roles and Responsibilities under IDEA and NCLB." *American Annals of the Deaf* 152, no. 5 (Winter 2008), 436; Johnson, Harold A. "U.S. Deaf Education Teacher Preparation Programs: A Look at the Present and a Vision for the Future." *American Annals of the Deaf* 149, no. 2 (2004), 87; Dolman, David. "College and University Requirements for Teachers of the Deaf at the Undergraduate Level: A Twenty-Year Comparison." *American Annals of the Deaf* 153, no. 3 (2008), 326.
[216] Johnson, "U.S. Deaf Education," 83.

unit makes it possible for virtually any teacher of the deaf—not just the participating teacher in this study—to also pick it up and implement it in their classroom.

Theme, Scope and Sequence / Goals for Unit

One of the first tasks in developing the intervention unit was to select which texts to use, determine the overarching theme and the objectives for the unit, and develop the scope and sequence for the lessons within the unit. Because successful engagement with literature is largely rooted in the reader making meaningful connections between the self and the text, the text and other texts, the text and the world,[217] I chose to design an inquiry-driven unit, which, as Wilhelm explains, centers around *essential questions*—that is, authentic, real-world questions that frame the students' reading experience in the classrooms and push them to make connections with the texts.[218] These overarching questions guide and drive the students' explorations of various stories as they work together to understand each text and pursue answers to the problems, challenges, and ideas posed by the texts. In other words, the essential questions provide a real-world purpose for the students as they seek possible answers through their interactions with literature.

Typically, English teachers design the literature component of their courses around themes (such as "coming of age," "war," or "justice," for example) and/or genres (such as short story, essay, or non-fiction), all of which build on one another throughout the semester or the academic year. Sometimes a theme will frame the whole year, being continually extended upon by each new text that the class reads. A challenge in designing this unit is that it had to be a stand-alone unit: a sequence of lessons that do not rely on a previously-existing overarching thematic framework for the entire semester or year, *and* that could be completed within a short amount of time (anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks, depending on how the teacher spaces out the lessons). The theme I chose also needed to be easily accessible to the students (i.e. does not require elaborate development in their

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[217] Keene, Ellin Oliver, and Susan Zimmermann. *Mosaic of Thought: The Power of Comprehension Strategy Instruction,* 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2007), 100-101.
[218] Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry: Promoting Deep Understanding in Language Arts and the Content Areas with Guiding Questions.* (New York: Scholastic, 2007), 10-16.

understanding over time) *and* overtly clear in the texts they would read in class during the unit.

Moreover, it would also ideally be a theme complex enough to interest the students but also simple enough for students who most likely have never been required to analyze a text using essential questions and/or thematic analysis (as most deaf students have not). After coming up with a few possible themes and essential questions, I scouted potential texts from the nationwide high school Common Core School Standards literature list (an imperfect list, as any list is, but as the majority of states at the time had approved CCSS, I found it a useful starting point for figuring out what kinds of literature were currently—and commonly—being taught at the high school level nationally), from the recommended literature list from the state in which my research site was located, and from a number of high school literature textbooks. Because I knew I would have to develop ASL translations for the literary works I selected, and because the unit itself would need to be doable in four to six weeks, I decided to limit my selection to short stories only. After much deliberation, I settled on a theme, essential questions, and two texts (one more archaic and one more modern) as follows:

Table 3-1: Thematic Framework of the Translation Unit

Theme	"Morality and Choices"
Essential Questions	What causes people to make bad choices sometimes? Why do people make bad choices even though they may know it's wrong and there might be negative consequences? How do we decide if a choice is a good one or a bad one?
Texts	"Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (short story) "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe (short story)

With this thematic framework and these texts in place, I then began developing the scope of the unit, listed as follows along with some objectives for each part of the sequence[219]:

Figure 3-1: Scope and Sequence of Unit

INTRODUCTION TO THEME AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
▪ Students will explore the concept of "bad choices" and discuss what makes a choice good or bad.

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[219] **Note about Figure 3-1:** Each part of this sequence is abstract; that is, they do not correspond to the number of lessons or assignments that may be required in actual practice, nor does this figure represent the amount of scaffolding that may go into each lesson. This figure merely serves to provide an abstract overview of the overall scope, structure, and arc of the unit, with some objectives listed for each part of the unit.

▪ They will begin to consider potential outcomes for various choices, both good and bad.

EXPLORING THE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS IN SELF'S EXPERIENCES
▪ Students will consider their own experiences with making bad choices, and recount the consequences of these choices.
▪ They will reflect on the motives and reasons underlying their own choices.

EXPLORING THE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS IN OTHERS' EXPERIENCES
▪ Students will explore the choices other people made and the circumstances and possible motives surrounding these choices.
▪ Students will consider alternative choices that other people could have made and how the situation may have played out differently had one person made a different choice.

INTRODUCTION TO CONCEPTS FROM SHORT STORY #1
▪ Concepts relating to the first short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" will be introduced, such as (1) how people react when something annoys them; (2) what kinds of things annoy people; and (3) what people tend to do when they realize they've done something wrong.

EXPLORING THE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS THROUGH SHORT STORY #1
▪ Students will engage with a short story ("The Tell-Tale Heart") in which the narrator makes the choice to murder, to cover up the murder, and, ultimately, to confess.
▪ They will consider the narrator's motives, reasons, and situational factors that led to the murder, subsequent cover-up, and final confession.
▪ They will assess which choices they felt were better or worse choices, and explore the factors that made some of the narrator's decisions more or less honorable.

MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN STORY, ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS, AND SELF/WORLD
▪ Students will explore the consequences that might—or ought to—follow the "Tell-Tale Heart" character's decisions.
▪ Students will consider how such choices might play out in the real world, and what kinds of consequences they think the narrator deserves, and why.
▪ They will reflect on how similar choices (e.g. to kill, to hide a wrong, or to confess a mistake) might play out in reality.

INTRODUCTION TO CONCEPTS IN SHORT STORY #2
▪ Concepts relating to the second short story, "Harrison Bergeron" will be introduced, such as (1) handicaps to "level the playing field; (2) how to make games, situations, and/or life experiences more "fair"; and (3) what "fairness" and "equality" means in various situations.

EXPLORING ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS THROUGH SHORT STORY #2
▪ Students will engage with the second short story ("Harrison Bergeron") in which various characters make several choices—some good, some bad, some deplorable—in a futuristic society where everyone is handicapped to ensure complete and utter equality.
▪ Students will explore the motives, reasons, and situational factors surrounding the choices made by multiple characters (especially George and Hazel Bergeron, Harrison Bergeron, Diana Moon Glampers, and the ballet dancer).
▪ They will assess which choices they thought were better or worse choices, and explore the factors that made some characters' choices more or less honorable, and/or some characters more or less likeable.

MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN STORY #2, STORY #1, AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
▪ Students will compare the characters and situations in both stories and the choices these characters made, considering the different factors that drove the characters to make the choices they did.
▪ Students will assess which characters they felt were the most honorable, and explore their reasons for their assessment.

MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN BOTH STORIES, ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS, AND SELF/WORLD
▪ Students will consider their personal reactions to the stories (plot and/or characters) and explore their personal reactions to various decisions made by characters in both stories.
▪ They will reflect on what causes them to feel more sympathy for some characters' choices and not

others.
- They will discuss how the characters' choices might play out in the real world; alternately, they will discuss how and why real people might make similar kinds of choices in the real world.

The scope, sequence, and arc is intended to progress from introducing a concept (e.g. bad choices), connecting the concept to what the students already know from their own experiences, and then progressing from exploring the concept in the students' own experiences to exploring it in a simple short story with one character and then in a more complex story with multiple characters. A constant recursive pattern of scaffolding, modeling, guided practice, and independent practice shapes the lessons throughout the sequence.

The scope and sequence of this unit is designed to achieve a number of objectives:

- Give the students opportunities to interact with complex stories and the ideas, themes, and essential questions arising from these stories.
- Expose students to ASL translations of English texts.
- Guide students in interacting with the stories by making readerly moves such as predicting, asking questions, identifying key moments in the narrative, and forming opinions about characters and events.
- Foster discussion among students about their interpretations, opinions, and reactions to the stories.
- Encourage students to make text-to-text connections, text-to-self connections, and text-to-world connections.
- Give students opportunities to practice literary analyses themselves using both ASL and English.

Secondary objectives—such as those for individual lessons, and such as those listed in Figure 3-1 above—are meant to support, enrich, or advance these broader objectives listed here.

Some Features of the Unit and Lessons

The objectives for the intervention unit—as for any unit of study—are achieved not on paper but in the classroom as the teacher and students work collaboratively to make meaning out of the activities, the assignments, and the texts. In designing this intervention unit, it was important to be mindful of the needs, skill sets, desires, and exigencies of real teachers, students, and classrooms. With this in mind, the unit design includes some features intended to accommodate some of the practical concerns and/or conditions the teacher may face when attempting to implement it. I was especially careful

to incorporate the following: (1) relatively short lessons (10-30 minutes) that could be implemented at any time during the class period and that could be easily integrated into the teacher's daily routine with the students; (2) lessons that could be spaced out over a few consecutive days or over several non-consecutive days; (3) supporting materials such as handouts or worksheets to accompany lessons; (4) the inclusion of suggestions for how to modify the activities to accommodate students at a lower and higher independence levels; (5) alternative homework and project prompts for students at different levels of difficulty; (6) ideas for how to incorporate writing in English and signing in ASL into all of the assignments; (7) detailed lists of possible discussion questions for the teacher to select from when leading class discussions about the stories; and (8) sufficient background information for the teacher about each story and about how each lesson relates to the theme of the unit.

Each lesson was designed with built-in flexibility so the teacher would be able to modify individual components to better suit their[220] teaching style and their students' needs. This unit is rooted in an "I-do, we-do-together, you-do" approach to instruction. Throughout each lesson, the teacher first models the target behavior, skill, or strategy for the students, then does it *with* the students, providing support and scaffolding as needed, and then, gradually turns over the work to the students to do more independently.[221] [222] Various pedagogical "moves" in each lesson have been marked with [*I do] [We do together]* and/or [*You do]* to help clarify for the teacher how the mental "work" of a particular activity might be divided between the teacher and the students, as showcased in Figure 3-2, along with other features of typical lessons.

Figure 3-2: Excerpts from Various Lessons

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[220] I am using "their" as a gender-neutral, singular pronoun.

[221] Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2001), 10-12.

[222] Smagorinsky, Peter. *Teaching English by Design (*Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2008), 19-21.

Lesson 8: Second Half of "Harrison Bergeron"

[Viewing the DVD]

- Right after Harrison Bergeron has been described, stop the video. Give the students a few minutes to draw Harrison's handicaps. You should also draw, as well. [*We do together, you do*]
  - o Alternative: Draw together as a class, with the body outline on a projector/overhead.
  - o Alternative 2: Have students work with a partner to draw.
  - o Alternative 3: Require the students to label each handicap on their picture.
- Compare and discuss drawings to make sure everyone understands what Harrison looks like with ~~all of his handicaps.~~ Rewind the DVD and let the

Detailed step-by-step instructions with alternatives for more or less scaffolding, or for a higher difficulty. Components of the lesson have labels [*we do together, you do, I do*] to indicate how the level of scaffolding.

Lesson 7: First Half of "Harrison Bergeron"

Homework Options

1. Have students write a sentence or a short paragraph predicting what they think will happen next in the story, and explaining why.
2. Alternative 1: Have students write or sign in ASL a short letter to George, Hazel, or Harrison, telling that character what they think he/she should do next in the story.
3. Alternative 2: Have students draw a picture of George or the ballet dancer with his handicaps.

Note: You can assign any of the above options as homework, or have the students start in class and finish at home, or have the students do the work during class.

Homework assignment with differentiation options and assignment alternatives, to be chosen by the teacher depending on preferences and student needs.

Lesson 8 Materials: Discussion Guide

To be used after viewing the second half of "Harrison Bergeron."
You are free to choose any of the following questions to use, add
your own questions, and organize the discussion in whichever way
you think is best.

1. **"Understanding Who, What, Where, and Why":**
   Questions on the Plot
   - What did Harrison do when he burst into the TV
     studio?
   - What happened when Harrison and the ballet
     dancer danced together?
   - Why did Harrison take off his handicaps?
   - Why does Harrison take off other people's
     handicaps?
   - Who shoots Harrison? Why?
   - What does Hazel do when she sees what
     happens on TV?

2. **Forming Opinions & Making Text-to-Self Connections**
   - How do you think George and Hazel felt when
     they saw what happened to Harrison? How do
     you know?
   - If you were George and Hazel, how would you
     feel about seeing your son die on TV?
   - If you were the ballet dancer, would you have
     volunteered to let Harrison take off your
     handicaps?
   - Does Harrison do the right thing in taking off his
     handicaps?
   - List the choices that the following characters

I wanted to ensure that the lesson plans provided ample guidance for the teacher to
implement each lesson without needing to do preparation beyond what might usually be
done for a regular class. Each lesson also came with a recommended time length that
could be modified, depending on the teacher's constraints and on how much scaffolding
the students needed. In short, one of my major aims in designing this unit was to make it
as flexible as possible so that the teacher would have some degree of freedom to modify,
shape, and space out each lesson as they saw best.

Development of Translated Texts for the Study

   In Chapter 2, I explicated a number of unique obstacles facing the ASL translator owing to the highly visible nature of the language, as well as to the inherent challenges of translation in general. Now, I will discuss the process and challenges behind translating the short story "Harrison Bergeron" into ASL for this study.[223] Very much aware of the high visibility of the ASL translator, I determined that if I signed one translation myself, then I should recruit someone else to sign the other translation, so that I would not be visible in *both* of the stories in this study.[224] I had a few reasons for this decision. Firstly, each signer has a unique style of signing that is very much their own, much like the distinctiveness of hearing people's spoken voices or the uniqueness of each person's handwriting, and not all signers' styles are equally comprehensible or enjoyable to all people. What is more, even though two signers may go through the exact same motions when telling the same story, the unique mannerisms in their signing, their facial expressions, and the general aesthetic of their signing adds a different "flavor" to each person's performance, and various people in the audience will, inevitably, have different preferences for various signers.

   Secondly, I did not want two translations signed by the same person or in the same style because I was curious as to how the participants would respond to different signers and also because I wanted to make sure the translations were not inadvertently catering to a certain category of people's signing style preferences and not others. Finally, I did not want my face to be attached to *both* translations. I, therefore, found an already-existing ASL translation of "The Tell-Tale Heart" from the Accessibility Materials Project (AMP) and then translated "Harrison Bergeron" myself. Thus, in the following discussion of translation process, my examples come from my experience working with "Harrison Bergeron" for this study, but not from "The Tell-Tale Heart," as I cannot comment on the translation process of the AMP translators.

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[223] As mentioned earlier, the Georgia School for the Deaf's Accessibility Materials Project (AMP) had already developed a translation of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and gave me permission to use their translation in this study. This meant I did not have to translate "The Tell-Tale Heart" myself.

[224] Due to the scarcity of ASL translators in general, in addition to time, location, and budget constraints, I could not get two different people to do the translations for this study. I therefore had to do one translation myself.

On top of the difficulties every translator faces, I found myself struggling with four areas in particular when translating this short story into ASL: (1) Name signs for the characters and for concepts unique to the story; (2) the logistics of switching back and forth between the two key settings throughout the story; (3) the portrayal of characters with handicaps; and (4) the process of video-recording the story.

First, unique name signs are often invented by ASL storytellers to facilitate the telling of a story by eliminating the need to fingerspell every character's name multiple times; moreover, name signs are often related to what the person is like—their personality, idiosyncrasies, interests, or appearances—so they can act as subtle reminders of who a character is throughout the story. However, too many name signs in a story and one runs the risk of losing the audience because keeping track of so many invented signs can be confusing. Most ASL storytellers will reserve the honor of a name sign for the key characters and not the minor ones. With "Harrison Bergeron," I obviously needed a sign for Harrison, the title character, but I had a hard time deciding if his parents, both of whom play important roles but are also very much passive bystanders during most of the story, really were worth having name signs for. At first, I assumed they needed name signs.

However, in the process of developing and rehearsing the translation, I realized that even though the names *George* and *Hazel* appear frequently in the English text—particularly in dialogue tags such as "George said…"—the names actually are rarely said outright in the ASL translation because the spatial role-shifting during dialogues eliminates the need to sign phrases like "Hazel said…George said…". When I realized this, I abandoned the idea of name signs altogether for these two characters. It did occur to me that having name signs might be helpful for the students to have when referring to the characters during their classroom discussions; however, both names are short and George is an especially common name, so in the end, I felt comfortable not having name signs for the parents. This decision also meant that Harrison, as the central and most active character, was the only one with a name sign (the remaining characters were either nameless or had names that appeared only once or twice), which set him apart from the rest of the characters, something that felt appropriate to his role in the story as the only

person who dares to stand up against the government's so-called "equalizing" handicap system.

I also had to invent a few signs for concepts that were unique to the story, such as the peculiar handicaps that different characters in the story have, which were purely inventions of the author. The mental handicap transmitter in George's ear, for instance, makes frequent appearances in the plot, but it is unlike anything we have in existence— not quite a radio, not quite earphones, not quite a hearing aid, not quite a Wi-Fi receptor. I could not simply use a sign for one of the above items (like *earphones*, for instance) because the audience might then mistake the handicap transmitter for that actual object, which would alter their interpretation of the story. To remedy this, I invented a sign especially for that handicap: an hybrid of the sign for *radio* and the classifier shape CL:1. Essentially, it looked like no other sign that already exists in the ASL lexicon, but it is not entirely a classifier, either, because the hybrid handshape is not used for anything else in the story, like a regular classifier might be. It, however, has hints of *radio* and *wireless* in it, so I was pleased with how the sign ultimately worked out in the story. I had to invent about two or three other signs in this manner.

Having the invented signs down pat, however, led me to the question of how to portray (i.e. perform) each character. In writing the story, Vonnegut clearly intended the characters' behavior to be at once genuine and absurd. Hazel, for example, is of utterly "average" intelligence (which in the story means that she is extremely scattered, forgetful, and unable to sustain a thought in her head for more than a minute). Her brief outbursts of emotions alternated with vacant absentmindedness about hugely emotional events in her own life—such as the imprisonment of her son Harrison—are meant to come across as absurd, even ridiculous to the readers, for that is one of the points of the story. At the same time, however, in the moments that Hazel feels grief and sadness, her emotions are genuine and heartfelt and in no way absurd, which makes her subsequent inability, only moments later, to remember why she had been crying all the more tragic.

My challenge as an ASL translator was to walk the fine line between the extremes of portraying each character as either entirely ridiculous or entirely authentic. I had to perform the characters in such a way that their choices and behaviors were absurd, but not slapstick silly (which would have been easy with George and Hazel, especially). That

touch of absurdity had to be played in such a way that the characters were entirely innocent of their ridiculousness—that is, their comments, behaviors, and choices were genuine and completely logical to them in their own eyes. This was a difficult balance to strike, and when it came time to perform the translation on-camera, I ended up doing several more takes than usual for a number of scenes with these types of characters in order to fine-tune my performance until I felt that this balance had been achieved satisfactorily. This process was just as time-consuming as doing the translating itself.

Perhaps the most difficult logistic challenge in signing "Harrison Bergeron," however, lay in the format of the story itself. The story takes place in two settings simultaneously: in George and Hazel's living room and on a stage in a television studio somewhere, the live broadcast of which George and Hazel are watching on their television throughout the story. The plot constantly switches between the two characters in their living room (commenting on what they are seeing on TV) and the actual events that are transpiring on the television screen. This is a very difficult scenario to "block" (to use stage theater terminology) in 3-D space using ASL because the signer needs to personify George and Hazel in dialogue, and then switch to depicting and personifying multiple characters on the TV screen, which is, in actual 3-D space, most likely located directly in front of the two characters. When signing this and placing objects in the space in front of me, I could not turn my back to the camera to depict what was happening on the TV. I had to find a way to go back and forth between each scene in a way that clearly indicates the change of setting but also allowed all of the events and characters to be in approximately the same space. I was concerned that it would not be clear to the audience what was happening where.

To solve this dilemma, I toyed with the following ideas:

- When signing, place George and Hazel both way to one side, and control my eye gaze so it appears they are watching a television set located on my opposite side. Then shift my shoulders when moving from one scene to the other.
- When signing, put George and Hazel in the middle (which is usually the default location) and have them watching television straight ahead—i.e. looking directly into the camera—and then use one of the following camera or film-editing techniques to indicate the switch in scenes:
  - When editing the video clips, fade the screen to black and then fade back in, to indicate that something has changed.

- Wear different clothes when showing what is happening on the TV as opposed to what's taking place in the living room.
- Either on the video camera itself or on the computer when editing, change the color of the picture to sepia or something a little "off" for the TV sequences.
- Get a computer program that allows you to show two screens side-by-side simultaneously, and then when editing the videos, keep George and Hazel on one side and the events on the TV on the other side.
- Have some sort of "frame" around the edges of the screen for the TV parts to mimic the appearance of a television screen.

Ultimately, I decided that for the sake of clarity and in order to allow the audience to see George and Hazel's facial expressions more fully, I needed to have the two characters located in such a way that they would be looking directly into the camera while watching TV. Because the two characters tend to make side comments to one another while keeping their eyes fixed on the television screen, this arrangement made sense.

I, then, had to find another way, via the use of technology, to make the frequent shifts to and from the living room and the television screen clear. The solution presented itself through the magic of video-editing on the computer when I discovered I could add a special effect called "Raster" to the video, making it appear subdued in color, and with thin green and blue lines running horizontally across the screen, much like old television sets and computer screens of the 1980s looked like. I used this effect on all of the scenes that took place on the television, and added a slight "pull away and swoosh in" transition whenever the scene shifted from the living room to the television set. This was not a perfect solution, but it did clearly distinguish what happened in which location, and it eliminated the need for me to add transitive comments that were not in the original story like "and now at the studio where the show was being filmed…" and it made my transitions from one setting to the other as quick and seamless as they were in the story.

Decisions like these about how the translation would be done and how the story would be performed were often difficult and solutions slow in presenting themselves. However, I discovered that one of the most challenging aspects of the whole translation process—not just with this specific story—was simply the sheer logistics of bringing video cameras into the translation process. When working with video cameras, I had to ensure that the lighting, background, camera location, and all of the technical details were

consistent from one filming session to the next (otherwise, the transitions between individual clips would not be smooth). To facilitate my performances, I also had a makeshift teleprompter with the text and my translation notes running while signing in front of the camera, to make sure I signed the text in the same way I had translated and rehearsed it earlier.

What is more, I had to ensure my personal appearance was the same every time I filmed a section of the story—my clothes, my hairdo, and all these details had to match. Any differences would be distracting to the viewers, and interrupt the continuity of the story itself. Because it was time-consuming to get the camera, lights, and background set exactly right, the computer and teleprompter timed correctly, (and my personal appearance the same, what is more), I gradually ended up doing what I came to call "binge-translating": that is, trying to get through as much of the story as possible over the space of one or two very long working days—translating, rehearsing, and then performing. This helped me ensure continuity in the video without the hassle of recalibrating the equipment multiple times as I would need to if I spaced out the translation over a few weeks or months. The long working days made the process more of a marathon than it should have been, perhaps, but one benefit was that my translations of previous sections were fresh in my mind when I went to perform new ones on-camera. If I waited a few days or weeks between translating sections, it was harder to remember what I had done for previous performances. Using the binge-translating method helped create consistency within my performance of various characters and of the overall story itself.

Then, of course, the pitfalls of performing live for the camera were ever-present. I would translate a section of the story, rehearse it, film it live, and then play back the video on the camera screen to see how it looked in order to make adjustments for the next take. Each section of the story required at least two or three takes, and most required more. The slightest mistake—signing something out of order, putting my eye gaze in the wrong place, or hesitating and/or stumbling, or falling out of sync with the teleprompter and losing my place—required a total do-over for that scene. I could not go back on the video and switch out the one sign that had been wrong, as one might erase a word on the page: I had to do the scene all over again. For the opening paragraphs, I did about ten

takes before I felt my translation had been achieved in my performance. After finishing all of the sections of the story, I would piece all of the clips together and watch the video from start to end. Some scenes did not fit—perhaps I inadvertently changed the location of something in one scene compared to where it had been four scenes earlier, or perhaps the narrator's tone was not consistent in a few scenes—so these I would go back and film all over again. In short, it was a long, time-consuming process to perform the translations in such a way that my performance itself became an accurate and faithful representation of my vision of the translation that I had painstakingly and carefully developed.

Of course, some parts of the translation and performing process would be greatly facilitated (and perhaps even become non-issues) if I had an actual film crew who would take care of the technology logistics of the camera, lighting, film editing, and so forth rather than it being only me running everything by myself. Or if I had hired an ASL actor to sign out the translation on-camera, I could have divided the labor differently. This, however, would have added another layer of complexity to the process of achieving a faithful translation, for I would have had to direct that person in how they signed the story, and their performance would become another person's interpretation of my translation and may not necessarily match what I envisioned in my head as I translated the text. Not surprisingly, the challenges I have listed here are not the only ones I encountered in the process of translating "Harrison Bergeron," but I hope the brief sketch provided here has given a glimpse of the rich, invigorating decision-making process that translation is, and how complex the process of developing ASL-translated texts for classroom use (such as for the unit in this study) can be.

Some Final Thoughts on the Design of the Unit and Lesson Plans

One of the many difficulties in designing a unit of study is that one has to make choices, especially choices about what to include and exclude. Selecting only two short stories out of scores is no easy feat. Ideally, I would have liked to include other genres such as poetry, non-fiction, or even a short novel; however, it was not feasible given the constraints of this short-term study—and especially because so few ASL translations of literature exist, meaning that any additional genres would also have to be translated prior to being introduced into the unit. Moreover, in the four-to-six weeks' space of time, it

would be impossible for the teacher and students to fully explore all of the multiple layers and complex themes of the two short stories that I did select.

After I finished authoring the intervention unit, it became a stand-alone text that a teacher would pick up and use with a group of students. My own hopes and anticipations about what the teacher and students would discuss and explore throughout the unit have little bearing on how the actual experience would play out for the participants. Rather, it is the students and the teacher—with their divergent perspectives and experiences—who work together in the classroom to negotiate and create dynamic meaning out of the text I have created, and it is very possible that they will touch on ideas and themes that I did not expect them to, making a meaning that is different from the intended objectives of the unit. Because of this, I approached my data analysis with no pre-established codes, instead, allowing the data to speak for itself through the inductive coding process.[225]

Site Selection for the Research Study

I am a native ASL signer who has been Deaf since before the age of two, and I attended a statewide school for the deaf where I had friends from all walks of deafness: hard-of-hearing, deaf, those who were deaf from birth, those who became deaf later in life, fluent ASL signers, non-fluent ASL signers, PSE/SEE signers, non-signers, those who can use speech well, those who do not use speech, those who identified strongly with Deaf culture, those who do not, those from deaf families, those from hearing families, those who have strong print literacy skills, and those who do not. Because a statewide school for the deaf tends to provide a significant mass of deaf students in one place with a wide variety of backgrounds and deafhood experiences, I chose to seek a school for the deaf as a research site, as opposed to, say, a mainstream program in a regular public school where numbers might have been more limited and/or with less of a variety of types of students. I wanted a research site that could afford me a wide variety of deaf students and in which the teachers used ASL as a communication method in the classroom.

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[225] Merriam, Sharan B. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 179. Glesne, Corrine. *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2011), 187.

Using contacts from my previous career teaching high school, as well as my professional and personal connections with schools for the deaf in a number of states, I initiated conversations with two schools for the deaf, both of which expressed interest in the possibility of having research conducted on their campuses. My choice to pursue a research site where I already had a professional and/or personal history is a decision that many qualitative and sociolinguistic researchers have also found to be highly beneficial because the personal connections they already have with the site often provides them with *relational equity*—that is, an obvious personal investment in the place and the people, which the participants can readily see and understand. Feeling like the researcher has a genuine, personal connection with the place (as opposed to being some random stranger barging in) can be a decisive factor in how the researcher forms trust-based relationships with the participants, which in turn leads to the participants feeling more comfortable sharing their experiences with the researcher during interviews.[226] To me, this personal connection was especially important because I would be asking my participants questions about deeply personal topics related to their literacy and linguistic experiences, and many deaf students have negative experiences with language and print literacy, particularly English.

I began my site selection process in November 2013; two places immediately showed interest; however, within a few weeks, one school expressed reluctance about having a researcher on campus, citing concerns about how the study might alter their English classroom instruction (however temporarily) and about how, if word got out that they were using ASL translations in the English classroom, the school's image to the public might be affected. What is more, I was also aware that their current high school English teacher at the time was not certified by the state to teach the subject of English/Language Arts but was only working towards her certification, so it did not surprise me that the school was reluctant to bring a researcher into a classroom where the teacher was not fully credentialed.

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[226] See the following for more information on researcher-interviewee dynamics: Heath, Shirley Brice. *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Merriam, *Qualitative Research*; and Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*.

The other school for the deaf, however, responded very enthusiastically to my request. The superintendent, principal, and high school English teacher were all thrilled with the prospect of participating in a study that they felt spoke directly to many of the issues they had seen with their students in the English classroom. They offered me a range of English/Language Arts classes to select from for implementing the translation intervention unit; moreover, they also opened up the whole high school population to me, allowing me to recruit additional participants at my own discretion. In January 2014, I obtained approval from the school superintendent to conduct the study; the school's only requirements were as follows. (1) That I would provide them with their own copy of the IRB authorization form for their files; (2) keep the principal informed of which students participated in the study, and (3) provide the school with copies of each participant's IRB consent forms, signed by the parents or the students themselves if they were eighteen or older. The school also requested to be kept updated on the research findings, as they were eager to know the outcomes.

As it happens, this school for the deaf is the same K-to-12 school I attended growing up, so I very much had a personal connection with the place. Initially, I would have preferred to conduct the research at a school where the students would not be able to go to the library and track down my picture in previous yearbooks, but because it had been more than ten years since I graduated, the student population consisted almost entirely of students who had never known me. Very few students—who had been in pre-school or kindergarten at the time I graduated—could vaguely recollect who I was, so this was a non-issue. As it turns out, the fact that I had graduated from the same school turned out to be a big selling point among the students; they were thrilled to hear that not only was I deaf, but I had once been a student in the very same classrooms as they were—and we had even had some of the same teachers, as well. This boosted my credibility almost more than anything else did, and it was not unusual for one student to introduce me to their friends as being someone "who used to go to school here." Because of my personal connections with the school, and because I was deaf, the students were all interested in why I was there, which greatly facilitated the participant recruitment process.

School for the Deaf

I will call this site simply "School for the Deaf." It is a statewide residential school for the deaf that consists of some students who live in on-campus dormitories during the week and go home on the weekends and also students who are "day students"—that is, they lived locally and go home every day. Because most states have only one (maybe two) residential schools for the deaf in the whole state, I will not specify which state or even which region of the country the state is located. Doing so, combined with the facts that I will shortly provide about the student population, would make it fairly easy for people familiar with deaf education to identify the school and perhaps even the participating teacher and/or students, and thus be a breach of researcher confidentiality. Compared to other schools for the deaf nationwide, School for the Deaf is on the smaller end of the spectrum, with approximately 100 students distributed throughout K-to-12. At the time of the study, there were approximately 25-30 students in the high school, which was my target population for the study.

Participant Selection

Because this study focuses on deaf students, all of the participants had to meet the following criteria:

1. At the time of this study, they must be enrolled in a high school (9th-12th grades) English/Language Arts class that is being taught by the participating teacher (but not necessarily in the same class period).
2. Their hearing loss must be greater than 25 dB (anything below 25dB is considered "normal" hearing).
3. They must be at least moderately fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) or Pidgin Signed English (a pidgin variation of ASL), according to their self-assessment and their annual evaluation done by the school's language specialist.

School for the Deaf uses American Sign Language as one of the primary modes of communication, and this, compounded by the fact that the school accepts only students who meet certain thresholds of hearing loss, meant that virtually all of the students in the high school met my criteria. To eliminate potential noise in the data, I did not include students who have multiple physical disabilities (for instance, a student might be deaf *and* have cerebral palsy, or be deaf-blind) in the potential participant pool because additional

physical disabilities may have affected the language acquisition process and/or the students' linguistic experience in different ways than only deafness would. This exclusion only reduced the potential participant pool by two or three students.

Participant selection occurred in a number of different ways because my study design called for two different groups of students and also necessitated the involvement of a teacher in whose classroom the translation intervention unit would be implemented. School for the Deaf has only one high school English teacher, Eva, who had already been involved in the administrators' decision about whether or not to allow me to come and do research at the school. At the same time she gave her approval for the study, Eva also gave her consent to participate, so I did not need to actively recruit other teachers to participate in the study.

According to the study design, Eva would implement the translation intervention unit in one (or more) of her English classes; the core group of students in this study—the ones who would be interviewed multiple times and observed during their English classes—would come from the class(es) that underwent the intervention unit. Because I wanted Eva to feel comfortable with teaching a unit that she did not develop herself, and because Eva knew the student composition of her classes far better than I did, I allowed Eva, in conjunction with the principal, to determine which class period(s) would undergo the intervention unit. I only requested that the class they selected would consist of at least a few students who typically struggle with reading, because I wanted to see how these kinds of students reacted to the translations. Additionally, because Eva teaches several levels of English classes and follows different lesson plans for each level, I let her decide if she preferred to try the intervention unit in one class or multiple classes. I did not want her to feel compelled to alter her routine for *all* of her classes simply for the sake of this study. In the end, Eva decided that her third-period English class would be the best option, so I made it a priority to recruit the students from that period.

Eva's third-period class consisted of five students whose reading levels range from the 1st grade to 6th grade. I was pleased when I learned that these students also had a variety of hearing levels, ranging from hard-of-hearing to profoundly deaf. To recruit these students, I visited to her class, introduced myself, explained the study, and outlined the potential benefits of the study. IRB consent forms were sent home, and within a week,

all five students and their parents had given their signed consent to participate. I was relieved that the entire class had consented, for it saved me the trouble of having to edit my classroom observation videos to blur out the faces of the students who were not participating. Moreover, having an entire class participate would give a more comprehensive picture of what was happening with everyone in the classroom during the translation unit. These five students made up the core group of this study: Chris, DJ, Jayson, King and Snooki. I have outlined their basic background information and reading levels below:

Table 3-2: Background Information and Reading Levels for Eva's Students

Student	Age	Hearing Level	Reading Level (English)[227]	Conversational Fluency in ASL[228]
Chris	16	Mild to moderate hearing loss since birth (hard-of-hearing)	5th-6th Grade	3.0
DJ	15	Profoundly deaf in one ear since birth or pre-lingually (considered hard-of-hearing)	2nd-3rd Grade	2.0
King	15	Profoundly deaf since birth	1st-2nd grade	5.0
Jayson	15	Profoundly deaf in one ear since birth (considered hard-of-hearing)	3rd-4th grade	3.5
Snooki	18	Profoundly deaf since birth or prelingually	3rd-4th grade	5.0

Because my research questions also center on deaf students' language ideologies, I needed to collect data about not only the translation intervention unit but also about a wide range of deaf students' perspectives about language. The five students in Eva's class would provide rich data, certainly, but they were all struggling readers. To paint as comprehensive a picture as possible of deaf students' ideologies, I would need data from more than five students, and not just the students who struggle with English. Thus, I

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[227] Reading level as reported by their teacher Eva and also based on the school's annual print literacy assessment of the student.

[228] Conversational fluency in ASL is presented on a rating of 1 to 5, with 5 being native-like fluency; ratings are from the scoring of an impartial third-party professional sign language evaluator, using standards from the Sign Language Proficiency Inventory examination.

recruited a second group of students—a group that I called, for lack of a more creative name, "the additional students." When designing the study, I envisioned a target number of approximately ten to fifteen students altogether, so with Eva's five students accounted for, I needed to recruit five to ten additional students. Upon figuring out what my interview schedule would look like (based on the school schedule and after-school obligations that might constraint the students' availability) and how much time I would have left over after interviewing Eva's students, I decided to try and recruit eight more students for the "Additional" group.

These eight students were randomly selected from a list the principal provided of all the remaining high school students who met my criteria for the study. I arrived at School for the Deaf two weeks prior to the start date of the study for the purpose of recruiting, collecting IRB permission forms, and, as qualitative researchers emphasize, mingling with people to build rapport and trust with potential participants.[229] To this end, I went to several luncheon periods with the high school students, hung out in the hallways with students between classes and after school, spent time in the dormitories during non-studying hours, and attended a few school events. The students and I talked about school gossip, school sports, movies, mall trips, the upcoming spring prom, books they were reading, things they were doing with their friends, and whatever other topics the students would bring up. My goal was to be highly visible and accessible to the students so they could get to know me and develop a friendly rapport with me prior to being asked to participate in the study.

After about two weeks of mingling, I approached the students who had been randomly selected and invited them to participate in the study. Each student was approached individually during one of their "down" times, such as before or after school, or during the lunch hour. All of the eight students I approached readily expressed desire to participate; indeed, by the end of my recruiting week, word had gotten out amongst the students, and many of them were eager to get the chance to get involved with what everyone was talking about. No one declined to participate, to my surprise, so I did not

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[229] Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 106. Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*, 143.

have to do another round of random selection to recruit more participants. I ended up
with eight additional students as follows:

Table 3-3: Background Information and Reading Levels for Additional Students

Student	Age	Hearing Level	Reading Level (English)[230]	Conversational Fluency in ASL[231]
Auggins	19	Profoundly deaf since birth	2nd-3rd grade	4.5
Bella	15	Hearing levels have fluctuated since age 7; mild to moderate loss in both ears, but she occasionally loses all hearing temporarily (generally considered hard-of-hearing)	Above grade level: 10th grade	3.0
Dani	15	Progressive hearing loss since age four has gone from a mild loss to moderate loss in one ear and profound in the other (considered hard-of-hearing)	7th-8th grade	3.5
Hendrix	15	Moderate to severe hearing loss since birth (considered hard-of-hearing)	At grade level: 9th grade	3.5
J-Dawg	18	Profound-severe hearing loss since birth (considered deaf)	1st-2nd grade	3.5
Megan	18	Severe hearing loss since birth (considered hard-of-hearing)	9th-10th grade	4.0
Reg	19	Profoundly deaf since birth; has cochlear implants and uses them	At grade level: 12th grade	2.0
Roy	18	Profoundly deaf since birth	8th grade	5.0

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[230] Reading level as reported by their teacher Eva and also based on the school's annual print literacy
assessment of the student.
[231] Conversational fluency in ASL is presented on a rating of 1 to 5, with 5 being native-like fluency;
ratings are the average of my own scoring and the scoring of an impartial third-party professional sign
language evaluator, using standards from the Sign Language Proficiency Inventory examination, as will be
explained later in this chapter.

It is worth noting that this group seems to consist disproportionately of stronger readers; however, this is because the additional students were randomly selected from a list that did not include Eva's third-period students, who were already a part of the study and who make up a good percentage of the struggling readers in the high school. I will also note that by interviewing a grand total of thirteen students, I basically included nearly half of the high school population at the School for the Deaf.

Finally, I chose to include one student from my pilot study, which I did in February 2012. The pilot study consisted of an in-depth case study of one deaf student's language ideologies; the data was collected in two 45-minute videophone interviews with the participant. Because the participant, Xina, had also attended the same School for the Deaf as the rest of the participants, I felt strongly that her data should be included in the larger research study. Moreover, the interview procedures related to language ideology in my pilot study were virtually identical to the procedures for this study (the only major difference being that for this study, I was able to interview the students in person rather than over the videophone), so I anticipated no problems with including Xina's data in this study. When I arrived at the School for the Deaf to conduct this study, I contacted Xina (who by that time graduated, but was fortunately still in the area), and obtained her signature on the IRB consent form. I then received IRB approval to include the data from my pilot study with the data from this study; ergo, with Xina, I have a grand total of fourteen participants.

Participant Profiles

The Participating Teacher: Eva

At the time of this study, Eva had been teaching English/Language Arts at School for the Deaf for seven years. A calm, reserved person who rarely raises her voice (metaphorically speaking, since she usually communicates with her students via ASL), Eva runs her classroom with a quiet efficiency. She has a reputation among the students for being a firm taskmaster: she assigns work and expects the students to get it done, no matter how much they may procrastinate. Students know the routine of Eva's classroom well, and they know her expectations for their work and their behavior; as a result, Eva's classroom is generally run like a tight ship, with students working together as a full class on specific days of the week and moving through various literacy "stations" individually on other days, working on assignments tailored to their reading levels. Eva originally trained as a teacher of the deaf with an elementary certification; however, upon being

hired as a high school Language Arts teacher, Eva began taking a series of literacy-related courses to enhance her expertise in reading and writing instruction.

The Students from Eva's Third-Period Class

Chris (Hard-of-Hearing)

Chris, a sturdy, athletic 9th grader with thick hair that is perpetually wind-swept at impossible angles across his forehead and eyes, is a notoriously unmotivated student who spends most of his days with earbuds in his ears, and only reluctantly removes them when told to do so by teachers. He much prefers music, longboarding, and socializing to schoolwork; in fact, aside from the school's basketball team and being able to spend time with his friends, school holds little interest for him. He tends to slide by with middling-to-low grades in his classes, and is frequently late with turning in assignments. For his English class alone, he tends to be late with (or not turn in altogether) two to three assignments a week. In his words, "I just never do it." Chris comes from a rough home background, which has affected his schoolwork, and he has been known to get in trouble with the law in the past. At first glance, Chris seems to be apathetic and unsmiling with adults, giving reluctant and short answers to their questions, but with his friends, he can be a jokesy, goofy guy if he is in a good mood. On the days he is in a bad mood, he withdraws into himself, sullen and silent towards everyone. Given his history for getting in serious trouble, teachers tend to be somewhat suspicious about his behavior, especially if he is gone too long to the bathroom or if he is late to class (living under this cloud of constant suspicion may be partly why he is distant with most adults and authority figures). However, if Chris feels a genuine connection with an adult, he will flash rare grins, letting down his "tough guy" guard down. When this happens, he can come across as a sweet, insightful young man. Chris started learning ASL at the age of eight, when he started attending the School for the Deaf. He tends to sign more PSE than ASL, and he is also a sloppy signer because he doesn't put much effort into articulating his signs clearly. He generally prefers to speak with his voice, except when he is with his deaf friends who sign.

DJ (Hard-of-Hearing)

A somewhat tall, thickset young man with dark hair and a heavy forehead, DJ can get a vacant look in his eyes pretty often, which gives the impression that he is daydreaming or zoned out. Because of his slight language processing delay, he needs an additional one or two seconds to think through what was just said to him (in either spoken English or ASL) before responding, especially in the classroom environment. With his friends or in one-on-one conversations, however, DJ seems slightly quicker on the uptake in conversations; but in all situations, he is not particularly loquacious, limiting himself to short remarks and the occasional sly or funny comment (he likes making his friends laugh). DJ's language processing delay also affects his reading and writing skills: even though he speaks English fairly well with his voice, he reads and writes at the first or second grade level, and rarely writes more than a few sentences at a time. He dislikes school—especially English classes—finding it "boring, it's all boring!" The only part of the school day he enjoys is when he can go to the elementary wing and be a classroom aide. But as for English, math, woodshop, and so forth, he finds it all boring. He tends to work

doggedly at his assignments during class, but requires frequent prompting and one-on-one guidance from the teacher to stay on-task (otherwise, he will zone out and stare at the paper). His work is often turned in late (or missing altogether). DJ enjoys sports—and he plays on a few school teams—and is unabashedly addicted to video games, preferring to spend most of his time at home playing video games instead of interacting with people. DJ started attending the School for the Deaf when he was ten, which was when he started learning sign language. He tends to sign PSE, and his sign articulation is slower than most other students, perhaps due to his language processing delay. He prefers speaking with his voice, but he admits he has a hard time expressing himself that way, as well, so he is not completely comfortable in either ASL or in English.

Jayson (Hard-of-Hearing)

A gentle, soft-spoken, and unfailingly polite young man, Jayson finds it easy to chat with teenagers and adults alike. With his long, dark hair (always pulled back in a low ponytail), the black-framed glasses, and the oversized t-shirts and hoodies combined with dusty, slouchy Wranglers jeans and sometimes even cowboy boots, Jayson's lanky figure gives off an impression of a pleasant juxtaposition between a small-town farm boy and a grungy rock band musician (even though he doesn't play in a band, to my knowledge). Jayson tends to play the peacemaker among his friends, always anxious to keep everyone happy, even if it means he has to give up something he wants or if it makes him come across as less skilled than he actually is. Jayson is usually eager to please his teachers, even though he doesn't care very much for schoolwork or for reading and writing, especially. He is conscientious about staying on-task and doing what was asked of him, and he tends to participate readily in the class activities that he likes (such as group discussions), but he will fall behind with the assignments that he dislikes, especially in English class, a class that he hates (even though he would never tell that to the teacher's face). As boy from a blue-collar family, he grew up working with his hands, and finds more satisfaction in hard, manual labor than he does in school; he expressed an interest in someday working in the mines with his father. Jayson speaks clearly with his voice, but ever since learning ASL at the age of nine (when he transferred to the School for the Deaf), he has been hooked on signing. He is still not fluent in ASL, so his signing tends to be more CASE-like; however, Jayson is actively working on improving his signing whenever he gets the chance to.

King (Deaf)

A slender, athletic young man of possibly mixed Mexican-Caribbean descent, King's quick smile and eagerness to please make him popular among students and teachers alike. His dark eyes and expressive face reflect his moods, indicating whether he is teasing, excited, confused, or occasionally even sardonic, but they never light up more than when he scents an opportunity to engage in language play in ASL. Telling stories in ASL is one of King's favorite things to do—and one of the only language-related tasks that he takes pride in being skilled at. King never seems to tire of watching other signers, whether it is his deaf friends or an ASL video, his eyes on the prowl for a new turn of phrase in ASL or a signing effect that he might incorporate in his own repertoire. However, when King

is confused or not understanding something that is happening or something that is being said to him, his eyes can quickly go flat and lifeless, rendering his face an unreadable blank. People often do not realize that King is lost because he has perfected the art of *appearing* like he is following and understanding them, with head nods and comments like "Ohh…" and "Yeah, yeah…" and "Ohh, that…". Only when he gives an off-topic answer to a direct question does the other person realize that King is confused. If he is interested in the topic, King can be a very eager contributor to conversations—especially in the classroom, where he is anxious to please the teacher—so in his eagerness to show that he knows *something*, even if his answer does not fit the question posed, King will often start giving a random answer before the teacher even finishes signing the question. King's answer is usually the correct answer for *a* question that the teacher might ask, but it is not always the answer for the question that the teacher actually just asked. This tactic of his can fool some people into thinking that he understands more than he actually does, especially because he is usually very polite and attentive towards others. King struggles print literacy quite a bit, and dislikes reading and writing. A native ASL signer, King is highly fluent and never uses his voice to communicate with others. He attended a few different schools for the deaf before transferring to this School for the Deaf approximately a year before this study took place.

Snooki (Deaf)

It takes Snooki a while to feel comfortable talking with new people, particularly when it comes to hearing people and/or authority figures like teachers. When Snooki feels like she's the center of attention in a classroom setting, she covers her lower face with the palms of her hands and her eyes seem to hide behind her thick, slanting bangs. She hates giving answers in any type of group discussion in class, and if the teacher waits her out, she will finally giggle nervously and blurt out a clipped answer, and it is often difficult to understand her rapid signing. "I'm just so shy!" she explained to me. However, in the halls and anytime she is hanging out with her friends, she is not quite so bashful, for she is quick to jump into the conversation, her dark Hispanic eyes flashing behind her hipster glasses and her usually half-hidden smile often breaking out in a tittering laugh. Even though she does not usually make jokes herself, Snooki quickly picks up on humor and is often ready with a sardonic, witty comment about other people's antics and jokes. Even so, she still tends to sit back and observe ongoing conversations rather than taking an active role in directing the flow of conversation. And in one-on-one conversations with adults, Snooki tends to be more relaxed and effusive, as well. It is only in the classroom where she seems to try and make her petite form even smaller so to be as invisible as possible during group discussions or question-and-answer type of activities. Snooki doesn't particularly enjoy school—and especially dislikes English class, reading, and writing—but she is a self-driven perfectionist, so she is conscientious about staying on top of turning in assignments. She is determined to graduate on time without any credits missing. Snooki attended a large deaf school during her early years, and then transferred to this School for the Deaf in the second grade. A fluent, native ASL signer, Snooki never uses her voice to communicate.

Auggins (Deaf)

Auggins has severe ADHD, for which he has long been under a cocktail of medications. Even so, he still has a hard time staying focused on tasks at hand, and he also can struggle with even carrying on ordinary conversations without getting stuck in a loop and repeating his sentences several times, especially when he is excited. This makes Auggins seem less fluent in ASL than he really is, but he *is* a native ASL signer with strong mastery of the language. With structured and repeated rehearsal, Auggins has developed various "scripts" to use for different communication situations, which greatly reduces his stutter-y repetitions when talking with people in certain situations. Auggins is not shy: he loves to relate with people, so he is always eager to communicate his thoughts with them. He will do anything to make himself understood, whether it is through signing, writing, or gesturing. He is not afraid to try and fail, and he will try and try relentlessly, using any tool or means available to him, until he is successful. When he gets stumped while trying to communicate with someone, he often runs his hands through his blonde hair while he thinks about what to try next, and then his blue eyes light up with a new idea, and he is off at high speed, trying his next communication tactic. Auggins can come across as an overpowering—even smothering—personality because he is so exuberantly eager to talk and connect with other people, but when he has his frenetic excitement under control, he is a sweet, thoughtful, friendly, extroverted young man. Auggins attended the School for the Deaf during his early years, transferred to public school for his late elementary and early middle school years, and then came back to the School for the Deaf again in the 8th grade, where he has remained ever since.

Bella (Hard-of-Hearing)

A short girl with wide, icy-blue eyes that can either stare sullenly or sparkle vivaciously, depending on her tempestuous moods, Bella is a dedicated, involved student who, even though she is only a freshman, is already in the thick of playing multiple sports, planning various school events, taking Driver's Ed, and hoping to start up a FFA group at the school. When Bella was in early elementary school, she was diagnosed with Ménière's Disease, which subjects her to frequent dizzy spells accompanied with ringing in her ears and hearing losses that can fluctuate, even from day to day. Because Bella was fully hearing for the earliest years of her life—and still has days when she can hear very well—she has perfect speech and did not learn ASL until she transferred to the school for the deaf in the 8th grade. She is hard-of-hearing most of the time, but as she has gotten older, there have been more and more occasions when she went completely deaf, an effect which has so far been temporary, but her parents' fears that one day, she will wake up deaf and never get her hearing back, combined with the fact that she was struggling with missing information in her public school classes, spurred them to transfer her into the School for the Deaf where she would have the opportunity to learn ASL. At the time of the interview, Bella had been signing for only a year and half, but she has picked up signs remarkably well, even for her age, and is able to carry on detailed conversations with other ASL signers, especially in one-on-one situations. Her signing, however, tends to be CASE rather than ASL, but Bella is thrilled with her newfound bilingualism and is

working hard to improve her ASL. Bella has always loved to read—even though there was a long spell during middle school in which she told everyone she hated reading because she didn't want to be identified as a nerd—and can often be seen carrying young adult books through the school halls.

Dani (Hard-of-Hearing, with a Cochlear Implant She Doesn't Use)

With light-brown and slanted almond-shaped eyes in a wide, angular face, along with her dark olive skin, Dani exudes an exotic appearance that makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly what her ethnic descent is—Caucasian? Filipino? Mexican? Ecuadorian? Italian? (For the record, her father is Mexican and her mother Caucasian.) Very much a queen bee personality, Dani likes to be in the thick of all things social, especially at school; when she heard that I was interviewing random students, she cornered me and demanded, "So when is my interview? I want to be interviewed." I explained that students were being randomly selected, and when her name did in fact come up for an interview, Dani was very pleased. She has no qualms about saying what she thinks and tends to do so with much gusto. Dani was identified as having hearing loss at the age of three, but she suspects she was born hard-of-hearing, and she has been signing CASE/PSE since she was three or four years old. When she was younger, she preferred to sign because it was easier for her, but as she has gotten older and more practiced in speech and in using her voice, she is starting to prefer to rely on her voice instead of signing, functioning more like a hard-of-hearing person than a deaf person. Whenever she signs, she always—and has always—uses her voice while signing, so her signing follows English grammar (CASE) instead of ASL, and she says she can't sign without also voicing. When she was ten years old, she got a cochlear implant in one ear, but it did not work out for her, so she doesn't use it anymore. Dani has attended the School for the Deaf since age three, but she also mainstreams for part of the day at the local public school.

Hendrix (Hard-of-Hearing, Has Hearing Aids but Avoids Wearing Them)

A trim, athletic young man, Hendrix is a third-generation Mexican-American: his parents, grandparents, and aunts and uncles all live in the same rural area where they continue to work the land. Hendrix grew up around the farm lifestyle, through which his family instilled in him a serious-minded work ethic that is evident in every aspect of his life, whether it is in his schoolwork, in sports, or in extracurricular activities like the academic bowl team. Even though Hendrix is a dedicated student who consistently gets good grades in challenging courses, he was not always this way. Prior to the fifth grade, Hendrix was mainstreamed in the public school in his hometown, and even though he is hard-of-hearing and has excellent speech, he still missed a lot of information in the classroom. His struggles with understanding the teachers, combined with his never wanting to wear hearing aids (so he wouldn't be different from the other kids) and the teasing he encountered as the only deaf kid at school, led to Hendrix earning poor grades and skipping school frequently, refusing to attend even after appearing before a truancy board a few times. His mother, at her wits' end, brought Hendrix to visit the school for the deaf, where one of the first things he noticed was that all the other students were like him: "Mom, they all wear hearing aids, too!" And Hendrix started attending the School

for the Deaf, where he has made a tremendous turn-around in his academics and in his attitude. Hendrix credits being able to understand everything in ASL and being around other deaf students as being instrumental to his change in attitude towards school. Because Hendrix comes from a family where deafness is genetic in males, he has two uncles who are deaf, and his younger brother is deaf, as well. At home, Hendrix's family juggles three languages: spoken Spanish, English, and ASL. Hendrix's parents are not fluent in ASL, so Hendrix, as the only one who is fluent in all three languages, often has to "interpret" for his younger brother, who is completely deaf and has no speech.

J-Dawg (Deaf, with a Cochlear Implant He Doesn't Use)

A lean young man with dark feathered hair carefully groomed to stick out in all directions from underneath his pink Puma cap, J-Dawg carries himself with an supercilious swagger that indicates he likes to play the role of the flashy, rich playboy. Even though he is soft-spoken and polite, J-Dawg can be overconfident in himself, and he is known to embellish stories about his academic and athletic exploits, making himself sound more accomplished and more skilled than he really is. It is not unusual for his friends and teachers to take his boasts with a very large grain of salt. When it comes to golf and skiing, however, J-Dawg does have skill and experience, and he is actively involved in those two sports. With regards to school, however, J-Dawg has always had a hard time with academics, especially anything language-related in *any* language. J-Dawg, being profoundly deaf, uses ASL as his primary communication, but his signing is a little stilted and slow, not fluid like one would expect a native ASL signer's signs to be, which suggests a language-processing disorder of some form. J-Dawg seems to need an extra moment to process what he just heard (or read) before formulating a response. He also struggles with fingerspelling quite a bit; he is often unable to produce all the letters in a word in the correct order, even the shortest words. He has a terribly hard time with reading—his reading ability hovers at about the 1st-2nd grade level, even though he is now a senior. J-Dawg knows he doesn't read well, but he doesn't seem to realize how low his reading skill is compared to his friends and to hearing people—either that, or he was exaggerating about his reading ability during his interview when he described himself as being better at reading than his friend Roy, who reads at the 8th grade level. J-Dawg has attended the School for the Deaf since his early elementary years.

Megan (Hard-of-Hearing)

With her black-rimmed, square glasses and the thoughtful, almost skeptical glint in the eyes gazing out from behind the glasses, Megan at first sight seems to be a quiet, thoughtful introvert who holds people off at a distance, but a few minutes' conversation with her reveals her to be a strongly-opinionated young woman who is decidedly not shy about voicing her protests if something is not going the way she would like it to. Megan has an older brother who is deaf, so she grew up signing with him even though her speech is clear enough for her to communicate with hearing people without the support of signs, and she has attended the School for the Deaf ever since she was very young. For a while now, she has been taking classes at the public school (with interpreters); she is at grade level in most subjects. Megan has fairly strong reading skills; she is not on par with most

hearing seniors, but she reads at a high school level. However, Megan dislikes reading, describing herself as being "not the kind of person who picks up books and reads them." She prefers doing other things rather than read. She does enjoy journal-writing, however, and writes occasionally in a personal diary. When it comes to signing, Megan says she signs more "English" (that is, PSE/CASE) and she prefers that over ASL because it's more "exact" and because her ASL skills are "not great." She is fluent in CASE, but not in ASL, and sometimes has a hard time understanding sentences in pure ASL.

Reg (Deaf, with Cochlear Implants that He Uses)

Perhaps the best way to describe Reg's personality is to say he moves through life at a snail's pace. Even though he is a polite young man of normal intellect, Reg moves slowly in everything he does, taking the world in through his half-closed pale blue eyes and hardly ever reacting beyond the occasional a half-smile or widening of his eyes. Most of the time, Reg seems to be so preoccupied by his own thoughts that he zones out of other people's conversations around him (and indeed, he likes to retreat behind his handheld video console whenever he can), and when someone speaks directly to him, Reg's responses are slow in coming. "Mm…" he will invariably say for a long minute before he answers, and his sentences are usually clipped and short. He signs SEE, and the formation of his signs are not always clear, so that, combined with his clipped sentences, can make him hard to understand. To the aggravation of other people—especially his teachers—Reg moves agonizingly slowly when he walks, when he does chores (such as clearing the table), when he talks, when he works. Often, he drifts off in thought mid-task and has to be prodded to keep moving. The only two things Reg seems to do at a fast pace are video games and reading. A voracious reader, Reg enjoys reading novels, and he reads at grade level. Once in a while, Reg will break out in a wide, toothy grin, but most of the time, he remains impassive behind his heavy-lidded eyes, not unlike Yoda, yet inching his way from here and there at a remarkably slow pace. Reg has been signing CASE his whole life (he has a deaf sister who signs ASL, interestingly enough), and he was mainstreamed for the entirety of his K-to-12 experience, transferring to the School for the Deaf only during his very last semester.

Roy (Deaf)

Roy has always been a voracious storyteller and jokester. When a mischievous glint comes into his round, blue eyes and his trademark quick smile tugs at the corners of his lips, you know you are in for one of his playful ASL puns or a quirky one-liner. Roy has an off-the-wall brand of humor all his own, and not everyone always understands his jokes. Born for the stage, Roy can easily carry off an audience with his stories and wild creativity, and he takes his craft seriously by consistently studying other ASL storytelling masters and imitating different techniques in their signing. It may seem like Roy doesn't take very many things seriously, but when he wants to, he can swing from lighthearted riposte to a dead-serious discussion without skipping a beat. When he thinks, Roy often runs his fingers through the mess of tight blonde curls atop his head before he gives carefully crafted answers. Roy is a connoisseur of ASL, but when it comes to English, his experience has been somewhat mixed. He used to hate reading with a passion, but

towards the end of high school, something "clicked" for him and he found a genre he loved (sci-fi/fantasy); since then, he has enjoyed reading much more than he ever did. Roy reads at about the 7th-8th grade level, and is at grade-level in most all other subjects. Except for his English class (which he detests), Roy enjoys school immensely and volunteers his storytelling skills in elementary classes whenever he can. He attended a school for the deaf in another state for pre-school and kindergarten, but transferred to this School for the Deaf when his family moved to the area during his early elementary years.

Xina (Deaf)

An outspoken—and sometimes sassy—young woman, Xina is very much the center of any group she is in; in fact, she has always been one of the cute, popular girls who pretty much command the social scene show at school. Xina is quick in everything she does: quick to speak, quick in her signing, quick-witted, quick to move, quick to laugh, quick to scowl, quick to try new things, quick to have an opinion. Her signing can be hard for some hearing people to understand because she signs rapidly, and her signs often blend into one another fluidly without distinct separation between words. She also signs very fluently in ASL, as well, and has a wide range of creativity with her language play. In fact, she is the one that most students identify as having "good ASL," by which they mean she signs fluidly and with good facial expressions. Indeed, with a chiseled nose, high round cheekbones, and expressive eyes (usually fringed by dramatically black mascara) in a heart-shaped face, she can convey whole sentences through her facial expressions alone, and it can be quite entertaining to watch. Xina struggles with reading, but over the past two years, she has become more studious in her English classes, knowing that she will graduate soon and be out there in the "real world." This prompted her to really dig in and try to improve her English. She focuses especially on improving her vocabulary, and has an intense desire to prove that deaf people can be just as successful as hearing people. Xina attended the School for the Deaf for her early elementary years, transferred to public school for several years, and then came back to the School for the Deaf during high school and graduated from there.

Data Collection

Student Interview Procedures

For each student in Eva's class, I planned two interviews, with one taking place prior to the start of the intervention unit in their English class, and the other happening within a week after the end of the unit. After Eva had updated me to her timetable for the unit, which she had decided to space out over six weeks, I arranged interview dates with her students. By that time, I was already on site at the School for the Deaf, so my method of communication with the students was simply to approach them in person and ask when it would be a convenient time to interview them. To accommodate their sports, extracurricular, and driver's education schedules, I let the students choose whether they

preferred to meet me before or after school and on which day of the week. Nearly all of the students opted for meeting with me after school. The fact that several students were residential students—that is, they stayed in the on-campus dormitories during the week—made it possible for me to interview them during the evening hours, as well.

Because I used to be a teacher myself, and also because the students saw me at school regularly talking with other students, teachers, and administrators, I was very conscious about how I presented myself to the students. I did not want them to see me as one of the teachers or as someone in an authority role, for if they felt that way, they might not be as honest about potentially difficult topics like their struggles with English or their past negative linguistic experiences. To this end, I made sure I dressed casually and signed in an informal register (unlike their teachers did), and I put effort into being visible not only at school but also in the dorms and at after-school extracurricular events where teachers and principals typically are not present. I also openly answered the many questions that the students asked about my long-ago experiences as a student at the same School for the Deaf and about my experiences in college as a student and as a deaf person in general. It was a tremendous boost that I was also deaf, for the students immediately accepted me as one of their own. More than one student expressed skepticism towards me until they discovered I was deaf, at which point they instantly warmed up and began speaking more freely, peppering me with questions.

Interviews were conducted in a few different places, depending on the time of the day and the availability of various rooms on campus. Per the administrators' and dormitory supervisors' request, I had to clear interview locations with them ahead of time so they would know where the students were and so that they could unlock the room for me. All of the interview locations were intentionally not in classrooms but rather in more neutral places on-campus, such as an unused kitchen in the dormitory complex or an annex of the library or a multi-purpose room typically used for team-building activities and after-school events. At all of the interviews, the room was empty except for the student and me, and I always gave the students the option of having the door wide open or partially closed for more privacy. All interviews were conducted in either ASL or PSE, depending on the students' communication preferences. As an experienced code-switcher, I was able to adjust my sign language mode as needed for each student. The fact

110

that the interviews were in sign necessitated them to be video-recorded as the optimum mode of recording the students' interview data. I gave the students the option of not being video-recorded; however, it is not unusual for deaf people to record themselves or one another signing (when telling stories or sending video messages over their smartphones), so none of the students expressed any reluctance whatsoever about having the camcorder running.

My interview protocols were very much informed by the concept of "active interviewing." In other words, I knew that meaning during interviews did not come from me simply asking questions to elicit some form of meaning from the mind of the interviewee; rather, the interviewer and participant would actively co-construct the meaning together as the interview unfolded. I wanted my participants to be able to contribute to the direction and content of the interview in meaningful ways, so I designed my interviews to be semi-structured with many open-ended questions that gave the participants the opportunity to elaborate on other parts of their experiences that they might think relevant to the general topic at hand.

I later transcribed the interview videos by myself. I could have had a sign language professional (e.g. an interpreter or an ASL instructor) transcribe them for me, but I decided against it because the process of transcribing ASL signs into a print transcription means that one is also translating ASL sentences into English sentences. I was concerned that having different people transcribe might lead to certain concepts not being translated in a consistent manner (which might affect how the data would be coded), and what is more, the students frequently used name and place signs to refer to people, activities, places, names, and slang unique to that school, to local area surrounding the school, and to the state in which the school was located. As someone who had attended the same school in the past and also lived a significant part of my life in that state, I was already thoroughly familiar with all of the places and name signs that came up in the interviews. A random transcriber who is not from that area would not have been able to accurately comprehend most of the "inside" name signs; moreover, some of the students were difficult to understand (teenagers are not always the most clear signers), so I did not want to trust the transcribing process to someone who had not met

the students in person and spent a good chunk of time in conversation with the students like I had.

To check for accuracy in my transcriptions, I showed portions of them to some the students (those who could read English well enough to verify its accuracy and those who expressed a desire to see it when I asked all of the participants if they wanted to see their transcription), and I also showed an excerpt of each student's interview video to a professional ASL interpreter, instructor, and evaluator of interpreting assessments who, as a child of deaf parents, was also a native ASL user. That individual watched the excerpts and verified my transcriptions as being accurate ASL-to-English interpretations of what the students were saying. I also took other steps to ensure I was translating accurately while transcribing. For instance, if an ASL sign or idiom for which there is no real English equivalency occurs, such as the signs SUFFER and PHAW, both of which can mean a number of things depending on the intensity and tone of the signer, as well as the manner in which the sign was carried out, then I contacted my personal network of deaf professionals who were also fluent bilinguals in ASL and English and professional ASL interpreters (who deal with interpreting between the two languages on a daily basis). Using video messaging on my phone or asking them in person, I relayed the sign (copying the manner and execution exactly), giving the sentence and context in which the sign had appeared. They then gave a list of suggestions for how to translate that sign into English, a list from which I chose the option that seemed to best fit the context and the student's personality. After the transcriptions were completed, I asked my verifier (the professional evaluator) to check these specific phrases to ensure they were indeed a good fit, and if some ambiguity still remained in a student's comments, I explicitly discuss that in my analysis.

All five students in Eva's class participated in both interviews, and all of them were quite eager to do so. For one thing, they seemed to enjoy talking about their linguistic experiences with another deaf person. At the end of each interview, I asked them if there was anything else they wanted to discuss with me; they typically did not talk more about themselves but instead used that opportunity to ask me questions about my own experiences with language, with reading, and with being deaf to see how it compared with theirs. They liked hearing about my college experiences and the times I

112

had a hard time navigating something as a deaf person. Snooki, in particular, was curious about how I deal with communicating with hearing people because I, like her, do not use my voice. Jayson and King both expressed interest in hearing more about why I was doing this study (even though I had already explained it during the recruitment process), and they also inquired about my former days as a student at the School for the Deaf. For these students, the money initiative was also a big draw, for I offered $25 per interview, and the possibility of collecting a total of $50 was very appealing to them. It was a lot of money for a high school student, and a few of them eagerly recounted the things they hoped to buy with the cash. All of the students were eager to do both interviews, and most of the interviews ended up flowing more like a casual conversation instead of a question-and-answer session. My rapport with the students, as well as my legitimacy as a deaf person and a former student at their school, probably played a role in their eagerness to be interviewed and the openness they showed towards me throughout each interview.

The first interview, which lasted approximately 45-60 minutes on average, served to provide a baseline of the students' linguistic experiences, their language ideologies, their experiences with reading and writing in and out of the classroom, and their perspectives of what usually goes on in their English class. Many students ended up talking about their deaf experiences as well as their linguistic experiences (for the two are often intertwined), and most interviews lasted more than 45 minutes. The second interview (approximately 30-minutes) took place after the intervention unit had ended, focused mostly on the students' experiences with the translations and coursework related to the translated stories. The goal of this end interview was to elicit the students' reactions and opinions about the intervention unit, as well as giving them the opportunity to reflect on that experience.

As for the additional students, who were not in Eva's class, I adhered to a similar interview process with them, except for the following differences. Instead of doing two interviews, these students did a one-time 60-minute interview, in which the whole protocol of the first interview was followed in order to amass data about their language ideologies, linguistic experiences, and literacy experiences, much as was done for Eva's students. After this interview protocol had been completed, I then followed a revised protocol of the second interview in which I showed the students a print excerpt of "The

Tell-Tale Heart" in English, elicited comments from them about the experience of reading that, and then showed them the corresponding ASL translation of that excerpt, and asked questions about that experience. The goal of this portion of the interview was to garner the students' first impressions of that experience and get them to talk through their immediate reactions and thoughts about it.

Teacher Interview Procedures

To help triangulate my interviews with the students, and to build a more comprehensive picture of what was going on in the classroom during the intervention unit, Eva, the participating teacher, participated in three interviews: once before the intervention unit, one about midway through the unit, and one after the unit ended. I was interested in Eva's experience with using the translations, and I was also eager to see what she had perceived in the students from her vantage point as a teacher. All of our interviews took place in ASL and were videotaped; I followed a similar process of transcribing for her videos. However, because Eva is fluent in English and because she expressed a desire to see the transcriptions, I e-mailed Eva a copy of her interview transcriptions as I completed them, and let her suggest alternative word choices or phrasing if she felt my translation of her ASL did not quite fit her speaking style. Our interviews all took place in her classroom either during her prep period or after school, according to her preference. The first and last interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, and the midway point interview was only fifteen minutes long.

In the first interview, Eva answered questions about her teaching philosophy, her approach to classroom instruction, the scope and sequence of her semester, how the school year had been structured thus far for her third-period class, and her typical experiences with the students in her third-period class. The midway point interview, which was considerably shorter, served as a time for me to check-in with Eva and get her *in situ* impressions about how the unit was going, and also for her to ask me questions— if she had any—about the implementation of the unit. The end interview invited Eva to reflect on the overall experience as well as on specific aspects of the unit that she felt worked well or didn't work well. Eva also reflected on herself as a teacher, on how she thought the students reacted to the intervention unit, and on how her thinking may or may not have changed after this attempt to incorporate translations into her pedagogy.

Contextual Data: Classroom Observations, Student Work, Assessments

To further triangulate my interview data, I collected a variety of artifacts and other data from Eva's third-period class. Firstly, Eva's class was video-recorded (using three camcorders to ensure everyone's signing could be seen) throughout the six weeks of the intervention unit. All of the classroom activities, discussions, and work related to the translations were captured on video and then later transcribed. Eva read the transcriptions and verified their accuracy, and I was able to compare the events in the classroom video data to what the students said in their end interviews. Snooki, for example, barely ever speaks during the classroom discussions, behavior that might lead to the impression that she was disengaged, and Eva, during her second interview, expressed concern about this, thinking that Snooki had not enjoyed the stories or the discussion. What Eva did not know (and was revealed by the observation videos) was that Snooki was actually very much engaged in the discussion, but only when Eva had her back turned to the class. Snooki, as a very shy individual, did not feel comfortable talking in front of the whole class, but when Eva was busy elsewhere, Snooki frequently made comments to the people sitting next to her, expressing her opinions about what the class had just been discussing. Having seen the observation video, I was able to ask Snooki about this phenomenon and hear her explanation for it. Thus, the triangulation of the interview data and the classroom video data helped build a more complete picture of what was happening in the classroom, not only for the example I have just given but also for a number of instances.

Secondly, Eva also provided me with a copy of all the students' work related to the intervention unit: their written homework assignments, their mid-unit video mini-project, their in-class work, and their final project in both English and ASL. Eva provided me with her assessments and grades for these assignments. With this data, I could see for myself the quality of the work the students were doing related to the translations, as well as see what their written English sentences looked like. Also (and thirdly) Eva, as well as the school principal for the additional students, gave me summaries of the results from school's most recent annual reading and writing assessment of each student. All of these pieces of data helped provide a more comprehensive understanding of the students' print

literacy levels, which I found helpful because the students were not always accurate in their own description of their reading and writing abilities. Chris, for example, insisted that he can read and write at the tenth grade level (which was where he was, age-wise), but the assessments revealed that he is actually at the 5th-6th grade level. J-Dawg was similarly inaccurate about his reading ability, boasting that he read better than Roy, when the assessments showed that the reverse was true, and not even by a close difference. Snooki knew her print literacy skills were very weak—she admitted it outright—but she could not give me an estimate of how weak they were, so once again, the assessment data provided useful for helping me to interpret what the participants were saying about themselves in their interview data and/or during classes.

I also, wanting to triangulate my personal assessment of each student's signing skills, developed a brief rubric based on the widely-used and extensive Sign Language Proficiency Inventory (SLPI)[232] and compensated a professional sign language interpreter who had the following qualifications:

(1) is a native ASL signer (being the child of deaf parents);
(2) carries multiple top-level national interpreting certifications and endorsements (NIC, RID, BEI, and so forth);
(3) is an instructor for a reputable interpreter education program;
(4) is an official evaluator for the BEI interpreting certification examination;
(5) has 20+ years of experience interpreting for a wide range of deaf people and a wide range of signers.

In short, between her role as an evaluator for an interpreter certification examination, her linguistic knowledge of ASL, and her work in training aspiring interpreters, this individual has extensive experience evaluating and assessing a wide variety of signers, so I felt she would be a good person to neutrally and independently assess the students' ASL proficiency levels in this study (this same individual also verified the accuracy of my transcriptions). The SLPI is an extensive examination that consists of an ongoing conversation between the evaluator and the examinee, which was not possible for this study, as the assessment took place after the interview data had been collected and the participants were no longer available to me. Instead, using my shortened version of the

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[232] Sign Language Proficiency Inventory (SLPI): A nationally-recognized assessment of an individual's conversational fluency in ASL.

SLPI rubric (see Appendices), the evaluator watched excerpts from each student's interview and assessed the students' signing proficiency from a scale of 1 to 5, with half-point increments (e.g. 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, and so forth). She also identified whether a student was signing ASL, PSE, CASE, or another sign system. Her assessment scores were not included in the data analysis, but they helped inform the analysis of students' comments about sign language during their interviews. These additional pieces of contextual data and artifacts, however, were not the primary data source for this study, and while they do contain interesting areas for future study, a full analysis of the classroom videos, language assessments, and student artifacts is beyond the scope of this study.

Data Analysis

One of the primary objectives of qualitative research is to provide, as Miles, Huberman, and Saldana put it, "well-grounded, rich, descriptions and explanations of human processes."[233] In other words, to use a popular phrase, it provides "thick," complex, and rich descriptions of its participants' experiences, and even though the qualitative researcher may sometimes begin with pre-generated codes based on previous studies or theories, qualitative research often does not seek to find support or confirmation for an answer or argument that the researcher wants to confirm. Instead, many qualitative studies rely on an inductive coding approach to data analysis, in which the themes and patterns that emerge from the data are used to create, define, and refine codes for further analysis. This study was no exception. I began with a few theory-generated codes and previously established codes based on the patterns that had emerged in the pilot study; however, during the first round of coding, I noticed a number of new patterns, which were used to create new codes for the second round of coding.

Because people tend to take their language ideologies for granted—that is, these ideologies pervade their daily experiences but tend to remain unspoken and even unnoticed most of the time, to the point of seeming "obvious" or "commonsense"—I was very much aware that I could not simply ask my participants what their ideologies were in the same way that I could ask them about their experiences with print literacy and with

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[233] Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2013), 4.

the ASL translations. Reading and writing are concrete, tangible experiences that are far more easily described compared to the abstract concept of language ideologies. Nor could I ask the students how their language ideologies affect their attitudes towards print literacy and/or towards their English classes. All of my participants knew nothing about the terminology surrounding language ideologies even though they carry deeply ingrained ideologies that shaped their daily experiences —indeed, there is not even an established sign in ASL for the word *ideology*, which would have made the conversation difficult to begin with the students. Because of this, I designed the extensive list of questions in the interview protocol in such a way that it would create a space for the students to talk about and reflect upon their linguistic experiences, attitudes, identities, and preferences as deaf individuals. The students' experiences with the translations in this study also provided them with a more tangible space to talk specifically about language-related beliefs they have. Overall, this design meant that I collected far more information than I needed.

This study included approximately thirty-eight hours of videotaped data from student interviews, teacher interviews, and classroom observation videos; a twenty-six page research journal I kept throughout the study detailing my research efforts and reflecting upon my interactions with the participants; approximately fifteen pages of student coursework and one four-minute video project per student from Eva's class; and summaries of the school's most recent formal print literacy assessments of each student. This is a lot of data; however, some of it I collected simply to gain context and to inform my analysis of the students' interviews, so I did not analyze them in the same way, as they did not contribute to the exploration of my primary research questions like the student interviews did.

After I limited my data for primary analysis, I coded and analyzed that data using the two-cycle inductive coding process as detailed in *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*,[234] as well as in *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*.[235] I began the data analysis process after I had completed all of the first interviews with the students. Before conducting the second interviews, I watched the prior interview videos and wrote

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[234] See Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis*.
[235] See Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*.

reflective memos noting points I wished to follow-up or clarify with the students to ensure that I was accurately understanding their experiences. These reflective memos also helped me to challenge my own assumptions, revise my interview protocol for the end interviews, and ask more detailed follow-up questions in the subsequent interviews.

When data collection was finished and all of the video-recorded data of interviews and classroom observations transcribed, I began coding the data using qualitative coding software. In the initial round of coding, I used the in vivo method of coding because its focus on highlighting the participants' words and voices paralleled the goals of this study. Even though I began with an already-existing list of codes from my pilot study and from other language ideology research done on students, the in vivo coding brought to the surface a number of clear patterns of words, phrases, and themes in the ways that the students spoke about themselves, their identity, and their linguistic, literacy, and deafhood experiences.

Prior to the second round of coding, I wrote a series of memos capturing my impressions and observations from the first cycle of coding. Through the memoing process, I discovered four codes that were too broad and needed to be split into two separate labels to more accurately capture the nuances in the students' experiences. I also identified five codes that recurred frequently throughout most of the interviews and therefore merited closer analysis later. In the second round of coding, then, I re-coded everything using the revised codes, and paying particular attention to the five key codes I had noticed, continually looking for patterns within each and memoing about my findings. After the second round of coding was completed, I created a list of six key codes that demanded further analysis and wrote extensive memos for each. Through this analysis, I determined that three out of the six key codes shared an overarching thread— connections and contradictions between the students' language ideologies, their literacy experiences, their identities, and their reactions to the translations—and what is more, these three interconnected key codes also incorporated two of the other six key codes that I had identified. With this in hand, I returned to my initial list of codes and searched the interviews for instances where these connections and contradictions were revealed in the students' comments. I then incorporated this data into my analysis of the key codes, and from these codes, I developed the arguments for each chapter.

Research Ethics

Limitations

A study consisting of a total of fourteen students, all from the same school, will, of course, have its limitations. This is especially true of deaf students, for it is not uncommon (particularly in quantitative research) for one group of deaf students to completely confound findings from a previous group.[236] In their attempt to synthesize findings across various areas of deaf research, noted scholars Marschark and Spenser also discuss this trend, remarking that unpredictability might be in fact the *one* predictable factor about deaf students, especially when it comes to language-related research.[237] This study is no exception: it is a small case study done in one state and at one school for the deaf. Very likely, a similar study in a different state or at a different school for the deaf may consist of vastly different types of deaf students and thus yield different findings. Even though I tried to include a variety of deaf students in this study—some profoundly deaf since birth, some hard-of-hearing, some late deafened, some fluent signers, some non-fluent signers, and so forth—the limitations of a short-term study of this size confined it to one location, which therefore limited the pool of participants. The time constraints of this study also prevented me from following the students from Eva's class throughout the remainder of the school year and/or their future English classes in order to gain a more thorough understanding of how their language ideologies might play out in the classroom and how ASL translations might or might not continue to play a role in their classes. Even though the fourteen participating students and Eva provided rich, thought-provoking data, these factors are all limitations on this study and on the generalizability of the findings.

It would, of course, have been illuminating to be able to observe Eva—and even other teachers—use the ASL translations in multiple classes instead of just one. It would also have been ideal to test the translations in the classroom with a much wider range of readers, including stronger readers, instead of only with a group that consisted of students who read at the "average" reading levels for deaf graduates (that is, an average of the 3rd-

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[236] Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-based Practice,* 12-13; 17; See also Paul, *Literacy and Deafness.*
[237] Spencer and Marschark, *Evidence-based Practice,* 78-80, 82, 189.

4th grade level). Another possibility that would have amassed considerably more data would have been to add a quantitative aspect to the study by giving the students comprehension assessments before and after reading English texts and then the ASL translations, to determine what kinds of tangible effects—if any—the ASL translations have for different levels of readers' comprehension of the stories. As the study is, I have copious data about the students' and teacher's perspectives and their descriptions of their comprehension of the stories, but very little quantitative data about how much difference—if any—the ASL translations make for the students' performances on tests and assessments. Given the analytic focus of this study on the participants' *experiences* and *ideologies*, this limitation is a reasonable absence from the data. Future studies are needed to explore these areas further.

Research Subjectivities and Treatment of Participants

As a Deaf person who is bilingual in ASL and print English, I conceived and approached this research project as an invested member of the population I intended to study. My background heavily influenced the study design, and I went to my research site not only as a scholar and researcher but also as a former alumna who had personally experienced many of the same challenges that these deaf students face in navigating a world in which hearing people vastly outnumber them. My participants and I, as most deaf people do, instantly felt a powerful sense of solidarity with one another because we have very similar ways of experiencing the world and because, as notable Deaf performer Ella Mae Lentz puts it so poetically, we all have deaf souls, which sets us apart as one people.[238] My local ties to School for the Deaf and my being a deaf person turned out to be extremely valuable for this study.

A number of students, upon being introduced to me, seemed skeptical about the study and asked why I was doing it. The minute I explained that I was deaf, however, their skepticism visibly melted away and they started chattering away with me as if I were one of their own. Knowing that I was deaf probably reassured them that I was not just another hearing person who wanted to study them as an exotic "other" under a

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[238] Lentz, Ella Mae, *To a Hearing Mother*, ASL Poem. In *The Treasure: ASL Poems*, directed by Ella Mae Lentz, 2006. (San Diego, CA: DawnSign Press, 2006), DVD.

microscope; what is more, they knew I, being deaf, could truly understand where they were coming from when they described their experiences, and that I could, better than a hearing person, faithfully represent their experiences to others. Honored by their immediate trust and confidence, I did my utmost to be cognizant of my treatment and portrayal of their stories. The students' quotes in this dissertation have been translated into idiomatic English that matches their linguistic register in ASL—in other words, I have tried to represent their words in English the way they might have spoken it had they chosen to speak English themselves. The accuracy and validity of my translation of their words has been checked and verified either by the professional ASL evaluator and/or the student themselves (if they could read English well enough to do so), and I have done my utmost to capture the idiosyncrasies of their personalities and speaking styles.

As a researcher, I was acutely aware that I would be asking the students to talk about deeply personal experiences that would require them to reflect on their identities. Many deaf students have had negative experiences with using English (spoken or written), so I knew that my questions might recall negative emotions and/or unsettling memories for them. To ensure ethical treatment for all of my participants, I took a number of steps. First, I applied for and received IRB approval for my study (IRB expedited review approved on 1/31/2014), which confirmed that my study design and interview protocols met the standards of ethical treatment as defined by my sponsoring institution.

The IRB determined my study to pose minimal to no risk to the participants than normal everyday interactions in an educational setting, and decreed that I could process with minimal oversight from the IRB. As an additional ethical safeguard, however, I reminded my participants at the beginning of every interview that they did not need to answer any questions they did not want to, even though they had already given their consent to participate. I conducted the interviews in on-campus locations that were familiar and comfortable to the students (e.g. annex of the library, a dormitory kitchen), places that all offered the option of partially closing the door if a student wanted additional privacy. After interviewing the students, I would "check in" with them at a later point to clarify the meanings of any comments I was not sure of from their interview videos.

I also felt it important for the students and Eva to feel like they benefited somehow from participating in this study. Numerous qualitative researchers have pointed out that many participants, due to the nature of qualitative research and its emphasis on descriptions of experiences, often find the interview process illuminating and beneficial because it prompts them to reflect on their experiences in ways that they might not have done on their own.[239] What is more, people often enjoy the opportunity to talk about themselves, and a qualitative research study makes it possible for them to do so in a meaningful way.[240] Several of my students remarked to me afterwards that they had really enjoyed the interviews, and Bella even said, "No one has ever asked me those things before." As a deaf person with a very different history than most of her deaf friends, Bella felt grateful and honored that her experiences had been worthy of a researcher's time and attention in this study. Because I was asking the students very specific questions about their linguistic experiences, this study probably inadvertently contributed to prompting some of students to reflect more critically about their attitudes, languages, and deaf identities.

Additionally, I recognized that some of the participants might perceive me as not only a fellow deaf person but also as a resource for advice or moral support as they contemplated life after graduation. This did turn out to be true, as many of the participants would stop me in the hallways between classes or during lunch with questions about my deafhood experiences, my college experiences, my time at School for the Deaf, my personal life to a limited extent (for example, the question of whether one would prefer to marry a hearing person or a deaf person, something that is frequently discussed among deaf people in general and so therefore did not feel like an invasive question), my life in Michigan, and so forth. Snooki, in particular, wanted to know how I negotiated practical things in everyday life as an independent adult, such as writing notes back and forth with a hearing person when an interpreter is not available. Megan and Hendrix both asked about my college days, for they were planning to go to college themselves. Jayson liked to simply chat with me about the latest thing he had heard about

[239] Weiss, Robert S. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies (*New York: Free Press, 1994), 121-26.
[240] Ibid., 122.

in the news, whereas Bella and Roy would tell me about the books they were currently reading.

Even some students who were not participating in the study came to know me and would initiate conversations with me as we passed one another in the hallways, inquiring about the study, about my School for the Deaf experiences, or simply to tell me about themselves. A few students asked if I was planning to attend the school prom, which was the big social event *du jour* while I was there, and several girls showed me pictures of their prom dresses on their phones. All in all, the way these students frequently sought me out for conversation even after their participation in the study had ended indicates to me that they found the research experience to be meaningful and enjoyed their rapport with me as a researcher and a deaf person.

Validity

This study primarily focuses on students' voices and experiences, but I have also gathered a variety of artifacts and taken measures to enhance the validity of my findings. Of course, the most indispensable sources of data are the students themselves, for they bring a rich array of linguistic experiences to the table, and they are the ones best situated to express their perspectives on these experiences. Virtually no other research study has set out to explore deaf students' language ideologies in detail, and what is more, the design of this study also allowed me to get the students' reactions immediately after experiencing the translations for the first time either in their class or *in situ* during their interviews, so their impressions were very fresh in their minds as they spoke about it. The immediacy of their reactions made it possible for me to see the students think out loud about the experience and grapple with the parts of it that did not make sense to them (such as when their reaction or preference contradicted one of their language ideologies, for example, as in the case of Megan), as opposed to asking them at a later time when they have had time for the experience to fade from memory and/or rationalize away the experience to make it align with their ideologies. My status as a deaf person also enhanced validity, for it made the students much more comfortable with me and with the interview process. Also, it affirmed for them my genuine interest in—and ability to relate with—their positive *and* negative experiences.

The short-term nature of this study somewhat limited me when it came to member checking while I was transcribing and analyzing data, for after the study ended, followed soon afterwards by the end of the school year, some students graduated, some students moved away, and the rest scattered to their homes throughout the state for the summer. I have maintained contact with the school administrators, however, and also with the participating teacher, Eva, with whom I have done member checking at several intervals during the transcribing and coding phases of the study. However, during the data collection phase, while I was on-campus at School for the Deaf, I made sure I re-watched the interview videos so I could ask follow-up questions of the students while I still had access to them. This turned out to be very fruitful, for the students were able to clarify some of their points, which also led to me adapting the interview questions to accommodate the emerging themes that my original protocol could not have anticipated. This allowed me to collect more data from the students about more specific aspects of their experiences.

Also, to help boost validity, the students who could read English well enough all received a copy of their transcriptions and verified that it was accurate to what they were saying; as for the students who could not read well enough, I would repeat to them what they had told me during their interviews, and ask if I was understanding them correctly. I wanted to collect thick, rich data about students' authentic experiences; however, I am aware that my presence at the interview and my participation in our conversations about their experiences inherently influences how these students talk about their experiences with me. In the interviews, therefore, I asked questions from several different angles and frequently rephrased questions in different ways to get students to explain their experiences, feelings, and thoughts.

Conclusion

My purpose in this short-term qualitative study was to collect and explore deaf students' language ideologies and the ways these ideologies are confirmed, complicated, or contradicted outright in the ways these students react to ASL translations. My conversations with the students from School for the Deaf brought to the surface many complicated issues related to not only language but also identity, literacy, and bilingualism as the students negotiated their experiences living with two languages. By

spotlighting the students' voices about their linguistic experiences, I was able to analyze how their variegated, often unpredictable ideologies powerfully affect the ways they take up various literacy practices in both ASL and English. In the chapters that follow, I present four of the major findings in this study. First, in Chapters Four and Five, I dig into the students' language ideologies as they relate to literacy, specifically discussing how their conceptions and misconceptions about both English and ASL influence their attitudes and experiences with literacy. Then in Chapters Six and Seven, I showcase the students' responses to the translations and explore not only how their language ideologies affect their reactions but also how their reactions align (or not) with their language ideologies.

Chapter 4
Language Ideologies, Identity, and Ownership in Deaf Students

Introduction

What do deaf students believe about language? And, importantly, how do these beliefs affect the ways these students take up or resist reading and writing? Linguists and educators have done a fairly thorough job of laying out the types of grammatical and syntactical errors deaf students tend to make when using standard English and the many challenges that these students face with reading comprehension.[241] We also know a lot about the wide range of beliefs, attitudes, and values that various adult stakeholders in deaf education (parents, teachers, administrators, lay people) hold about language and education, thanks to a long, embroiled history of fierce ideological debates over which language and communication method should be used with deaf children. However, when it comes to the language ideologies of deaf *students,* it seems to be generally accepted that "they don't like English because it's hard for them," or conversely, "English is hard for them because they don't like it."

Indeed, if one asks any given deaf student their thoughts on reading and writing in English, chances are they will respond with something like "It is strict; I don't like it," as King does, or even with an outright hate in the form of Snooki's outburst, "Ugh, I despise English!" Hearing comments like these from many deaf students makes it easy for us to assume that they find English hard (and therefore dislike it) and ASL easy (and therefore love it). However, in this chapter and the next, instead of taking the students' negative comments about English at face value, I will go beyond the "English hard/bad, ASL easy/good" oversimplification of what we assume that the deaf students' ideologies are and unpack a number of reasons why their struggles with English literacy simply are not that simple.

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[241] For more, see the following: Spencer and Marschark *Evidence-Based Practice*; Easterbrooks, *Review of Literature on Literacy Development;* and Paul, *Literacy and Deafness*.

Although it is true that many students in this study dislike reading and writing, not all of them felt this way, and for those who do dislike English, the reasons underlying their feelings are vastly more complex than mere antipathy. Likewise, their reasons for often preferring ASL cannot be boiled down to trite statements like "it's easier for them" or "they think it's a better language" as we might assume. In fact—and surprisingly so, considering how highly valued ASL is in Deaf culture—many of the students in this study actually carry diminished and even *negative* views of ASL as a language. Yet, in spite of this, a good number of them still value it more highly than English. Contradictory? Yes. Very much so. Indeed, when we dig into the students' complicated and often self-contradicting ideologies about language, we find a convoluted mass of misconceptions, confusion, competing values, and tensions about and between ASL and English.

In this chapter, I will untangle and surface some of the students' primary ideologies about their two languages. In doing so, I will draw from Rosina Lippi-Green's language subordination model as a useful framework for examining the students' ideologies (see Figure 4-1). In this model, Lippi-Green lays out the often unspoken beliefs and values that English speakers have about the language and the various ways these ideologies exalt standard English as being a superior dialect compared to others (such as various southern dialects, Appalachian English, or African-American Vernacular English). Importantly, Lippi-Green examines how people subordinate not only non-standard dialects of English but also the speakers of these dialects, as described in Figure 4-1:

Figure 4-1: Model of the Language Subordination Process[242]

Language is mystified
You can never hope to comprehend the difficulties and complexities of your mother tongue without guidance.
Authority is claimed
Talk like me/us. We know what we are doing because we have studied language, because we write well.
Misinformation is generated
That usage you are so attached to is inaccurate. The variant I prefer is superior on historical, aesthetic, or logical grounds
Non-mainstream language is trivialized
Look how cute, how homey, how funny.
Conformers are held up as positive examples
See what you can accomplish if you only try, how far you can get if you see the light.

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[242] Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States.* (London: Routledge Press, 1997), 68.

This study focuses not on dialects in English but rather on deaf students who are bilingual in both ASL and English, but Lippi-Green's model remains a productive frame for unpacking the students' complex and often self-conflicting ideologies surrounding both languages. In this chapter, I show how this model is confirmed and even complicated when we apply it to deaf students' ideologies about ASL and English, for as we will see, many of these students subscribe to several tenets of this model, elevating English above ASL on various grounds (to be explored in this chapter and the next). I argue that the students' views (skewed or otherwise) of the two languages lead to them subordinating ASL in comparison to English, but also at the same time, their personal feelings and sense of identity leads them to resist this subordination.

Even though they do uphold English as being very important for various reasons, these students view it as a threatening "other" that imposes on their preferred language, culture, and identity, so many of them distance themselves from English and resist learning it. They express a strong sense of personal ownership of ASL and point to it as an essential part of who they are. Interestingly, even though these students claim ASL as an essential part of who they are, they also blatantly subordinate it in comparison to English, viewing it as being a lesser language, as lacking in detail, and even as a dumbed-down or broken version of English. Rather than this leading them to look down on ASL, as we might expect according to Lippi-Green's model, it actually makes many students feel less respect towards the authority of English, a language that most of them find excessively difficult and from which many of them feel excluded. This, in turn, leads to them appreciating ASL even more for its apparent simplicity and clarity (or so they believe), which further alienates them from English.

This is especially true of the students who struggle the most with print literacy (the "struggling readers" in this study) for they are the ones who tend to see English as something that belongs to hearing people (as belonging to the "other"). They typically are the most hostile towards learning the language, even though they all know very well

the importance of strong print literacy skills. Complicating this finding is the second group in this study, the "strong readers,"—that is, students who have achieved at least intermediate fluency in *both* ASL and print English, and are more bilingual than the struggling readers. They, like the struggling readers, also tend to subscribe to the view of ASL as being linguistically simpler and easier than English, and many of them identify strongly with ASL, but yet this group does not resist reading and writing as much as the struggling readers do, *in spite of having similar ideologies about both languages.* Also, they are much less likely to perceive English as belonging to the "other" (i.e. to hearing people). Tension still remains, however, for the bilingual students who prefer to use ASL, because even though they highly value ASL, they are still confronted with the disquieting (and perhaps unrecognized in themselves) belief that the language they identify with the most, the language they call "mine, my own," is also a language that they believe is of a lesser stature than English.

In the sections that follow, I unpack the ways that the deaf students in this study subscribe to these various ideologies within the language subordination model, and, importantly, I explore how such ideologies are affecting not only the ways these students view both languages but also their attitudes towards reading and writing in English. I begin by showing the students' beliefs in the promises and threats associated with learning English successfully, and from there, I explore how the students' personal identities and their feelings towards both languages can—and often do—lead to them resisting learning English even at the same time that they insist that it is the most important language for their futures.

Explicit Promises and Threats about the Importance of English in "the Real World"

Even though many of the students feel ambivalently or negatively towards English (as I will discuss later in this chapter), they almost universally point to English as being an important language—if not *the* language—that they need in order to be successful in "the real world": that is, for college, for the workplace, and for living independently as adults. These students have thoroughly bought into the promises that the language subordination model makes about learning standard English, believing that if they learn the "superior" language well, they will be more successful in the real world. They know and believe, without doubt, that print literacy in English is important;

however, at the same time, a strong undercurrent of reluctance and resistance often underlies their comments, suggesting that several students may feel conflicted between their belief in the importance of English and their personal preferences for ASL. Before delving into the students' resistance towards taking up print literacy, I will first examine what they *do* believe about "what English is good for."

The Necessity of Print English for Navigating Adult Life: Signing Contracts, Buying Cars, and Raising Children

Although a few students do mention spoken English as being important (for example, Megan, Reg, Bella), most of them focus exclusively on *reading and writing* as being vital for success. Having been told for years by their parents and teachers that they need to improve their reading skills because otherwise they will not make it in the real world, the students are well-versed in all of the reasons they should be more motivated to improve their English. As they rattle off their litany of reasons, we can see echoes of the threats and warnings that they have heard about what might happen if they do not achieve enough fluency. Here, Auggins discusses the "threats" of failing to learn English well enough:

> Like, for example, if I sign my name on something, like if I sign to buy a new house, and I don't read the sentences, or I don't understand them, I don't know what it is, then I might accidentally sign up for something that I shouldn't have. Then I'll be stuck there for at least a year, maybe. I couldn't move away, you know? That's why reading is important.

Jayson, J-Dawg, and Snooki also talk about practical everyday tasks like paying bills, signing contracts, reading menus at the restaurant, and writing notes with hearing people to communicate. "Like, how will you sign to buy a car?" Snooki asks, and as she speaks to me, she takes on the tone of a teacher lecturing:

> Um, and going to college. And buying a house, signing the lease, or for an apartment. Uh, and buying food…the list just goes on and on. It's a ton of things you will need English for. I mean, how will you go out into the real world and encounter all of those things without English? You'd be totally lost.

Snooki is very much aware that she will need English for many adult responsibilities that she will have to assume after she graduates, and she believes that if her reading and writing skills are not good enough, she will be "totally lost." This belief may be

compounded by the fact that she, as a senior nearing graduation, has several friends "on the other side" who have struggled with navigating their adult lives. Her friends who used to blow off reading and writing are now telling her to take it more seriously while she is still in school because, as Snooki puts it, "it turns out that it's hard in the real world!" Her friends serve as living proof of the warnings that Snooki has heard for many years about the dangers of not learning print literacy well enough, which in turn reinforces her belief in the importance of learning English so that doors will be opened to her, as promised by the standard language ideology.

Chris, however, focuses more on the more prosaic aspects of having a family. If a deaf person doesn't know how to read and write, then "if their kids need help with homework, then they won't understand enough English to help." He is concerned about his deaf friends whose English skills are weak because he knows their (most likely hearing[243]) children's reading and writing ability will quickly surpass their own, which will make it challenging for them to be active, involved parents when it comes to schoolwork. "Deaf people can't just be depending on the ASL," Chris says, but at the same time, he acknowledges that they need ASL because it's the language they understand better, and the one that they (including him) will rely on for communicating with their children. Even though these students can use ASL to communicate with their children or to talk with others about practical adulthood concerns such as paying bills and buying cars, they all believe that English is of paramount importance for being able to successfully complete these "adult" tasks when they are living independently.

The Necessity of Print English for College and the Workplace

In addition to helping their children with homework, Chris sees that English will be useful for the workplace. "Jobs do not always have ASL," he says.[244] Indeed, he is correct in saying so, and several other students mentioned careers as places where print

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[243] Not all causes of deafness are hereditary, so it is very common for deaf people to have hearing children. Chris, who became hard-of-hearing due to a childhood illness, does not carry genes for deafness, so his concern is very personal and real: he will most likely have hearing children who may very well advance above his level of fluency in English as they grow older.

[244] Because most deaf people go on to get jobs in a wide variety of workplaces, they often end up working in environments where most people are hearing and do not sign. The deaf must rely on written English in order to communicate with co-workers. As Chris' point hints at, only a few workplaces (such as schools for the deaf, for example) have ASL as a communication option.

literacy would be vital. J-Dawg, Dani, and DJ point out that people get better jobs if they can read and write well, and Jayson emphasizes the importance of being able to write English with "proper grammar":

> Because if they get an interview, you know, for a job. So they need all the words [in the correct order]. Everything needs to be in there so their boss will more easily know what they're saying. With more words, they could be hired easily—depending on what their work is like, you know—but if the words are not in there, then they might or might not get hired at all, depending on who the boss is.

With "more words," by which Jayson means all of the English words in the proper order, the employer will be more likely to hire the deaf person. Reg echoes Jayson with "If [the English grammar] is sloppy, then they will think the worker is also sloppy." The message is clear: poor English skills reflect poorly on the deaf worker. Several other students— King, Megan, Roy, and Snooki—express concerns not only about the hiring process but also the deaf person's ability to retain a job if their reading and writing English skills are not good. If someone can't read or write well, then "they might get an F," King says, and then quickly corrects himself, "I mean, you get fired and are sent home." Clearly, these students all know that reading and writing are vital skills for the workplace, and they all buy into the belief that without good English skills, it will be very difficult for them to maintain gainful employment after graduating.

Most of the students also bring up the importance of English for college; in fact, even the non-college-bound students talked at length about why one needs good English skills for college, a place that they all imagine to be filled with even more reading and writing than high school is—"like, double what you do in high school," according to Megan. Poor literacy skills will not bode well for you; DJ describes the consequences as he imagines them: if you can't read and write well enough, "colleges will probably kick you out." King, who reads at the first grade level, says with a degree of reverence, "Colleges, like Gallaudet, require you to be able to read *books*." By "books," King means the thick kind, without pictures, the kind that he can't read because his print literacy skills hover at the first-to-second grade level. Roy also points out that there are many

"whopping-big words"[245] at the college level, so it would take a lot of work for him to prepare himself so that he will be successful in college. In the eyes of these students, college is just as demanding and unforgiving as the real world when it comes to weak print literacy skills. Therefore, they see learning print English as a vital ingredient for succeeding in college, in the workplace, and as independent adults.

ASL: It's Not Beneficial for the Real World, but It's Good for Communicating

Interestingly, virtually none of the students said anything about ASL being important for them in the real world—not for jobs nor for college nor for communicating with hearing people, which aligns with the predictions from Lippi-Green's model. Only Roy, who hopes to be a professional ASL performer (either that, or a veterinarian), mentions ASL as being possibly important for his career. The rest of the students talk exclusively about the essentiality of print English for them when they graduate and go off into the real world. Here, we see Snooki talking about print English (yet again) and its importance. Note that she does not ever mention ASL:

> Because you have to learn to read for when you go out into the real world, you know, um, you've got to be able to do a budget and read paperwork to make sure it's clear, and, um, without it, you would go downhill, go nowhere. You need to develop your English skills so you know what to do. Things will go more smoothly for you. You won't need to struggle or to live in paranoia because you don't understand. You will know stuff, know what to do, and life will go more smoothly for you.

Snooki chooses some interesting phrases to describe the (so she believes) promises of learning print English, and in her words, we see echoes of the kinds of promises captured in the language subordination model. If her English is good enough, then she will always know what to do and things will go smoothly for her. She won't need to worry or struggle; instead, she will "know stuff." If her English is not up to snuff, however, she believes she will "go downhill, go nowhere." Not once does she bring up ASL and how it

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[245] *Whopping-big words:* a common idiomatic ASL sign used by deaf people. It cleverly combines the handshape for the sign "fat" with the handshape for the sign "word" to indicate just that: a fat word. It is used to refer to "advanced" words that the signer may or may not understand. The sign can be positive—as in "Whoa! Smart vocabulary!"—or it can be negative—as in "That vocabulary is so advanced that nobody could understand a thing." To my knowledge, there is no English translation convention for this ASL sign, and the phrases "big words" or "impressive vocabulary" do not quite deliver the same impact as the sign, so I have opted for translating this sign as "whopping-big word" when students in this study use it in their interviews.

might help her to navigate the unknown terrain of "the real world." Megan, in fact, sees her ability in English as something that opens her up to working with just about anyone:

> Really, [knowing English] would help for my job, because I prefer to keep my options open with hearing people or, uh, with deaf and hard-of-hearing people. I mean, I don't want to just work exclusively with the deaf, no. I just want to broaden my possibilities to whatever.

Megan doesn't want to be limited to working only with the deaf, and she seems to feel that English will offer her a much wider range of career options than ASL can, so she doesn't really see much benefit for ASL in her future (unless she does end up working with the deaf, that is, but her tone here implies that she doesn't think it likely). Snooki and Megan are not the only ones—far from it—who omit ASL from their discourse about what they imagine their experiences in the real world will be like.

When explicitly asked about the potential uses of ASL in their futures, the students hardly ever mention the phrase "the real world," nor do they talk about jobs or academic success; instead, they focus on how ASL will help them to stay connected with their future families and deaf friends. Chris, who strongly insists that deaf people can't rely on "just ASL" in the real world, actually plans to prioritize teaching his children ASL (even though he currently relies mostly on spoken English for communication). "I'm going to marry a deaf woman," he declares, and he wants their children to be able to communicate well with their mother. J-Dawg loves making new deaf friends, for which he needs ASL, and Jayson agrees, explaining how he is looking forward to using his ASL to connect with the wider Deaf world once he graduates. Several other students also expect to use ASL for the rest of their lives, so they can easily picture ASL being a vital component of their social lives, and a few of them mention wanting to teach it to hearing friends, as well. "ASL is very valuable to deaf people," Xina reiterates time and time again, emphasizing how the language opens up easy communication for deaf people and brings them together. For her, and for many of her deaf peers, ASL feels "like home" and is a vital part of their identity.

But then why do these students hardly ever mention ASL when referring to "the real world"? Why do they appear to see virtually no use for it? Perhaps they have never been told (by parents, teachers, or other language authority figures) that ASL might have real-world benefits for them, nor has anyone listed the different ways ASL could help

them in their professional futures. Or maybe they view "the real world" as an extension of school—which is especially likely when thinking about college—and therefore a place where English is studied, respected, and necessary, whereas ASL is non-academic and used only for socializing. Either way, these students have bought entirely into the ideology that English is far superior than ASL for succeeding in life, to the point where it doesn't even occur to them that ASL might play a role (or is already playing a role) in helping them succeed. While it is true that most of the world is hearing (and in the United States, most hearing people come in the form of English speakers) and while it is true that the language with the most "currency" and cultural capital[246] will be whichever language the hearing majority speak, it is still disheartening to see how these students do not perceive any possibilities that ASL might have for making them better communicators, workers, students, professionals, and /or persons in "the real world." Instead, they subordinate ASL into something that belongs only to the social aspect of their lives and trivialize the language into something that is "only talking" (a comment I will explore in more depth in a later section).

Subscribing to and Resisting the Elevation of English and the Subordination of ASL

At the same time that they subordinate ASL and uphold print English as what is perhaps the most important tool for navigating their professional futures, many of these students (mostly the ones who struggle the most with print literacy) also complicate the language subordination model in their active resistance towards taking up English. As we have seen, they all know very well the potential consequences of not learning to read and write well. They know all of the things that require print literacy skills (paying bills, signing leases, writing on the job, going to college, and so forth). They can tick off a long list of disasters that might befall them if they don't understand what they're reading. In spite of all this, they still drag their feet about practicing and learning English. DJ, Chris, and Jayson are usually several assignments behind with their English homework, while Auggins and King both express the sentiment of "forget the English; it's too hard."

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[246] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241-58.

Snooki never picks up a book to practice her reading unless she absolutely has to, finding it all "boring," but with her graduation mere weeks away, she is starting to feel frightened. "When my friends graduated, [the real world] just hit them in the face," she recounts, and she is scared the same will happen to her, or worse, because her print literacy skills are even weaker than some of her friends'. Roy and Xina, who are also nearing graduation, feel the pressure as well, and it has motivated them to try harder to "smart up" their reading, as Xina put it. Roy admits that in spite of putting extra effort into his English coursework, he still often finds the language to be frustratingly complex, so he continues to shirk writing assignments as much as he can. Snooki, however, feels trapped. "I'm so embarrassed of myself!" she says of her weak literacy skills. When I asked her if there were any books she enjoys reading and that she might consider practicing with to shore up her literacy skills, she exhales in disgust:

> Snooki: No. I just don't like to read!
> Q: Okay. Why not?
> Snooki: It bores me! I prefer to use ASL, not to read. It's read, read, read
> all the time. But I need it for my future, so, ugh. [shrugs]
> Q: Yeah, you're kind of stuck, aren't you?
> Snooki: Mm-hmm.

Snooki's feelings of hatred and embarrassment towards print literacy reflect not only her struggles with learning English but also with the basal readers and kiddie picture books that her low reading levels have limited her to thus far, even as a high school student (an important point that I will explore in Chapter 7). For now, I will point out that Snooki embodies the conflict many of these students feel: they prefer using ASL in their everyday lives, but yet the real world demands reading and writing in English. None of the students question the promises that print literacy offers, but out of the fourteen students in this study, only four or five of them eagerly embrace learning and improving their English.

As I will explore in the next section, it is not only the students' ideologies about print English that come into play in their push-and-pull relationship with reading and writing; rather, the students' reactions to print literacy are shaped in complex ways by their ideologies about spoken English, print English, ASL, and other communication modes. Even though most of the students do share a number of beliefs, values, and/or attitudes in common with at least a few of the other students in this study, their ideologies

could not be predicted or grouped by identifying markers such as the student's hearing levels, their linguistic experiences, or their current communication preferences. Essentially, none of the students were predictable, and their ideologies did not always "behave" in predictable ways.

A number of tension points do stand out, however: areas where the students' ideologies feed one another, contradict one another, or are driven by misconceptions about one or both languages. During their interviews, students were mostly unaware of these tension points, even as their comments blatantly contradict what they had just said moments earlier. Chris, for example, praises ASL for being much clearer than English, but at the same time, he insists that ASL sentences are less complete than English sentences because they have "stuff cut out." Like most of the students, Chris does not notice that his beliefs contradict one another, which reinforces linguists Judith Irvine and Susan Gal's argument that people tend to take their ideologies for granted so much that they do not question them, think about them, or even know that they have them.[247] Instead, ideologies are accepted as "commonsense" and asserted with neither scrutiny nor afterthought. The students in this study are no exception. In the section that follows, I discuss a number of tension points that that center on the questions of *exclusivity*, *inclusivity, identity*, and *ownership* in language, and I explore the ways these tension points embody—and also complicate—parts of Lippi-Green's language subordination model.

The Mystification, Authority, and Exclusivity of English as Opposed to the "Homey," Entertaining, and Inclusive Nature of ASL

Many of the students in this study who struggle with reading and writing tend to criticize English for being hard, confusing, and unclear to them; indeed, the frustrations they experience make it difficult for them to persist in the task of improving their print literacy. Many of them grumble about it, using the sign SUFFER to describe the process, a sign that could be translated in a number of ways, ranging from "putting up with" or "tolerating" something mildly annoying to "getting through," "enduring," or "putting in

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[247] Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation," in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2000), 35-84.

my time" with an disagreeable task to, quite literally, "suffering through" an ordeal, depending on the person's tone when signing it. Most students who chose to use the 'SUFFER' sign inflect it with extreme emotion, making it clear that reading and writing is something they find extraordinarily difficult. Learning English *is* a challenge for them, no doubt about it, but a number of the students' comments reveal that in their minds, not only is English mystified as a very hard language that is beyond their mien, but also a language that is exclusive to hearing people.

With English—spoken and print alike—these students feel like they are frequently left out and confused, which starkly contrasts the ways they talk about ASL and the inclusivity they experience with ASL to the point of feeling like it is their "home." All of this only serves to further exacerbate the students' negativity towards English and towards engaging with print literacy even though they do believe the promises associated with learning English well (as predicted by the language subordination model). Various students have differing understandings of the relationship between "English," "spoken English" (which they tend to refer to as "speech"), and "reading and writing" English, so to facilitate the discussion, I will focus first on what the students said about speech and then from there, segue into their comments about written English, all the while exploring how these views contribute to the students' feelings of resistance towards the English language.

Left Out of Speech: The Mystification of English

Even though not all of the students in this study use spoken English, and not all of them are (or ever were) enrolled in speech therapy classes, every single student has had at least *some* experience with spoken English simply because it surrounds them all of the time in the form of hearing people. They have all struggled through a variety of frustrating and embarrassing situations in which they could not understand hearing people speaking to them, leaving many of them with understandably negative feelings towards speech, which is not all that surprising to anyone familiar with the experiences of deaf people[248]. What is startling in this study, however, is that out of the fourteen total

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[248] Learning to speak a language without being able to hear it is extraordinarily difficult. In lip-reading, highly trained lip-readers only see 30% of what is said and must fill in the rest by guesswork, which makes it difficult for students to rely on lip-reading for easy comprehension and/or as a guide for learning speech. Also, with limited or no auditory

participants, three students, because they have always missed so much information in speech, have somehow constructed a picture of English in which the spoken and print versions are two separate languages entirely. This glaring misconception, as we will see, works to reinforce these students' hostility towards anything English-related. J-Dawg firmly believes that when hearing people speak, they are actually speaking an abbreviated form of English in which shorter words are deleted and "fast" pronunciations help to streamline the remaining words into even shorter words compared to what he sees in print English. This belief makes J-Dawg frustrated with his language development class (which includes speech therapy), as he recounts in this lengthy exchange:

> J-Dawg: [My speech class] tends to be about short letters, short chunks, not speaking smoothly, speaking the full thing, speaking fluently like hearing people do. We just say one little thing, then one more little thing, over and over again. We never speak the full thing all at once. Like, like, when they say "football," they speak the whole thing fast. But she makes me say f—o—t—b—a—l—l (sic), y'know. It's really long, really slow. It's supposed to be shorter with my voice. I told her, my speech teacher, that I wanted it to be short, fast. But she refused to let me do that. "No," she said, "You must speak it out the long way." So I was like, "Fine." I put up with doing it her way. It has been like that for 8 years now.
> Q: Okay. So you visualize the word "football" as being "short," or "fast," when it is spoken. What does that look like?
> J-Dawg: (shrugs) I see, most of the time, I see the [hearing] coaches say it, it's really fast. Like ftbl, ftbal. They say it in an instant, "football," really fast. It's all rapid-fire. But I have to do it f—o—o—t—b—a—l—l, the long way [mimics pronouncing every sound]. It's really drawn out, stretched out. I want it to be short, short like—um, with "I will go skiing," in speech, it is, "I … will… go… to…ski." I hate that. I want to say it short. I prefer to just say it concisely and be done with it.

Believing that spoken English words and sentences are supposed to be "shorter," "faster," and "more concise" than they are in written English, J-Dawg gets impatient with his speech and language specialist who insists that he pronounce every word and every syllable as he sees them printed on the page. "It's supposed to be shorter when you speak

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input, it is challenging for students to understand what individual letters (or phonemes, to use the linguistic term) are supposed to sound like, let alone how to produce these sounds on their own. A helpful analogy for understanding this challenge would be to imagine oneself being put in a glass soundproof booth and required to learn how to speak an entirely new language—such as Japanese—only by watching people speak it on the other side of the soundproof windows. It would be a frustrating endeavor, and it is similar to what is asked of deaf students in learning speech.

it," he insists, saying that spoken English is different from print English because it's more concise and more like ASL in grammar, which he explains also skips a lot of the words.

In contrast, his English teacher seems to limit him to only the "short" words in reading, which he resents because he sees that hearing people read longer words and sentences.

> [My English teacher] tends to do the same things over and over again. She would focus on little chunks and words, not expanding them into sentences. Making it all shorter […] I asked her, and she said the words had to be this way. Small words like "cat," "dog," "my," really easy words. Why bother?

He believes that his English teacher is limiting him to reading the way that he signs (more concisely and simpler, which is how he views ASL), but then at the same time, his speech teacher is forcing him to say words the long way. Both things seem to be the opposite from what he sees hearing people doing (speaking quickly and seemingly in an abbreviated form; reading with more and longer words), so he feels resentment about not being allowed to use English the same ways that he thinks hearing people do. In all aspects of learning English (spoken, read, written), he insists that his teachers are intentionally restricting him to slogging through everything the hard way. Because he is not skilled in lipreading (nor in print literacy, as his reading level hovers at the first-to-second grade level), J-Dawg misses most of what he sees in speech and in print words, so he has constructed an explanation for himself that seemingly rationalizes what he *does* see when he sees hearing people using English in various forms, and these are the people who, per the language subordination model, are the most superior models of what English ought to be, or so he believes. As a result, he resents the literacy tasks that his teachers assign him because he believes that they are limiting him to using English in what seems to him wrong ways.

Snooki and King are not as confident in their conceptualization of spoken English, but they are both utterly bewildered by it. Snooki emphasizes several times in her interviews that spoken English always goes over her head. When asked to differentiate between spoken and written English, she hesitates:

> Snooki: [slow laugh] Uh…I think…they're the same. [Shrugs]
> Q: You think it's the same, the spoken stuff and—
> Snooki: I don't understand what I see them say, none of their sentences.

[Laughs]

Q: That's ok. Do you think the sentences they speak are the same as the sentences you see here [indicates print text]?

Snooki: I—I think they're, uh, different.

Q: Different?

Snooki: Uh, I think so. I'm not sure [laughs nervously]. I'm not very experienced with what hearing people say. [Laughs]

Q: Right, right. Okay.

Snooki is profoundly uncertain about the relationship between spoken and written English. We see here a manifestation of what it means for the superior language to be mystified in the language subordination process: for Snooki, English is this mystifying thing that hearing people do, and it is all above and beyond her ability to comprehend. Snooki has no idea what goes on when hearing people talk and is always missing out on it, so in her eyes, speech could easily be a different language than the English she sees on the page. King is equally confused; his bewilderment is obvious in our conversation:

Q: Ok, um, are written English and speech the same thing?

King: [Shakes head 'no'] I never—speech is different.

Q: You see hearing people talk all the time with each other, yes? Is that the same language as reading-writing English? Or what?

King: No, it's like a language from a different country. Like Mexico, you know…

Q: No, I don't mean like Mexico. I mean, just a hearing person, talking with his voice, compared to what they write in English. You see the lips moving when they talk, yeah? What language is that?

King: [Shakes head, shrugs] I have no idea.

Q: Like, you see your teacher Eva talk sometimes with her voice, maybe to another hearing person, what is that?

King: I don't know. I watch, and try to see if maybe they're friends or—

Q: The talking, what is that?

King: Or maybe they could be fighting, I don't know. I don't want to get involved. Later, I might ask what it was about, but if it's a fight, I just back off.

Q: Yeah, you don't want to get involved. Yeah, that's the smart thing to do. Um…do you have hard-of-hearing friends?

King: Yeah.

Q: Do they speak with their voices?

King: Yes.

Q: Do you see them talking without signing sometimes? Just using their voices.

King: Without signing? Well, sometimes they sign and voice at the same time. And sometimes they just voice. I'm totally lost. They talk so fast.

142

> Q: Okay, what language is that on their lips when they talk so fast?
> King: [shrugs] It's fast, too fast. [Imitates rapid speech, shrugs.]
> Q: Okay. That's fine.

Clearly, it took me a while to ascertain what King was saying about spoken English. He associates what he sees on hearing people's lips with foreign languages like Spanish (and it very well could be, for all he knows), but he doesn't ever recognize that it might be English. When he sees hearing people talking to each other, he is not looking for familiar words or trying to understand any of it; rather, he watches for emotional cues on the speakers' faces so that he will know whether he can interrupt to ask what they're talking about or if he should give them a wide berth (very much a basic survival tactic for someone who is completely lost as to what is going on). Spoken language is a mystery to him, and it does not seem to occur to King that it might be the same language he sees on the page.

This misconception about the relationship between spoken English and print English is unsettling, and especially so when we see how the students' misconception affects the way they perceive learning the language, the people who speak it, and themselves. King checks out entirely and simply says, "I don't get it. Forget it." When he talks about English (in all its forms), he associates it with feeling left out and isolated from hearing people. "I want to know what they are saying, I want to be a part of it," King says, "but they just talk with their voices, so I get slighted or left out." And he doesn't fare much better with print English, either:

> King: Yeah. Most of the time [I will write back and forth with hearing
>   people to communicate].   But sometimes, they write a really long
>   word, and I don't know it.   I see a whopping-big word, and I don't
>   understand.
> Q: What do you do if that happens?
> King: I'll point to the word and gesture that I don't understand it. But they
>   can't sign, so, um, usually they just say, "Forget it," so we let it
>   drop.
> Q: Just forget it?
> King: Yeah. They can't explain it to me. They don't sign. So we just
>   forget it. (shrugs)
> Q: Do they try to explain it?
> King: No, not really. Like, if I'm in the store, and I can't understand what
>   they write, they're like, "Oh, forget it, don't worry about it." I'm
>   like, okay, so I just leave or whatever. (shrugs)
> Q: So they write back and forth with you until you don't understand

something, and then they say, "forget it?"

King: Yeah, exactly.

King has grown accustomed to hearing people waving him aside and/or dropping conversations entirely when he doesn't understand them (which happens often); this sends him the message that his understanding of the written content is not a priority, nor is he a priority himself. So he comes to the conclusion that it doesn't matter: "Forget it." And he drops it altogether. Snooki feels the same way as King does about English's exclusivity to hearing people; in fact, she feels at such a disadvantage when trying to read or write English that she has developed a fear of it—and of hearing people, as she explains below:

> Snooki: Yeah, yeah. Well, because people might look at me and think that I've learned nothing, that I'm inferior, like I'm asking to be bullied. I feel, um, stupid, you know?
>
> Q: Do you—
>
> Snooki: I want to be even with hearing people. Hearing people will look down on deaf people, and put down deaf people. I resent that. I want to try and face up to that, but…I'm scared to. I'm, I'm way too shy to try being face-to-face with hearing people by myself.
>
> Q: I can understand that.
>
> Snooki: I'm just uncomfortable with hearing people. I don't know why. And my own family is hearing. I don't get it.
>
> Q: Right, right.
>
> Snooki: It doesn't make any sense, I know.

Snooki is afraid that hearing people might think she is stupid because her English is not good, and that infuriates her because she wants to prove to them that deaf people are just as capable as hearing people. In this way, she pushes back against the implicit hierarchy she senses in the ways that the language subordination model elevates English and English speakers (i.e. hearing people) above her. However, she also feels like her English skills are so weak that she is too afraid to even try using the language with hearing people who she doesn't know. She mentions potential bullying from hearing kids, as does King. Even though they both insist that deaf people are "equals" with hearing people, so entrenched is English and hearing speakers at the top of the language hierarchy in their minds that it does not occur to them that ASL might be an equally valid way to prove their capabilities. Instead, they sense they must prove themselves using English, and for

both of them, the language is always associated with being lost, feeling confused, and getting excluded.

J-Dawg, however, is firmly convinced that his views of English are correct; instead of feeling at a disadvantage and resorting to avoidance or giving up like the other two students do, he simply blames his (typically hearing) teachers for his weaker skills in English, saying that they limit deaf students like him by forcing them to use English in ways that hearing people do not. These students' confusion and misconceptions about English should give us serious pause. I myself never considered the possibility that some of the students might not fully understand the relationship between spoken and print English, nor did I expect them to tell me that spoken English is an entirely different language from written English. It is important to point out that these three students seem to be the exception—or, rather, three exceptions—because all of the remaining students in the study spoke explicitly about how speech and print English are related, and they understood that hearing people tend to have an easier time with print literacy because it's the same language that they hear being spoken all the time. However, the fact that not one, but three students (out of the fourteen in this study) demonstrate this degree of confusion about English suggests that there are more students out there who are just as confused as these students are, and whose skewed conceptualization of the language also leads to attitudes that may increase their resistance to print English.

Left Out of It: English as Exclusive to Hearing People

The remaining eleven students in this study have a wide range of print literacy fluency, but regardless of their reading levels or of whether they use speech or not, they have a firmer understanding of the connection between spoken and written English. As such, they point to hearing people's access to speech as a major factor in why hearing people have an easier time learning print literacy. However, it is important to note that these students, even the ones who are more fluent in print literacy *and* the ones who are fluent in speech, *still* feel left out of the English language to some degree—primarily with spoken English. When relying on speech, students have to deal with missing large chunks of auditory information due to their imperfect hearing levels (e.g. missing the ends of words, unvoiced sounds, whole words, syllables, or even all of the sounds) and having to

guess and infer most of the words they see in lipreading,[249] whereas with print English, all of the words are clearly visible on the page for them to see. Thus, it is not unusual for deaf students who read fairly well and enjoy reading (for example, Roy) to still have a hard time with learning speech, so these types of students might feel more negatively towards speech than they do with reading. Essentially, spoken English tends to be much less accessible for these students, so many of them, no matter how positively or negatively they may feel towards speech or print English, express a deep appreciation for ASL and the security and clarity that it provides for them in their daily communication. It is interesting to note that for some students, being able to express themselves more easily in ASL feeds into their negative feelings towards English, whereas for others, it simply provides them a secure linguistic space to become stronger, better bilinguals. Regardless of the students' feelings towards speech, however, all of them report feeling left out—to various degrees—of English, which causes some of them to distance themselves from the language altogether.

I Can Use Speech, but ASL Feels Safer

First, let us turn our attention to the students who *do* rely on speech as an important part of their linguistic repertoire. Usually, the students who have strong speech skills have (or had, at some point earlier in their lives) milder levels of hearing loss, so they can (or at one time were able to) hear at least *some* speech sounds. There are always exceptions, of course, but as far as the students in this study go, the hard-of-hearing students were the ones who showed the strongest command of spoken English, and they generally view their speech ability as an asset, as a part of their bilingualism. "I like speech because most people in this world speak [with their voices]," Bella explains, "So…me being able to voice helps me because I've met people because I can speak like they do." Hendrix and Dani agree, both of them pointing out that they can talk with pretty much anyone, deaf or hearing, simply by switching from speech to sign or vice versa, and they like—and even pride—having that flexibility. There are, after all, vastly more hearing people in the world than deaf people, and they are very much aware of that.

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[249] In idealized conditions, the most highly trained and experienced lipreaders can "read" only 30% of what is said, and must guess, infer, and puzzle out the remaining 70% of information. Thus, deaf students (whose lipreading skills vary widely from student to student) who try to understand spoken English via lipreading have to deal with missing extraordinary amounts of information and figuring it out as best as they can.

All of these students, however, were quick to caboose their positive comments about speech with comments about ASL. Basically: "I can speak with my voice. And I sign, too." Hendrix's exchange with me follows this typical pattern:

Q: Do you like using your voice to talk?
Hendrix: Yeah, I love to talk that way.
Q: Are you comfortable with that?
Hendrix: Yeah. And with signing, too.

Likewise, Bella, after explaining how speech allows her to meet many new hearing people, immediately brings signing into the equation again. "So…because I can speak both sign and speech, I can communicate in both ways, like, I love [it]." Dani and Megan also express similar sentiments, emphasizing more the fact that whether they speak or sign depends on who they are around, rather than on which mode they prefer. Upon being asked about the benefits of speech, Megan replies, "If there's someone who can talk [spoken English], then I'll voice and maybe sign, too. But if the other person is deaf and only signs, then I'll sign, no problem." These kinds of comments came up often, which suggests to me that these students do not see speech and sign as binary or competing opposites; nor do they think one communication mode as better than the other (i.e. "speech is best!" or "signing is best!"). Rather, they have recognized that each communication mode is good for certain situations and not others, and they adjust accordingly (like many bilingual and bidialectical people do).

However, the fact that most of these students were quick to bring up ASL when asked specifically about speech makes me suspect that they felt it was important to make sure ASL was also mentioned. Two possible explanations for this comes to mind: (1) They felt that their ability to use speech might make others think of them as less Deaf, so when talking about speech, they wanted to reassert their Deaf identity by reminding everyone that they do sign, too; or (2) Even though they see and enjoy the benefits of being able to both speak and sign, ASL feels either closer to their identity and/or more important to them, so they want to make sure ASL is also in the foreground along with spoken English. Based on the data I have, however, I cannot speculate any further. All I can safely claim is that these students are acutely aware of which communication mode fits different peoples and situations, and they like having the ability to adjust in order to talk with a wide variety of people.

Their appreciation of their spoken English skills, however, comes with a caveat: speech is a double-edged sword. They still do get left out and excluded from the spoken English club like their deafer peers do. "It doesn't work both ways," Reg sagely points out, "Because the deaf, they might be able to talk [with their voices], but they can't hear the people speaking back to them." He is mostly deaf, relies on cochlear implants, and has somewhat clear speech. Nonetheless, he still usually can't understand hearing people when they talk back to him, which frustrates him. The same problem befalls his more hard-of-hearing[250] peers, albeit less often, but it still happens. "It kind of makes me feel bad because I have to make them repeat what they said," Megan sighs. Hendrix has to do the same thing: "I can't hear [the higher voices] so well. I'm always asking, 'What did you say, what did you say?' And then they get mad at me. My mom gets mad at me." Spoken English does not always work out in their favor, which can be difficult and frustrating.

On top of that, these students achieved their mastery of spoken English through years of laborious work. Because it took so much effort to become fluent enough to feel confident in their articulation (very few of them hold fond memories of their speech classes), they value ASL for the security and clarity it provides in easy communication with others. Dani, who currently likes to use speech nearly all of the time when she is around hearing people, still falls back on signing when she feels insecure:

> Because when I was little, I didn't really know how to communicate with my voice because, like, I couldn't hear myself very well, and signing was something I just preferred [at the time] because it helped me a lot with communicating with others, like with my friends and my teachers.

She then explains how in her mainstream English class earlier that year, when it was her turn to do a presentation, she felt so shy that she didn't want to use her voice; instead, she signed the presentation and let her interpreters do the voicing. In spite of her fiercely independent personality and confidence in her speech, Dani still relies on ASL when she finds herself in intimidating situations. It took her until middle school to feel comfortable using her voice with new hearing people, and even now, she admits she has a hard time

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[250] I'm using "more hard-of-hearing" here from the perspective of a deaf person—that is, the adverb "more" means that they're closer to hearing people on the hearing loss continuum and therefore are farther away from me (and from Reg, with whom the comparison is being made here, meaning that they have *more* hearing than he does).

pronouncing new (multi-syllable) words that she has never seen before. Hendrix has better hearing than Dani and pronounces words easily, but he says it took him until sixth grade to achieve clear articulation without "mumbling," and he insists that he needs ASL to be able to understand other people clearly. "I love visual stuff. I can't—I don't really like listening to voices talk," Hendrix admits, "like in long lectures. I hate them. I just need to *see* something." These students, all of them, can easily tick off situations where they had trouble using spoken English—either with their own articulation or trying to understand other people talking to them. Because of this, signing feels safer, and perfect spoken English remains something beyond them, out of their grasp (not unlike the mystification of speech that we see with their deafer peers who do not use speech).

Perhaps this is why Chris, Jayson, and DJ (the remaining hard-of-hearing students in this study) feel less positively about their spoken English abilities. Chris, in particular, is indifferent, shrugging off speech as "not really benefiting" him at all, except for when he wants to talk with his hearing friends. After considerable prodding, he finally admits that maybe it does help him with his English, by which I think he means print literacy (reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and so forth). DJ is equally *blah* about his speech abilities. He admits that it's good that he can talk with other hearing people, but he gets turned off by the mistakes he makes.

> DJ: Sorta, uh, well, sometimes—I don't actually get the word that I want
> to say correctly. Uh, like sometimes, I say, "I will go to the store,"
> but I say part of it wrong, uh, like, it got messed up in my head.
> Q: Can you hear yourself if you're wrong? Can you hear it and know that
> it's wrong?
> DJ: Uh, I can hear it, but um, someone has to tell me it's wrong. (laughs)
> Then I'm like, "Sorry, sorry."
> Q: Can you understand other people when they speak with their voices?
> DJ: (shakes head) Not really.
> Q: No?
> DJ: I don't like it. I don't always understand it.

He later estimates that he comprehends only 50% of what hearing people say to him, so he will often avoid talking with hearing people because he doesn't understand enough to know what they want. Jayson understands more spoken English than DJ does, but he still refers to speech disparagingly: "You just stand there and move your mouth. Bla, bla, bla. And you're done. That's it. It does nothing," he scoffs, imitating hearing people talking

gibberish with their lips. It is striking that he sees *nothing* in what is spoken through the mouth; instead, he goes on to talk about how he much prefers to use ASL instead because he finds it clear, easy, and fun.

These students remind us that just because they know how to speak at least fairly well and use spoken English frequently (especially with their families, who generally do not sign), and just because they subscribe to the ideology that English is superior to ASL, it does not necessarily mean they find English useful or enjoyable or important for themselves, nor do they feel fully included in the spoken aspect of the language. For them, ASL is, at the very least, a safe fallback for them and at the very most, their preferred and most reliable mode of communication. These students speak at length about appreciating their bilingualism, and for Hendrix, Megan, Bella, and Dani, their feelings towards print literacy do not seem to be affected negatively by their partial exclusion from spoken English. DJ, Chris, and Jayson, however, express ambivalent or hostile attitudes towards reading and towards speech, which suggests that they do feel left out and detached from both forms of English even though they have comparable levels of auditory access as their other hard-of-hearing peers do for spoken English. This area needs further exploration in future studies.

I Don't Use Speech: Feeling Alienated from English

As for the students who do *not* use speech, by choice or otherwise, most of them have more severe levels of hearing loss and therefore tend to not be able to hear spoken English at all. In other words, they are mostly or completely excluded from the spoken form of the language, and several of them feel that exclusion keenly. So keenly, in fact, that some of them—particularly the struggling readers—will often lump speech and print literacy together in the same hate rants when they talk about the English language. For them, print English is often not any clearer or more accessible than spoken English, so they feel excluded and alienated from everything English-related. I will first discuss their views of speech and then bring in print English.

Most students who don't use speech express sentiments towards it ranging from dislike to outright hate. J-Dawg describes his experience with speech classes as being "kinda half, in the middle" between being positive and negative. His speech is not at all clear, and he knows it. He expresses a strong wish that he could use speech well enough

to converse with hearing people in everyday situations, but at the same time, he admits that he would drop out of his speech classes in a heartbeat if he could (his parents force him to go). Xina, Roy, King, and Snooki are decidedly more hostile towards it. They readily assert that if other deaf students want to learn and use spoken English, then that's their own choice, and these students won't judge them for it. With that said, however, they clearly and unequivocally insist that speech is not for them. "No speech at all. Not for me. I really just prefer not to," Xina explains, "With speech, it's hard, and it always goes over my head and communication falls apart." Roy agrees, describing in some detail what makes it so difficult for him, as a profoundly deaf person, to learn spoken English. "Well, it was frustrating. It was really hard," he sighs:

> I couldn't pronounce things. She'd always say, "No, that's wrong, that's wrong." And I'd try to follow her, copy her voice, but it never came out right. I couldn't do it. So I just called it quits. I told them, forget this, I want to drop it. And they were like, "No, no, no." But I insisted on dropping it.

 No matter how hard he tried, Roy could not manipulate his vocal cords, his breathing, his lips, and his tongue in the proper ways to produce sounds correctly. After years of suffering through it (his words, not mine), he appealed to his mother, who gave him permission to quit. King, too, stopped his speech classes in seventh grade. "Why bother?" he asks.

> It was hard and I didn't understand it at all, and I didn't need it, so…And I was always tired from it. Yeah, I was tired from it all the time. My jaw got sore, my face hurt from trying so hard to say things. It wasn't working, so I said, "I don't need this anyway," and I dropped it.

These students see themselves as functioning just fine with ASL, and they see little need for speech, especially because it is something in which they feel completely disadvantaged and excluded. Their feelings also echo the language subordination model and its casting of English as a highly advanced and complex language that the students cannot possibly comprehend without help. For these students, though, several have come to believe that even with a lot of help, spoken English is still impossible for them. Feeling that they are doing poorly and not seeing any need for it, they drop the speech classes and/or stop trying altogether and instead rely on ASL as the infinitely safer and clearer choice for communication.

So excluded do they feel that oftentimes, the moment I brought up the word "spoken English," several of them groaned outright, as does Snooki who explains:

> With speech, I just stare at it and don't understand a thing [...] I don't get it at all. Speech is like, like a blank face to me. There is movement but no expression...it's flat. Ugh, it's so boring.

The ASL metaphor that Snooki uses, *a blank face,* is a powerful description; she sees no expression and no meaning in spoken words: they are empty to her. These students find spoken English confusing, inaccessible, over their heads, and excruciatingly difficult to learn; therefore, they feel neither motivation nor interest in learning it even though they know it might actually be helpful sometimes. The mystification and complexity of English drives them away from it; instead, they identify ASL as being sufficient for their needs. "ASL is just better for me," King says, and Xina and Snooki also use the exact same adjective about ASL: *better*.

Even though these students do not talk explicitly about how their feelings about being left out of spoken English relate to their feelings about reading and writing, it is clear that many of them do, in varying degrees, also feel alienated and left out of print English as well. Auggins describes the frustration with reading well:

> Well, yeah, I, I—when I read, I tend to not understand it. Like, I can get confused really easily with it. Because, like, when I read a sentence, I forget what it said, so I have to go back and re-read it. But the meaning is muddy to me. It's confusing. It makes my eyes glaze over when I try.

In written English, there still are too many words that Auggins simply doesn't know, and he, along with several other students, describe the tedious process of trying to look up words in a dictionary and then not being able to read the definition and having to look up the words in the definition, and so on in a never-ending labyrinth. DJ, who estimates he understands only 10% of what he reads, explains that trying to read exhausts him—the harder he tries, the more his brain deletes words from his head, so he ends up missing even more.

For these struggling readers, print English is often a "blank face" in similar ways that speech is, so they feel frustrated and lost when they try to read and write. Xina and King both use the phrase "it all goes over my head" when talking about reading, and Snooki, in particular, uses extremely negative verbs when talking about anything related

to print literacy or to speech. "I hate it!" she says, "I despise it! Ugh!" For these students, spoken English is so inaccessible that they feel alienated by it and want no part of it, and the fact that they also find print English difficult to access further drives them away from the language altogether. This, in turn, strengthens their claim to and investment in ASL, the only language that they feel that they can fully understand and in which they can achieve fluency easily.

As I will discuss shortly, even though some other students (for example, Hendrix, Dani, and Roy, to name a few) do feel more positively towards reading and writing, more than half of the students in this study complain about feeling lost and unmotivated when they try to read, which indicates that they tend to miss a lot of information in the English language—whether it is spoken or written. Thus, they feel excluded from the entire language, and many of them speak of English as something that they feel little ownership in because it belongs to hearing people, a sentiment that will be the focus of the next section.

The Inclusivity of ASL and Language Ownership

Nearly all of the students spoke highly about ASL's ability to connect people, and many of them—including the hard-of-hearing students who learned ASL later in their lives—identify ASL as a crucial part of their identity and express a deep sense of ownership in ASL that they do not with English. Many deaf students encounter communication barriers when trying to talk with hearing non-signers (in many cases, including their own families), so a large chunk of their lives consist of either being left out of hearing people's conversations and/or missing large amounts of information when hearing people talk (or write to communicate) with them. Several students mention their negative feelings about this, but King encapsulates their overall sentiment well with the phrases "feeling crushed" and "being lonely," saying that with English, deaf people often just have to be isolated by themselves because they can't connect with the hearing people around them.

With ASL, however, the students find themselves able to communicate with other people easily and clearly, with much less confusion and vastly fewer misunderstandings, which makes it a great deal easier for them to connect meaningfully with other people who sign. "Knowing ASL is what brings deaf people together," King asserts. He, Snooki,

and Xina all discuss in some depth the immediate connection that many deaf people feel with one another through the language. Instead of being isolated, confused, or left out, the students are able to actively participate in conversations through ASL; several of them express great love for the language and how easily they can express themselves through it. As Xina puts it:

> [ASL] provides opportunity to communicate, to really understand. Things don't go over your head. You don't need to fake-nod and pretend that you understand. With ASL, you can be direct and ask and get clear information. Things are easier to understand.

With English, Xina has to "fake-nod" and pretend that she isn't completely lost—in other words, she often acts like she understands what is going on in English so that she doesn't look like she is left out (a common coping technique that many deaf people, including me, resort to at times). With ASL, however, Xina has no need to do that because the information is direct and clear. Upon being asked why she thought ASL was important to her, she is incredulous at even being asked the question. "Because—well, because we're deaf," she finally says as if it were the most self-evident truth ever. "I mean, we're *deaf*. That's why it's important—it's communication. We love to talk, to chat, to gab away together." For Xina—and Snooki, Auggins, Roy, and several other deaf students—ASL equals communication. It is their main (and for some of them, the only) way they have to converse with others, and what is more, it is often the only linguistic space in which they do not feel excluded.

Roy strongly identifies ASL as his linguistic home, calling it "mine own, my language," and he is not the only one. Many students talk about ASL being an integral part of their identity, and in their comments about identity, we see the strong sense of ownership many of the students feel towards ASL as opposed to English. Auggins dismisses English with a wave of his hand, saying that "English is meant for the hearing and ASL is meant for the deaf." He is not alone in his dramatic demarcation: several other students also identify English as something belonging to hearing people and hearing culture. "Because the deaf learn ASL. And the hearing learn English," Reg declares when explaining why many deaf people don't like to read. He, a fluent reader, has read well his whole life, but nevertheless, he still sees reading as a behavior belonging to hearing culture because it is in English.

Most of the other students are not quite as black-and-white as these two are, but many of them (Roy, Snooki, King, Jayson, Hendrix, and Xina, to name a few) invariably express sentiments along the lines of "ASL is mine," "ASL is for the deaf," "ASL is a part of me," and "ASL is my way," while distancing themselves from English and hearingness with comments like "English is for communicating with hearing people," "it's their way of talking," "Forget the English, I don't need it," "That's just their language," and "I don't want the English in my head." In fact, Xina associates English so much with hearing people that she sees them as always being in English, even if they do know how to sign:

> You see, English is the hearing way, so signing English is the hearing way
> to sign, you know [initializes signs] "I am going to the store…or to the
> bathroom," whatever, that is how hearing people usually sign.

"English is the hearing way," is a very telling statement, and, not surprisingly, she later refers to ASL as being "for the deaf." Comments such as these, particularly the ones like "forget the English" and "I don't want the English in my head" from various students indicate that the hearingness of English (and the mystification of English) in their eyes, may very much be an alienating factor for them when it comes to reading and writing, for they perceive print literacy as being something that belongs to a dominant 'other' from whom they tend to feel excluded.

Then Dani makes an interesting comment when thinking out loud about whether deaf students (specifically those who cannot hear speech clearly) should learn spoken English or not. After a moment of thought, she says:

> Mm…maybe. For some of them. For some parts of it. But I think they
> are—they sign, so that's fine for them because that's who they are. They
> don't need to talk with their voices, to become another person. They can
> just be themselves.

Her last two sentences are striking, for they suggest that Dani thinks learning English essentially changes something vital about who the deaf students are—in fact, they would become a whole other person—and that this change would not be a good thing. According to Dani, the students should "just be themselves" by using ASL. She is not explicitly talking about which language belongs to whom here, but her answer reveals that she *does* associate English with hearingness (the 'other'), and sees it as something

that is not natural or native to deaf students. This raises the question of whether she also views reading and writing as belonging to hearing people, too, and, importantly, how that belief might factor in her own relationship with print literacy.

Intriguingly, it is not only the most profoundly deaf students (whose first and preferred language tend to be ASL) who express a strong sense of identity and ownership with ASL the way Snooki does when she says, "It's just my way, my deaf way," using the sign HABIT to express the sentiment, a sign that, in this context, indicates that something is firmly ingrained in a person (their personality, soul, and/or genetic composition) and cannot be changed. In fact, several students who learned ASL later in life actually have, in some ways, an even stronger connection with the language than do the native ASL speakers. In spite of having no claim to ASL as their first language (and also in spite of not being as fluent as native speakers), several hard-of-hearing students point to ASL, not English, as being a crucial part of their identity. What is more, a few of them even claim ASL as their linguistic "home" now instead of their first language (English), and this transfer of ownership, so to speak, may have implications for the investment some of them feel towards print literacy and its association with hearing culture.

For these students, their ownership and love of ASL come from the vital role it played in their personal journey in coming to terms with their hearing loss (something that English could not do). Bella and Jayson, in particular, talk at length about how ASL came to be absolutely essential for them. As hard-of-hearing students with strong speech skills, they both spent their earlier elementary years in public schools (and in Bella's case, her middle school years as well) trying to function like hearing people by masking their hearing loss as much as they could in order to appear "normal." During these years, they perceived themselves and their hearing loss negatively. Bella uses the word "broken" to describe how she felt:

> I think that deaf people [who don't know other deaf people] look at
> hearing people more like, they're so perfect, or they're so, um, not broken.
> For a long time, I felt that way. I felt like, "Why me, why me, why me?
> I'm so deaf. I feel so stupid. Maybe that's why I'm so slow at learning."

Jayson also used to ask the question *why, why, why*. "I feel like it's good, um, it's a good experience being able to speak with my voice," he acknowledges, "but…uh, when I was

eight, I think, I really wished I could be hearing. I wished and wished." They both struggled with the fact that they couldn't be exactly like hearing people, and it made them feel like they were incomplete, broken, and less whole persons. In other words, their identity was something like, "I'm a broken version of a hearing person," and they wanted to be "normal" more than anything.

Upon transferring to the school for the deaf and learning ASL, however, their self-perception radically changed. Here is Jayson's recollection of that change; I will backtrack and repeat the beginning of that dialogue because everything that follows builds on the quote I just gave above.

> Jayson: I feel like it's good, um, it's a good experience being able to speak with my voice, but…uh, when I was eight, I think, I really wished that I could be hearing. I wished and wished. But then I just got used to being deaf, and I even started to love being deaf. I started realizing that it was a cool thing.
> Q: How old were you when that change happened?
> Jayson: Maybe nine or ten or so.
> Q: What caused that change, do you remember?
> Jayson: Um, trying to talk with other people about being deaf, and uh, like, talking with the counselor here at this school [who is also deaf]. The first day I came to school here, I started watching other people sign right away, and I thought it was just really cool to sign. I wanted to learn it as fast as I could.

And now, as a fifteen-year-old, Jayson strongly identifies as a Deaf person, and not even as hard-of-hearing. Upon being asked which language he prefers to use now, Jayson answers without hesitation: "ASL." When I queried why this was the case, his answer is simple, "I just prefer to be deaf." No longer does he wish to be hearing. No longer does he feel negatively about being deaf. It is now "cool": he *wants* to be deaf and wants to be a part of Deaf culture. And it was ASL—not English—that helped him to get to this place, and he knows it. In fact, Jayson expresses a lot of negativity towards English, in which he often struggles to understand speech and print words, calling it "boring," "uninteresting," and "hard." He has never felt fully comfortable using English, and now that he has a new linguistic home with ASL and has experienced a fuller range of expression in a language, he is not shy about expressing his resentment towards English for its difficulty and inaccessibility.

The turnaround in Bella's perception of deafness happened much more recently than Jayson's; as matter of fact, it is extremely fresh in her memory because it had taken place over the past year and half before her interview (which is how long she has been learning ASL). "Learning to sign made me realize that this is who I am," Bella explains, "and I cannot fix it. I can't. I can *not* change me. I need to learn to accept it, so learning to sign was the first step for me to accept myself." For many years, she pooh-poohed the idea of learning to sign, but to her surprise, transferring to the school for the deaf and using ASL to connect with other deaf students drastically changed how she felt about herself:

> I didn't want to be here [at the deaf school]. "This is stupid. Why am I here? I don't want to learn all this stuff!" But then soon after that, I learned that I was happy here. They accepted me. And I learned that, oh, this is cool. I'm learning things, and I can talk with my hands […] I was like, "Really? You don't think I'm weird?" So that really opened me up and made me realize that I'm special. I was made this way for a reason … (slow shrug) … to find out why. And just move on with life and enjoy it and show everyone that I can do things because I'm not broken, I'm not stupid, I'm not…uh…I'm ME. You can't—you have to accept me. And finally, I'm happy with where I am.

Bella's identity has undergone big change from "why me?" and "I'm stupid and broken" to "I'm not broken" and "I'm this way for a reason." She finally feels content with—and even proud of—her identity as a Deaf person. In fact, she feels so strongly about her Deaf identity that she describes the deaf school as "feeling like home" and repeatedly talks about wanting to prove to hearing people that deaf people are neither stupid nor broken. Bella, however, does not identify ASL as her preferred language the way that Jayson does. She has not achieved enough fluency in ASL yet to feel like it really belongs to her (yet); that said, she claims that she likes to use ASL and English equally often, "depending on the situation and who I am with," and she loves her newfound bilingualism. Unlike Jayson, she eagerly works on bettering both of her languages and finds each language to be challenging in its own way (spelling in English, for example, and ASL syntax).

Hendrix is not as explicit about his journey towards accepting his deaf identity, but I will briefly discuss him here because he, like Bella and Jayson, has a strong command of spoken English as one of his first languages (spoken Spanish is also a first

language for him), but yet he rejects being identified as a hard-of-hearing person. He also rejects anything that might make him more hearing, such as hearing aids. "I hate 'em," he scoffs, "I'm deaf, come on […] So, so, I just sign." For him, his ASL is an indicator of his deafness and who he is. He recounts how, as a young child, he used to rip off his hearing aids and refuse to wear them (and thus engaged in a perpetual battle of wills with his teacher and his parents). Nowadays, he has grown up enough to know how to play the game with more savvy: at home, he wears his hearing aids under the diligent watch of his mother, but at the deaf school and elsewhere (meaning wherever his mother is not around) his hearing aids are always off and out of sight. Hendrix strongly prefers to be deaf because "I was born this way." His attitude is very much *I'm happy like this, so why change it?* And when asked which language he prefers, Hendrix answers in a heartbeat, "ASL," and then explains that it's the language he needs to improve the most in because he believes his hearing will go away completely one day. Even though he is fully aware that his parents want him to work on his English and Spanish more than his signing, Hendrix insists on identifying with ASL. "I need to move forward [in life] with ASL," he concludes.

Like Jayson and Bella, Hendrix closely associates ASL with his identity as a deaf person, and even though ASL is not the sole language in any of these students' linguistic repertoires, they all feel a deep, intense attachment to ASL because of what it means for their emergent identities as deaf people. For them, ASL is a "home" in a way that English is not (thus leading them to resist the overtures of the language subordination model that pressures them to focus on their English). In fact, the tone and vested attitude with which they speak of ASL are virtually identical to the ways that native ASL speakers (such as Roy, Snooki, King, and J-Dawg) talk about their mother tongue. This suggests that the fundamental role ASL has played in the emergence of these hard-of-hearing students' deaf identities has cemented ASL as a integral part of who they are, and it thus now holds profound meaning and value for them in a way that English does not (even though they speak English well and still like using English). In this way, these students feel more closely aligned with ASL than they do with English, something that could have profound implications for their perspectives towards reading and writing. Further work needs to be done to explore why some, like Jayson, distance themselves even more from reading and

writing in English and others, like Bella, enthusiastically embrace their bilingualism (including print literacy).

Conclusion and Implications

The ways that these students subscribe to the kinds of ideologies we see in Lippi-Green's language subordination model—particularly when it comes to the elevated status and mystification they confer on English—suggests that they are, indeed, subordinating ASL to English in a number of ways: mystifying English, upholding good English as being important for success the real world, and subordinating ASL as "just talking." However, at the same time, these students also resist some of the implications that follow from such subordination, with many of them distancing themselves from English and upholding ASL as the better language for them. This complex push-and-pull relationship both aligns with and complicates the language subordination model. As such, below is a slightly modified version in which I have made changes to explicitly reflect the subordination I see happening with ASL among the participants in this study. My additions and/or changes are underlined:

Figure 4-2: Language Subordination Model for ASL (derived from students' responses in this study)

The English Language is mystified
   You can never hope to comprehend the difficulties and complexities of English because you are deaf and because it is an advanced, hard, and complicated language.
Authority is claimed
   Talk and write like hearing people. Hearing people know what we are doing because we can hear and because English is our language.
Misinformation is generated
   The ASL you're so attached to is inaccurate, basic/insufficient, and just something that you use to communicate if you can't do English well. The English I use is superior as a language on linguistic, cultural, historical, aesthetic, and/or logical grounds.
ASL and/or signing is trivialized
   Look how cute, how homey, how funny, how entertaining/fun, how simple/concise, how easy ASL is.
Conformers are held up as positive examples
   See what you can accomplish if you only try, how far you can get if you see the light. Deaf people who learn English well will be more successful; ASL is not as important for academic and professional success.
Explicit promises are made
   If you know English well, employers will take you seriously, doors will open.
Threats are made
   If your English is lousy, no one important will take you seriously, doors will close.
Non-conformers are vilified or marginalized.
   See how willfully stupid, unknowing, uninformed, unsuccessful, and/or limited these ASL signers are.

As the findings in this chapter indicate, English is a language that seems exceedingly complex and advanced to these deaf students. However, instead of it leading to a respect for the authority of English (as we see in the original model), it leads to most, if not all, of

the students viewing English and print literacy negatively or as something belonging to hearing people rather than to them. For many students, there seems to be very little room for English or reading and writing in their deaf identities, and for the students who *do* read well, their print literacy abilities appear to be "hearing" behaviors that they engage in. What is more, if they do not believe that print literacy can be a part of their identities, some students may view it as being "too hearing" and thus distance themselves from it even more. This is concerning, for if the students consistently feel excluded from parts of the English language, and if they believe that reading and writing are acts that do not quite belong to deaf people, then their relationship with print literacy will, for better or for worse, always have a touch of the alien about it.

This modified model also captures the ways many of these students also view English as being linguistically superior to ASL, a fascinating phenomenon that I will explore in the next chapter as we see how these language ideologies play out in the ways the students understand and view each language based on the information and misinformation generated by their ideologies. For now, however, I will reiterate that with ASL, these students have found a language that feels inclusive to them, a language in which they can understand and be understood, and a language in which they feel they can fully—not partially or occasionally but always—belong. This is powerful and vital for them as human beings. Even though most of them do not notice it, the tension is palatable between their cherishing of ASL as a part of their identity and their subscribing to (and oftentimes resisting) the subordination of ASL in comparison to English. The fact remains, however, that they still need to learn to read and write well in English, as they very well know. Learning the language of a dominant 'other' is a process that many of them find frustrating, as Xina describes:

> But hearing culture, reading and writing—it is not always as clear [as ASL]. There are misspellings, forgotten words, wrong words, or whopping-big words that go past your eyes and confuse you.

Note Xina's immediate association of hearingness with print literacy in the very first sentence: this speaks volumes for how much she—and many of her peers—view reading and writing as acts that belong to hearing people. Her comment further underscores the vital importance for us to find ways to make the print form of the English language feel less exclusionary, less "other," and less "for hearing people only" for these students.

Chapter 5
Language Ideologies: Grammar, Correctness, Misconceptions

"English has *everrrrrything* in it," Jayson complains when talking about what he perceives to be the excessively complicated nature of English grammar, "and that makes everything hard." He is not alone in his observation; many other students in this study also express similar views of print English. On the one hand, they uphold it as being the language they know that they need to learn well in order to lead successful, productive lives in an English-speaking society, but at the same time, these students disparage it for being *too* advanced, *too* complicated, and *too* hard. As discussed in the previous chapter, the students' feelings of being excluded and having very little ownership over the English language most likely make up a large part of what underlies their criticisms of English. However, the findings I will present in this chapter build on and go beyond the students' personal feelings by delving into the complex ways their perceptions of ASL and English factor into the ways they embrace or resist either language—especially in the students' often fraught relationship with English.

For convenience, I have included the modified version of Lippi-Green's Language Subordination Model from the previous chapter, as I will refer to it often; more specifically, the first four statements in Figure 5-1 will be addressed throughout this chapter.

Figure 5-1: Modified Version of Lippi-Green's Language Subordination Model

<u>**The English</u> Language is mystified**
    You can never hope to comprehend the difficulties and complexities of <u>English because you are deaf and because it is an advanced, hard, and complicated language</u>.
Authority is claimed
    Talk <u>and write like hearing people</u>. <u>Hearing people</u> know what we are doing <u>because we can hear and because English is our language.</u>
Misinformation is generated
    <u>The ASL</u> you're so attached to is inaccurate, <u>basic/insufficient, and just something that you use to communicate if you can't do English well</u>. <u>The English I use is superior as a language on linguistic</u>, cultural, historical, aesthetic, and/or logical grounds.

ASL and/or signing is trivialized
    Look how cute, how homey, how funny, <u>how entertaining/fun, how simple/concise, how</u>
    <u>*easy ASL is*</u>.
Conformers are held up as positive examples
    See what you can accomplish if you only try, how far you can get if you see the light. <u>Deaf</u>
    <u>*people who learn English well will be more successful; ASL is not as important for*</u>
    <u>*academic and professional success.*</u>
Explicit promises are made
    <u>*If you know English well,*</u> *employers will take you seriously, doors will open.*
Threats are made
    <u>*If your English is lousy,*</u> *no one important will take you seriously, doors will close.*
Non-conformers are vilified or marginalized.
    See how willfully stupid, unknowing, uninformed, <u>unsuccessful</u>, and/or <u>limited</u>
    these ASL signers are.

When the students start talking about ASL and how they think the language works, it rapidly becomes clear that nearly all of them subordinate ASL in comparison to English on linguistic grounds. Many students view ASL as being vastly less complete and less complex than English, and some even seem to think that ASL is merely a communication mode, not a bona fide language. I was astonished by how many of these students expressed such diminished views of ASL's qualifications as a language at the same time that they held it up as a cherished part of their identity ("it's mine, my own"). Indeed, their comments reveal a number of intriguing, contradictory, and sometimes misinformed ideologies about both languages—about the conventions, rules, and grammars of each—that add fuel to their resistance towards English and print literacy. Essentially, the students think ASL is lacking in many grammatical areas, but many of them still like ASL *better* for its apparent "simplicity" and how easy it is for them to access.

In the sections that follow, some negative comments from the students may sound familiar to teachers of the deaf who have heard litanies of complaints from their own students about English, hence the commonly held assumption that deaf students don't like English because it's hard. However, through a careful examination of what the students in this study say about English *and* about ASL, I will show that students do not necessarily dislike English solely because it is hard, but rather because they, not fully understanding how either ASL or English works, have constructed misconceptions that powerfully shape their views and attitudes towards both languages and especially print literacy.

Perceptions of English and ASL as Languages: Grammar, Rules, Correctness

Most of the students see ASL as being a "simpler" and "easier" language than English, and especially so because, according to many of them, ASL does not have all of the grammatical features they see in English. Their comments about ASL reveal that many of them seem to be using English as a standard for assessing the linguistic competency of ASL. Or put another way, they view English as being the model of what a language ought to be and then judge ASL—for many of them, their own preferred language—by how it measures up to English. Chris is a typical example of this ideological stance, as we see in the following excerpt when he talks about how his hearing mother couldn't understand his deaf girlfriend's writing because she was "writing ASL" and "cutting words out." I asked what he meant by that, and the conversation proceeded as follows:

> Q: What kinds of words?
> Chris: The unimportant words.
> Q: Like, for example…?
> Chris: Um…[pauses] um, like, "the" and "of."
> Q: So these are cut out?
> Chris: Yeah.
> Q: And that makes it "writing ASL"?
> Chris: [nods]
> Q: Do you sign that way, too?
> Chris: Oh, yeah.
> Q: Cutting stuff out like that?
> Chris: Yeah, most people do that when they sign. That's ASL.

Then Chris goes on to reason that people "cut words out" when they sign because it would be too cumbersome to sign every word in the sentence. His choice of verb speaks volumes: words are *cut out* in ASL. Assuredly, he means words typically seen in English, which indicates that he is comparing ASL to English, and this becomes starkly clear when he starts talking about ASL again moments later:

> Chris: [The ASL] is not always in full. You always lose stuff, like,
>   words are missing from it.
> Q: So you feel that it isn't enough, or what?
> Chris: It's not the full English. ASL is not complete English.
> Q: How is it different?

Chris: ASL is shorter. ASL flips words around.

Chris knows that word order is different in ASL, but he attributes it to the fact that it's not "the full English." He views ASL as being insufficient by itself—as indicated by his use of the phrase "you always lose stuff"—because there are English things missing from it. (Interestingly, however, he said several times that he has no problem understanding ASL.) In Chris's eyes, English has more words—and therefore more details and more legitimacy—than ASL does, and the way he insistently puts ASL in the context of English suggests that he perceives English as being the standard by which ASL is judged, even to the point where he seems to view ASL as a lesser or broken version of English.

Chris is not alone in this belief in the linguistic superiority of English. Several other students also draw comparisons between ASL and English and, based on the completeness they think they see in English, conclude that ASL is either a broken English or a weaker language that lacks many necessary parts for it to be able to stand equal with English. "ASL is, uh—[sighs]—it has words all backwards in order," Bella fumbles a bit as she tries to explain. "Uhh…I mean, like, you know what [the subject of the sentence] doing…uh, but you don't really know why or who or what." In Bella's eyes, ASL has fewer words than English does, and compared to English, all of the words are "backwards" (which echoes Chris's "flipped around" statement). This leads her to think that important details are missing—the "why," "who," and "what" of sentences (so basically, everything is missing, yes?). Reg, likewise, notices the gaps in ASL. "ASL is like broken English," he states. "Sometimes you know, ASL is kinda, it shortens sentences. And sometimes they skip things, some words that English doesn't skip." None of these students ever express the thought that the "backwards" word order and "missing words" might actually be a legitimate part of ASL's syntax.

Hendrix struggles to explain the reason that many English words seem to be "missing" from ASL, and his startling conclusion starkly illustrates how much these students really do subordinate ASL in comparison to English:

> Hendrix: Well, it's more different actually. Signing is different because it doesn't really have conjunctions. It can be hard to understand at first, like, huh, what? Words like *for, and, so*. At first, I didn't really understand it, but now, it's okay.
> Q: Why doesn't ASL have conjunctions and those kinds of words? Do you know why?

Hendrix: [short pause, shrugs] Maybe it's a third—third-world language. I don't know.

Hendrix, who is a skilled reader and has reasonable speaking fluency in three languages (English, Spanish, and ASL), possesses more general grammatical knowledge to talk about what he sees—or does not see—when comparing between languages. He can name specific parts of speech that he thinks are absent from ASL, but as to why these parts of speech are "missing," he thinks for a moment before shrugging and hazarding a guess. Unfortunately, the best way he could think of to describe ASL is as a "third-world language," a phrase that has strong connotations with poverty and less developed countries. His description speaks volumes: English, with conjunctions and all of the parts of speech, is clearly a first-world language, whereas ASL is not. It is worth noting that Hendrix is one of the students who identifies strongly with ASL and prioritizes it in his linguistic repertoire, so the fact that he use "third-world" to describe ASL raises a host of troubling questions about how he (and several other students, as well) might be, at an unarticulated level, feeling tension between the language that has become a core part of his identity and the unsettling misconception that his preferred language might not be fully adequate in comparison to other languages, especially English.

Snooki also refers to parts of speech in her attempt to describe ASL, and considering the fact that she is one of the students who struggles the most with print literacy, it was at first heartening to see her using grammatical terms to compare the two languages. However, the more she talked, the more I realized that she did not fully understand the terms she was using, nor did she understand how her own first language (ASL) works. In her confusion, she unintentionally reveals a deep-seated belief that ASL is inferior to English in linguistic completeness:

It's different. ASL is like, um, like, not, 'HOW ARE YOU.' The ARE is not ASL. That's English. ASL just goes, 'HOW YOU?'. But when you write your sentences, it's *how are you* because it's in English. It's different […] ASL has no verbs, nouns, adjectives, or anything like that. It's just straight-up talking, um, just normal talking, you know. But English *must* have nouns, verbs, adjectives. You just have to have them.

Unlike most of her fellow student-participants, Snooki is able to give an actual example of how the same sentence might be grammatically different in ASL and English. Even

though she has enough linguistic awareness—and pride in ASL—to insist that ASL and English are different languages (which she did earlier in her interview), she still claims that ASL has *no* nouns, verbs, adjectives, or any parts of speech. In her mind, those things belong to English, and in her follow-up interview, Snooki reiterated those ideas again: "Well, the signing, and this, um, [indicates an English print text in front of her], uh, this sentence, are different. The signing skips all of the nouns and verbs—those are missing in ASL. That's the ASL way."

Those things are missing in ASL. Snooki doesn't see a problem with this, saying that it's just the ASL way of doing things. In other words, she is okay with ASL being subordinate to English in this way because ASL feels more clear, more personal, and more entertaining to her (not unlike the conflicting emotions many speakers of non-standard dialects of English often feel between their cherishing of their home dialects and the ways others—and sometimes they themselves—subordinate their home dialects). But Snooki's word choice is revealing: *missing*. English has all of the rules and all of the grammar; ASL doesn't have any. This is a discouraging statement because it shows that this student, even though she knows that there are such things as nouns and verbs—and that those things are necessary for English—has failed to develop a complete understanding of *what* nouns, verbs, and adjectives are. She perceives them as being things that belong to English, which leaves her with very little vocabulary to talk about her own language and raises for us several implications and concerns about language pedagogy.

ASL as "Just Talking" or "Just Communicating"

Megan and Dani do not focus on grammatical terms; instead, they both use the word "proper" to describe English. "Proper" is a telling word choice, for it reveals the status they believe English to have, and it clearly articulates their ideologies about the inferiority of ASL. "[In English], you're really saying the proper words," Megan tries to explain as she struggles to articulate what ASL grammar is. She finally settles on calling it "shortened sentences" in comparison to English, and reiterates yet again that English has all of the proper words in the proper order. Dani, like many other students, points out that the words are "switched around" in ASL.

Dani: Like, you can't understand it [deaf students' English when it's written in ASL syntax], but if you sign it out, and think the right way through the sentence, then it'll make sense.

Q: It'll make sense if you sign it out loud?

Dani: Yeah, yup.

Q: So why is signing different than the way you write it in English?

Dani: Because signing is like you're talking, but you're not. Uh, you're communicating with people. Like, you communicate with hearing people. You see what they say, and you know how to respond in sign, but in typing [i.e. written English], you see what the hearing person says, but their typing is different than yours, yours is switched around. The hearing person's is proper typing, and that's different than signing. Signing is different.

Dani clearly spends a lot more time typing than she does writing by hand, so for her, written English means "typing." That aside, we see her saying that hearing people's language—English—is "proper," a word choice that implies that English is more correct and therefore superior to signing, which is "just talking." In her view, ASL is "different": its words are switched around, something that Dani seems to regard as making it a lesser way of communicating. These two students have clearly made English their standard for assessing ASL, which leads to them believing that ASL is not on par with English.

Moreover, the way Dani refers to ASL in the above excerpt is at once both intriguing and heartbreaking: "Because signing is like you're talking, but you're not." Instead, she refers to ASL as "communicating," and her subsequent comments about how hearing people's typing (i.e. written English) is more proper and different than ASL indicates that Dani believes ASL to be a useful way of communicating, but nothing more. With this reductive comment about ASL, Dani asserts that somehow, it is not *talking* like if you were talking in English. Honestly, I am not quite sure what Dani is trying to say here, and for me, this prompts a series of questions, such as what does Dani thinks she is doing while she signs with her friends, if not *talking*? How does she distinguish between talking and communicating? Interestingly, Snooki also refers to ASL as "just talking: "[ASL] is just straight-up talking, um, just normal talking, you know." Earlier, Snooki had insisted that ASL is a different language, but then here, she minimizes it as just "straight-up talking," suggesting that ASL is good only for communicating with other

people, but not for other purposes, such as learning or academics because it does not have nouns, verbs, and other things that English does.

Indeed, some students, such as Reg, even go so far as to describe ASL as not a language but instead "broken English." Other students express profound confusion about whether ASL even has rules at all, instead saying "I don't know," or resorting to listing the many bits and pieces of grammar that they know is required in English. These views clearly indicates that many of them perceive English as "having everrrrything" (to use Jayson's words) and they then take this conceptualization of English and use it as a measuring-stick for ASL, an act that in itself subordinates ASL to English. Then upon finding many things missing in ASL (or so they believe, for most of them have had very little, if any, formal grammar instruction in ASL), the students deem the language to be linguistically deficient in comparison to English, which subordinates ASL even more in their eyes. Even though many students passionately identify with ASL as their preferred language, they still—out of misunderstandings and misinformation—subscribe to standard language ideologies that diminish ASL into little more than "just talking" or "broken English."

Admittedly, Lippi-Green's discussion of standard language ideologies refers to standard English and the ways many speakers subordinate non-standard dialects of the language. ASL is a language entirely separate from English, so it may seem counterintuitive to bring in language ideologies relating to standard English when talking about ASL. However, based on the data in this study, there are a number of compelling reasons to do so: (1) the widespread belief among English speakers that ASL is "English on the hands," a belief that several students in this study also hold, indicates that in many people's minds, ASL is simply a visual variation of English anyway; (2) the linguistic comparisons that the students in this study already make between ASL and English suggest that they see a standard in English and not in ASL, even to the point of using English as a base measurement for ASL; and (3) the claims of "brokenness" and "gaps" that pepper the students' comments about ASL show that many of them do indeed actively subordinate ASL in ways not unlike how English speakers subordinate and disparage non-standard variations of English for being inferior in correctness and accuracy.

Unlike non-standard variations of English, however, which people quite correctly regard as being dialects of the English language, people who hold ideologies that subordinate ASL in comparison to English are mistaken in their beliefs that ASL is "broken" and that ASL is a form of English. It is important for me to emphasize that bringing standard language ideology into the analysis of this data does *not* mean that I am implying that ASL is a non-standard variation of English—or even a variation whatsoever—nor am I suggesting that ASL ought to be measured in terms of standard English. ASL is a whole and separate language that, unfortunately, due to the widespread ideologies held by many people, has been long and erroneously viewed as being just a communication mode, a broken version of English, and/or "English on the hands." These beliefs and attitudes surfaced among the students in this study, and standard language ideology helps us to better understand and tease apart the attitudes, values, and reasons that underlie the students' opinions of ASL. Intriguingly, one might assume that the subordination of ASL would lead the students to view it negatively because of its apparent defects, but as I will discuss in the next section, this is not always the case—far from it.

The "Strict Complexity" of English Versus the "Fluid Freedom" of ASL

In spite of their clear subordination of ASL and in spite of believing that at best, ASL is a language with few to no rules, or at worst, a broken version of English, many students nonetheless express a strong preference for ASL. In fact, the lack of grammaticality they perceive in ASL (words are missing, sentences are flipped around, parts of speech are not represented, and so forth) is actually for many students a point in favor of ASL. Most of them spoke about valuing ASL for how easy it was to use and how flexible it felt compared to the rigidity of English. In fact, nearly all of the students defined "good" and "correct" ASL with only two criteria (as opposed to the hundreds of rules English has): (1) it must be clear to the recipient, and (2) it needs to have good facial expressions. As long as these two "rules" are met, according to the students, then one can sign ASL sentences in any way one likes: grammar does not matter. This skewed view of ASL drastically reduces it from a rich, complex language to something little more than a simple, random system of communication that can be done in any which way as long as the recipient understands it. What is more, the apparent freedom that the

students believe they have with ASL causes many of them to feel even more resentful towards English and all of its "strict" and "hard" rules, a sentiment that feeds their resistance towards English, and, importantly, one that has profound implications for their relationship with reading and writing.

Jayson, in particular, exemplifies the frustration and resentment that many of his peers feel towards English when they compare it to the "almost anything goes" nature they believe ASL has. He struggles to distinguish between English and ASL, first claiming, "it is talking English both ways," but then interrupting himself and saying "it's not the same." Later, I returned to the question and asked him to explain his answer; by then, Jayson had had more time to think about it, and his response shows how volatile a reaction he has towards the observation that English has more "stuff" in it than ASL does (or so he perceives):

> Jayson: No, it's different. Because when it's signed in ASL, they say things a little differently…uh…they have different words in there. And English, on the other hand, English has *everrrrything* (sic) in it, and that makes everything hard. And grammar, and just a whole bunch of stuff.
> Q: So you feel English has more rules, more grammar?
> Jayson: Mm-hmm.
> Q: Does ASL have rules and grammar, too?
> Jayson: It has, but, um, it does have the same rules because um, um…(exhales)
> Q: It's a hard question, yeah.
> Jayson: Yeah, I forgot what I was going to say.
> Q: I asked you if you thought ASL has rules. You know, English has rules that you have to learn. Does ASL also have rules that you have to learn?
> Jayson: Yeah, it does. I'd say it's kind of the same because, um, deaf people and hearing people are the same, um, um, and the English people speak the language, and they both have rules and everything else in the same way.
> Q: Okay, so the two languages have similar rules, is that what you are saying? Are there any rules that are different from ASL to English?
> Jayson: I don't think so.

Jayson's confusion is evident. He sees that ASL does things differently and that the languages have "different words," but he can't explain how the grammar works

differently from English. However, he thinks—and with a great degree of uncertainty—that English and ASL might have the same grammar rules, even though he had just said a moment ago that English is much harder because it seems to have "everrrrything" in it, "grammar, and a whole bunch of stuff."

Interestingly, his assertion that both languages have the same rules seems to rest on the premise that deaf and hearing people are the same. His insistence on this point suggests that Jayson senses that if ASL is lesser than English (i.e. has fewer rules), then it would mean that deaf people are also less than hearing people, and he thoroughly rejects that idea. This rejection both subscribes to and resists the language subordination of ASL. His very limited knowledge of ASL grammar, compounded with the fact that he is still a fairly new signer who has not yet fully mastered the language, means that Jayson's resistance to the subordination of ASL is not yet a very informed resistance. He ends up with the contradictory beliefs that English has everything in it and ASL doesn't, but yet somehow he still thinks the two languages still share the same rules. Jayson, several times during his interviews, scorns English for being "way too hard" and complicated, and embraces ASL, saying that he prefers to sign because he finds it easier and more flexible.

As Jayson's example shows, in the eyes of these students, being more complex and more advanced of a language (the way English apparently is) also means that it comes with a heavy load of rules and a hefty dose of strictness, which they find tedious and alienating. And this is, of course, on top of the fact that English tends to be hard for them to understand anyway, as I discussed in the previous chapter. These views of English are sharply contrasted by the students' belief that ASL has a much more flexible and permissive nature (or so they think). By exploring what the students believe about ASL and their eerily consistent definitions of what constitutes "good" or "correct" ASL, we can clearly see how the features that these students value in ASL profoundly affect how they feel, perceive, and act towards English and the way English works, as well as the socio-cultural expectations that accompany the language.

Earlier, we heard Dani talking about "proper English." According to her, hearing people use proper English (and it's important to do it correctly), but signing is "different." By this, she might simply mean that the grammar is different in ASL (i.e. "flipped around"), but her use of the word *proper* makes one wonder whether she thinks

it is possible to have a "proper" way of signing. Her discussion of ASL at a later point in her interview is enlightening:

> Q: Is it possible to switch words around and sign something wrong in ASL?
> Dani: (scoffs) No. I don't think so.
> Q: So I can put my signs in whatever order I want to, and it would be okay?
> Dani: Hmm…umm…mm…Well, it could be fine—as long as you can understand them. (shrugs)

Thus, in Dani's eyes, there is no wrong syntax in ASL, no parallel to "proper English." Instead, the only constructs Dani puts onto ASL is that as long as you get your message across, then there is no wrong way to sign an ASL sentence. Roy agrees, describing ASL as being "fluid and flexible":

> Q: So you're saying, like, a different order of words? [on comparing English and ASL]
> Roy: Yeah.
> Q: Mm-hmm, okay.
> Roy: In ASL, it's fluid. You can move words all over the place.
> Q: Any way you want? Is it totally up to you?
> Roy: It depends on how understandable it is when deaf people see it.
> Q: So you're saying that as long as it's clear, you can put the words in whatever order you want?
> Roy: Yeah. It can vary, however.
> Q: Is it possible to have wrong grammar in ASL? Like, in English, you told me about people correcting your sentences, like, the past tense verbs and whatever. So you had to fix those. Does ASL have anything like that? Can you be wrong in how you do ASL sentences?
> Roy: Hmm…no.

He then gives several examples of how one might sign the same ASL sentences in different word orders, asserting that they are all equally "ASL," concluding with, "it can't be wrong." He is correct in stating that ASL has more flexibility in its syntax than English does, but his assertion that word order makes no difference in ASL is inaccurate, as is his claim that all syntactical constructs are "equally ASL" and can't be wrong.

Roy is the only student who gives actual examples of ASL's "fluidity," but he is not the only one to use this word to describe the language, nor is he the only one to claim

that it can't be wrong. J-Dawg, Snooki, Xina, and King all subscribe to the notion of ASL as being "fluid" and "flexible," using these exact words independently of one another. "I think you can switch the signs around any way," J-Dawg says. "It doesn't matter." According to them, the only potential mistakes in execution are made by "awkward signers" who are not as fluent and therefore not as clear.[251] To sign well, "You just say it simply and directly so others will understand you," Xina explains. Clarity and understandability are paramount, and the apparent simplicity of ASL leads Snooki to think that the language itself is flexible even to the point of having no sentences:

> Snooki: Well, in the print [English], there's full sentences, but in the [ASL] videos there are no sentences, uh, uh, it was all signed in ASL. I noticed that…it was a little strange, but it's different.
> Q: So in signing, are there sentences?
> Snooki: (shakes her head 'no') Mm. No.
> Q: Does it have rules?
> Snooki: [keeps shaking her head 'no' repeatedly, firmly]
> Q: So it's totally up to [the man in the video] how he signs it?
> Snooki: [nods]

Snooki found the signing style of the male signer in the video as being a little "different" and "strange" from what she was used to. However, she understood his signing clearly (as she explains at another point in the interview), so instead of criticizing his ASL, she reasserts her belief that he had complete freedom to sign however he wanted. She even insists that ASL has no sentences—that is how fluid and flexible she thinks ASL is.

Many students focused almost exclusively on the criterion of "clear" and "understandable" for ASL, but several students also identified facial expressions as being an important requirement for good ASL because it facilitates clarity. Hendrix singles out Xina as one of the best ASL signers he knows, and cites her facial expressions as being a vital part of why her signing is so good. "Her facial expressions show everything very clearly," he laughs, "I'm like, wow. I can read her facial expression so quickly." Snooki and Chris also point to facial expressions as being critical for a signer's

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[251] Just to clarify, the only kind of "error" these students see in ASL is if a person accidentally uses the wrong sign for something (e.g. signing "please" instead of "sorry") either because they are a novice signer or because it happens by accident, much like an English speaker might misspeak a word and have to backtrack. But when it comes to syntax and grammar rules, virtually none of the students thought these features mattered—or even existed at all—in ASL, as long as other people could understand the signer.

comprehensibility, and Chris blatantly declares that he doesn't see anything else as being important in good ASL. "[ASL's] rich facial expressions and the way it uses the whole body to communicate—that makes it easy to understand clearly," Xina concludes when she explains why she strongly prefers ASL over English.

Beyond these criteria, however, none of the students identified any other features that make ASL "good" or "correct." They did not talk about how the words were "flipped around," nor about the grammar of facial expressions, nor about the signer's use of classifiers and space—none of these things. Rather, the overarching criterion was this: is it clear and understandable (which includes good facial expressions)? For these students, where English has strict rules governing word order and grammar, ASL is completely fluid and flexible, as long as it is clear. Thus, the students love and value ASL for its freedom, even at the same time that they subordinate its linguistic status in comparison to English.

What is more, when they put English and ASL side-by-side, the flexibility of ASL makes the rigidity of English seem even *more* rigid. In other words, ASL, as the "easier" and "more flexible" language becomes the good guy, and English, with its strictures and restrictions, becomes the bad guy. Hence the many comments along the lines of "I hate English!" and "English is way too strict!" when I asked them about reading and writing. Auggins describes the frustration of trying to read in English, "The meaning is muddy to me. It's confusing. It makes my eyes glaze over when I try." Snooki minces no words: "I despise it!" She also, like King, complains about how her English sentences always end up being wrong, no matter what order she tries to put the words in. These remarks are very typical of many students in this study, coupled with emotion-laden words like "frustration," "hate," "struggle," "hard," "lost," and even "forget the English!"

A number of students, however, do not have as negative an attitude towards print English even though they do subscribe to the belief that ASL grammar is vastly more permissive than English. Hendrix, Bella, Megan, Reg, and Dani all have stronger relationships with print literacy than do the rest of the students in this study, and they seem to regard the complexity of English as a challenge—a sometimes exasperating challenge, but nowhere as excruciating as it is for some of their peers. "It can be fun," Hendrix says of reading. "You learn so much, you never stop learning. There's always

more to read." He acknowledges that he sometimes finds it hard to remember all of the English rules, especially for punctuation when writing, but he shrugs it off as a part of the learning process, as do Bella and Dani. For them, English seems to be slightly hard at times, but not at a level that is too far above their ability to successfully navigate.

It is important to note that the students who have this attitude are also the students who *already* possess strong print literacy skills. More research is needed in this area to explore how their relationship with reading and writing, as well as their attitude towards English, developed up to this point. I will also note that these students also perceive ASL as being vastly more flexible than English, so further study of how this belief might or might not be interacting with their view of the English language and/or print literacy is needed. For now, it seems safe to say that for many students, especially the ones who struggle the most with print literacy, the fluidity and flexibility they see in ASL can lead them to distance themselves even more from English, which they find excessively and unreasonably strict and difficult to navigate.

A contributing factor to the lack of grammaticality that these students see in ASL might also stem from the fact that throughout their lives, they have been consistently exposed to several different modes of signing: ASL, CASE, SEE, PSE, and so forth. As Xina puts it, hearing people have a "hearing way" of signing, which she calls "English signing" (a term that she is probably using to refer to CASE and SEE), which means using signs but following English word order. Some signers follow English syntax more exactingly (signing in subject-verb-object order, adding initialized labels for verb tenses, or signing all of the articles and conjunctions in sentence, for example)[252], while others

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[252] A quick note on terminology: ASL = American Sign Language, a full-fledged language with its own grammar and syntax. SEE = Signed Exact English, a system of signs that superimposes English syntax and grammar onto ASL signs in an effort to sign every detail of an English sentence, down to the exact conjunctions and verb tenses. Many ASL signs are also modified by the addition of fingerspelled initials to each sign (see examples below). PSE = Pidgin Signed English, a pidgin form of signing that combines ASL and SEE, and generally tends to loosely follow English word order, but does not sign every single English word in the sentence, nor does it label all of the words with initials as does SEE. Many hearing English-speaking people, for whom ASL is not a first language, find ASL grammar difficult to acquire, so they tend to sign more PSE because it aligns more closely with their own native English. I have included two examples to illustrate how SEE and PSE differ from ASL.
Example 1: I will be going to the gym tomorrow.

ASL: TOMORROW, GYM ME-GO. *(Follows time-topic-comment syntax of ASL)*
SEE: I WILL BE GO-ING TO THE GYM TOMORROW. *(English syntax, initialized signs underlined)*
PSE: I GO TO GYM TOMORROW. (*Some signs may or may not be initialized*)

might pick and choose certain features of English to include. Many hearing people who learn ASL as adults (e.g. teachers, parents) have a hard time with ASL syntax, so they tend to sign using English syntax, as do the hard-of-hearing students who learn ASL later in life. Many deaf people (myself included) will code-switch between signing more English-like and ASL-like, depending on whom they are talking with.

In short, these students have seen a gamut of signing styles, some of which are more "pure" ASL and some of which are not. Many of them could easily describe features of signed English in detail (initialized signs, signing every word, English word order, for example). Some of them simply said something like, "It's like English, but on the hands" (for example, Reg and Auggins), but several students gave detailed examples of what signed English looks like. They know that it is *not* ASL; nonetheless, for ASL, their definition is simply "clear (with good facial expressions) and fluid," and most students could not give examples of what a good ASL sentence looks like. It appears that they might be associating SEE and CASE with spoken and/or print English (which is a correct assumption) and therefore they perceive this signing system as being detailed and rule-bound like English is. Because of this, and also because they have studied print and spoken English in school for years, perhaps they have more linguistic terms to talk about SEE and CASE than they do for ASL.

With that said, my interview questions were focused more on their *attitudes* towards other sign systems, so I do not have data specifically about this and therefore cannot venture any further claims about how these students might perceive the relationship between SEE, CASE, and spoken/written English. The students' acclimation to a wide range of signing styles, however, is important to note because not only does it seem to contribute to their perception of ASL as being grammar-free, but also it seems to

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Example 2: **Last year, I walked 15 miles each week for my job.**
> ASL: LAST-YEAR, MY WORK ME DO-WHAT? (rhetorical question indicated by eyebrows)
> WALK 15 MILES WEEK-WEEK-WEEK.
> *(repetition of* week *indicates the temporal and repeated aspect of the verb* walk)
> SEE: LAST YEAR, I WALK-ED 15 M-I-L-E-S EACH WEEK FOR MY JOB.
>
> PSE: LAST YEAR, I WALK 15 MILES WEEK-WEEK-WEEK FOR JOB. (variation 1)
> LAST YEAR, FOR MY JOB, ME WALK 15 MILES EACH WEEK. (variation 2)
> (some signs may or may not be initialized)

be a big factor in their permissive attitudes towards error and usage in language, as I will discuss in the next section.

Errors in Both Languages: The (Apparent) Permissive Culture of ASL

Many of these students carry a general attitude of permissiveness towards variation and error when it comes to language usage. Especially because most of them have never been taught ASL explicitly,[253] they have never been told what the linguistic features of ASL are, nor have they been taught how these features work. They don't know that there are rules to be followed; what they think they see is that everyone seems to sign the way they prefer, and in the midst of all that variety, the only consistent value is that people can understand one another—hence the students' criterion of "clarity and understandability." This definition, unfortunately, leads to many students carrying a set of ideological values related to language correctness that differ from those of English speakers, and such values do not always play well with English. This tension seems to further aggravate the students' feelings towards English (and especially towards writing, in which there are countless ways to be wrong), and it may go some way in explaining why so many students feel so negatively towards print literacy.

To understand how the students' attitude of permissiveness in ASL bleeds over to English, it helps to first examine the students' attitudes towards what happens when people make mistakes in ASL. As discussed earlier, the only "errors" these students identify for ASL is when someone uses the wrong sign for a word or executes a sign with an incorrect parameter (e.g. incorrect hand shape or wrong location). Chris gives the example of accidentally signing "bastard" instead of "fireman," and asserts that he would be quick to correct this kind of error, especially if it is a younger child who doesn't know

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[253] Several students who transferred into the school for the deaf with no prior signing experience (such as Hendrix, Jayson, and Bella) had ASL immersion classes during their first semesters. However, other than this, most students who are native signers have rarely had the opportunity to take ASL classes. The principal at this school confided in me that about five years ago, the school added an ASL enrichment course for their middle and high school students, which the administrators and teachers were excited about because they believed it was important for the students to study their own language. However, these classes did not last long because so many parents reacted with so much outrage and backlash at the idea of ASL being formally taught, even to the point of threatening to un-enroll their students from the school (and some parents did). Feeling like they did not have enough research ammunition in their arsenal to convince the parents of why ASL should be taught as its own course, the school scrapped the ASL classes, much to the dismay of the administrators.

that it's a swear word and could get in trouble for it. Other examples from students include "please" instead of "sorry," "Tuesday" instead of "bathroom," and fingerspelling a letter incorrectly. These types of mistakes are ones that novice and aspiring signers tend to make much more often than do fluent signers, and they are errors in the physical production of a sign, not in grammar or syntax.

This may be partly why these students show an attitude of patience and readiness to help when they see someone making mistakes in signing. For them, these mistakes in ASL are teaching moments in which they can show the less advanced signer how to improve. Auggins talks at length about helping and encouraging people when they mis-sign, and J-Dawg does the same, saying, "I don't mind [teaching them]. I feel for them. I want to show them respect and help them learn." King sees it as a way of showing other people that he cares about connecting with them. "So people can understand them and they can understand their friends," he says. "That makes them feel great about themselves, proud, you know. Kind of like, 'I care for ya,' like they can talk better with each other now." Correcting other signers' mistakes is important for ensuring clarity, which the students all value, and if they see a weaker signer struggling, they will jump in to supply the sign, correct their signing, or offer encouragement. As Roy puts it, he doesn't blame deaf non-fluent signers for their linguistic backgrounds ("most of them can't help coming from families that don't sign well," he says), so he is willing to accept their signing, no matter how English-like or ASL-like it may be.

If it is a hearing person who is genuinely interested in deaf people and wants to learn, then the students are anxious and willing to help that person improve in signing. Very rarely do they judge, if at all. The language takes time to learn, as Xina and Snooki point out, and it's a process. Auggins, in particular, was taken aback by the mere suggestion that people might pass judgment on others based on their errors in signing, as our exchange shows:

> Auggins: I'd ask you, "I'm guessing that you meant to say 'business' instead of [demonstrates hypothetical incorrect sign]. Was that what you were trying to say, or what?" Or I'd ask them to fingerspell the word instead, to make sure. So they'll explain, so I understand them.
> Q: What would your feelings be about those mistakes? Would you be annoyed by it, or would you be okay with it?

Auggins: I'd be chill about it. Take it easy, you know.
Q: You wouldn't look down on them for that?
Auggins: No, never. Never. I'd never do that.
Q: Okay.
Auggins: I'm always a nice guy, I'm a nice person.

So taken aback by my question, Auggins' blue eyes went wide in astonishment as he repeats the word "never" three times. He can't imagine passing judgment on someone else for making mistakes when using ASL. Describing himself as being "a nice guy," Auggins was the first of many students who use this adjective when talking about the way they act towards signers who make mistakes (Dani, Snooki, King, J-Dawg, and Roy also used it, to name a few). Hendrix agrees with Auggins, saying, "We're nice about it. [We] try to be clear and show them how to do it."

However, when *fluent* signers make mistakes in executing a sign (which happens on occasion), it becomes a source of amusement for everyone involved. Auggins, in particular, makes mistakes more often than most fluent signers do because he tends to get overexcited and gets ahead of himself in his signing:

> Sometimes I do sign something wrong, and [my friends] think it's funny. Like, for example, um, one time I signed, "I will calltomorrow". [Note: instead of PHONE-CALL-YOU TOMORROW, he used the handshape for PHONE-CALL-YOU to sign the word TOMORROW, thus slurring the whole sentence into one awkward sign.] They saw that and laughed. "What kind of a new sign is that?" they said, "Calltomorrow! That's a funny sign." So sometimes there are weird signs like that, and we find it funny. Sometimes people just roll their eyes at those kinds of silly mistakes in the language. I mean, they don't mean to be rude, not at all. They just find it funny.

Auggins makes a point of clarifying that their laughter is not meant to be rude; rather, they are all laughing together, and it becomes a running inside joke for them. Hendrix agrees, describing how he has undergone a lot of this light-hearted teasing, especially when he was first learning ASL, and even nowadays, it still happens when he makes a mistake. "Not really 'pick on' in a mean way, not like that," he is quick to explain, imitating a playful punch, "[It's] more like friendly teasing."   Basically, when fluent signers do make mistakes, instead of facing criticism or negative judgment, the errors are quickly pointed out for everyone's amusement, and they all have a big laugh about it.

I am somewhat skeptical that none of the students ever feels stung by the others'
laughter. Roy insists that he never feels deflated by it; instead, he takes their corrections
in stride and laughs at himself. I, however, suspect that some signers—especially
fledging signers—might feel embarrassment or hurt feelings from their errors being
called out (but that is another research question for another day); in spite of my
misgivings, however, it seems safe to say that these students do not see the point of
passing judgment on others based on their signing style and/or mis-signs.[254] Snooki,
when talking about fluent and novice signers, had this to say:

> I don't care [about differences in signing styles or errors]. I mean, I
> understand that it's their way of signing. I'm not going to insult them or
> anything. I understand that it takes time [for novice signers] to learn, that
> it's a process before they become fluent. I was once like that, when I was
> three years old, and as I grew up, I became more fluent. It's just common
> sense, you know, accepting them.

The phrase that jumps out here is "it's their way of signing." For Snooki, it is absolutely
commonsense to simply accept others' ways of signing, even though it differs from her
own, especially in regards to novice signers. As we heard from Megan earlier, she thinks
she can't "put out a bad opinion" about people based on their signing. "It's just their
way," she says. And then Xina, as well:

> I would show them how to sign it correctly, but you know, sometimes it's
> just their way, how they sign. You can't force them to change that. You
> can ask them, show them the sign [the way you do it], but you have to
> respect how they sign, you can't force it on them.

Xina perceives excessive correcting of other people's errors (and style of signing, as
well), as "forcing" them to change. "It's their way," she insists (echoing Megan and
Snooki almost verbatim), and she thinks uninvited meddling in someone's way of signing
is a sign of disrespect. Moreover, Roy and King also point out that signs often vary from
state to state, so when a fluent signer uses a "wrong" sign, it might in fact not be a sign

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[254] I will reiterate my caveat from the methods chapter: these students' attitudes may very well reflect the
culture of their school. Students from other schools where deaf people might be less accepting towards
PSE, CASE, and SEE signers might be less likely to shrug off differences in signing styles as "everyone
has their own way of signing." The attitudes shown by the students in this study should not be taken as
representative of all deaf students in all deaf schools.

production error but yet another variation in the many ways that people might sign a certain word (in which case, they are eager to learn the new sign and add it to their repertoire of choices for that word).

J-Dawg and Dani also see excessive correcting of others' sign errors as something to go about cautiously. Dani says that she always makes a point of asking if the other signer wants help fixing their signs before she offers correction. If her offer is rejected, she lets it go. "It could be fine," she says unconcernedly, "as long—as long as you can understand them." J-Dawg expresses a very similar view, saying that he will sometimes let errors slide by unmentioned as long as the message is still clear enough. "It depends on them, really," he adds about novice signers, and especially hearing signers. "If they're having fun with the signs, you know, it's okay. If it's serious and I don't get it, then I will help. But if it's just having fun, then oh well. Whatever." His comment "whatever" reflects a fairly widespread attitude among the students of *it's good enough*: if it's understandable in spite of a few errors or sign variations, and if it's still clear, then it's no big deal. This sentiment might explain why the students put virtually no importance on syntax or other grammatical features of ASL (and, indeed, why they think grammar doesn't exist in ASL). Everyone does signs their own way, and if it's clear enough, then it's acceptable. Mistakes might or might not be corrected, but usually, nobody thinks the worse of anybody for making them. The important thing is that everyone is communicating easily with one another.

The (Apparent) Prescriptive Nature of English

The open-mindedness and permissiveness that these students show (and value) about language usage in ASL directly conflicts with the language culture of English, where correctness in grammar and word order are important for constructing meaning, and where a standard dialect exists and is strictly enforced, especially in print.[255] In fact, we do see some of the deaf students' linguistic permissiveness bleed over to their

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[255] A point of clarification: Even though many speakers of English are more permissive towards variation and rule-bending in spoken English, most still believe that the standard dialect is what English ought to look like in print, and are thus much less forgiving towards perceived "errors" and variations in written texts, particularly in academic and professional/workplace contexts. Many of the deaf students in this study do not have complete access to spoken English, so they are unaware of dialectal variations and the higher degree of flexibility that spoken English has compared to written English; instead, their experiences of English are mostly limited to what they experience in the written form of the language.

perception of English, resulting in at least two intriguing phenomena: (1) most of the deaf students do not realize that a fair number of English speakers pass judgment on people based on how they use language, and (2) many of the students feel like English is overly concerned with correctness and don't like the fact that their message is still not grammatically acceptable even though it seems to be "clear enough." I will discuss these two phenomena together because they are difficult to separate out and examine in isolation. They both hold profound implications for us as educators because they both seem to contribute to making several students feel even further alienated from print English; in fact, it may also drive them to prefer ASL even more than they already do.

Correctness in English: Tough Grammar and Problem-Solving

The students are very well aware that there is such a thing as "correctness" in English; in fact, they describe English as being "strict" and "tough" because it has so many rules that they need to follow. Terminology like "parts of speech," "predicates," "verb tenses," "prepositions," "nouns, verbs, and adjectives," "spelling," "word order," "grammar," and "vocabulary" pepper their comments about English. Even King, who has perhaps the weakest grasp of English compared to the other students, can talk in a vague way about grammar in English. "[My sentences] just are not right," he says. "Um, like, my words are out of order. Like, I write, 'I want,' but I put that at the end instead of the beginning of the sentence." Like King, many students can describe what they see in the language, and even name some rules, but when it comes to enacting these rules in their own writing, they struggle. King also mentions the present and past tenses, as do Megan, Dani, and Hendrix, probably because verb tenses and subject-verb agreement are common problem areas for deaf students in their writing.

Several students cite English as being too strict and complicated. Jayson complains that it has "grammar in it, and a whole bunch of stuff." To Jayson and many other students, English grammar is not a way of describing, understanding, and using the language; rather, it is a long list of rules that feel prescriptive and demanding to the students. Snooki explains: "English *must* have nouns, verbs, adjectives. You just have to have them." She then throws up her hands and says with a sassy look on her face, "I'm like, okay, sure. It doesn't make sense to me." The prescriptive nature of English is incomprehensible to her, and she feels alienated by it. Snooki's reaction is not

uncommon. Quite a few students, in spite of being able to bandy around grammatical terms like *past tense, adjective, parts of speech*, still felt deeply confused about what to do with these many complicated things that belong to English.

King admits that most of his sentences have at least one error in them, and on fixing them, he says:

> I change it because they tell me to change it. Sometimes, it is not a big deal, but often—I mean, the rules are very strict in English. When I finish writing something, there are lots of mistakes in my sentences, so they tell me I need to change it. If there are only one or two mistakes, they might leave it, but if there are lots, I have to change them.

King, with his uncomplaining personality, tends to do whatever his teachers ask him to do, but the fact that he is simply changing whatever they tell him to change shows that he really does not understand what he is doing or why. Nor does Auggins, who describes a sort of frenetic hunt for the correct way to express himself in English when trying to write back and forth with hearing people:

> If they read the sentence and don't get it, then I'll gesture it out. But sometimes, it happens that they don't understand, and I don't know [the word I want], so it's like, oh, great, we're stuck […] I'll try to find another word, another way to write it. If they still don't get it, I tell them to wait a second while I think of another word instead. Until we both go *aha!* and they finally understand. I mean, I keep trying word after word until they understand.

Basically, Auggins tries one word, or one way to write the sentence, and if it doesn't work, he tries again, and again, and again in his characteristic energetic fashion, until he succeeds (or until the hearing person gives up and walks away, which has happened on occasion). For Auggins, as for Snooki, King, and a few other students who struggle the most with English, there seems to not be much rhyme or reason to how English works, or if there *is*, then it is a complicated mystery that is beyond the students (which, as Lippi-Green points out, is a part of the language subordination process in which the preferred dialect is mystified and elevated to superior status).

All these students see in English are a series of prescriptive rules that they must follow, even though they are deeply uncertain about how to do so, which is reflected in the vocabulary they use to talk about English: it *must* have this and that, you *must* do this

184

or that, it *has to have* these things. They do not recognize that many of the grammatical terms they use to talk about English are actually *descriptive* labels (e.g. nouns, verbs, subjects, prepositions) used for all languages and not necessarily the *rules* that govern English usage. Nor do most of the students seem to be aware that within the constructs of standard English, there *is* room for some flexibility in syntax. To them, English is always rigid and prescriptive, with only one correct option: nowhere in their comments about English do we see the kinds of words they use to talk about ASL (e.g. flexible, fluid, free). Instead, the verbs *fix* and *memorize* came up frequently along with *need* and *must* in the context of English words and sentences. Xina, in particular, talks about "problem-solving" English; she goes in so much exacting detail that I had to condense her comments here for the sake of brevity, and to get to her point faster:

> Um, well, um, my reading-writing English is a struggle. A lot of practice over and over again. […] I have to take on the challenge of analyzing [the language] and talking about it, about how to problem-solve English, and, um, trying to better my skills. […] The more vocabulary I'm taught, the better. […] Then we write down the definitions and I memorize them.

We see the verbs *analyzing, problem-solving,* and *memorizing* pop up here; at another point in her interview, Xina expounds on the pitfalls of navigating the complex mazes of English: "There are misspellings, forgotten words, wrong words, or whopping-big words that go past your eyes and confuse you […] and then I have to analyze and problem-solve my—our—English writing, our sentences." For her, English is filled with many Potential Mistakes and Unknown Words that lurk about, waiting to trip her up; hence, the language becomes something that requires extensive analysis and problem-solving.

Auggins and Snooki, likewise, perceive English as a long, confusing march of learning vocabulary and syntax—a process that is extraordinarily difficult and baffling, as Snooki explains.

> Um, I always write my sentences in ASL form, not English. It's a habit of mine because I'm so used to ASL. Then they're like, change it to English. And I'm like, are you serious? I gotta do this? The rules are so strict for English. And I'm like, really? I used to think ASL was the same thing, but no, it has to be changed to English. Because it's a different language. When I learned that, I was like, ugh, you've gotta be kidding me.

Snooki's reluctance to change her sentences to English partly stems from her frustration with never being able to get her sentences correct, as evidenced when she later adds,

"Like in [my] paragraphs, there are lots of mistakes. Sometimes the words are switched around, in the wrong place. Some people get it exactly right, and some don't. Me, (scoffs), I don't. It's a big struggle." Somehow, some people get their sentences exactly right, but Snooki has no idea how they do it; all she knows is that she never does, and nor does Auggins. For students like them who struggle with English grammar, English appears to be a vastly complicated and strict behemoth that they cannot ever fully grasp or control; instead, they must struggle through it, negotiate it, problem-solve it, analyze it, and change, change, change their words over and over again.

They clearly know that English needs to have many things in it—and oftentimes in a certain order—before it is considered "correct." However, their attitude towards achieving that correctness is somewhat lackluster, as we already saw in Snooki's disdainful comments about English grammar ("Are you serious? I gotta change this?" and "Okay, sure. It doesn't make sense to me"). She just fixes her sentences because she is told to, not because she sees any value in correctness, as do King and Auggins. In fact, Auggins' goal is to get his message "clear enough" rather than getting the English correct; he doesn't think he ever does get it exactly right, but when he gets close enough, people will understand him. Roy, who has considerably stronger skills in print English than Auggins and Snooki, still gripes about the necessity of fixing his grammar because it runs counter to his desire to just communicate:

> Roy: Sometimes, some of my [hearing] friends will point [a mistake] out and explain to me why it's wrong, show me how to fix it. I'll be like, oh, thanks. But at the same time, I'd be a little annoyed, like, don't you do that again, so…[laughs].
> Q: Annoyed? Why?
> Roy: Because I don't like my grammar being corrected. Forget that. That's not important. The important thing is to communicate, to write with each other.

A few minutes later, Roy complains about the same thing again, wondering out loud why he should bother fixing his sentences if the hearing person had already understood him in the first place, errors or not. Here, he blatantly says that correct grammar is not important; instead, communication is key. Dani agrees with him, saying that people should try to understand the message and communicate with the deaf person instead of trying to fix their errors.

Roy and Dani—along with several other students—do not seem to distinguish between informal writing to communicate with hearing people and the more formal types of writing for their schoolwork. To them, writing is writing and English is English: no matter where they use it, they are often told to, as King puts it, "change, change, change" things. Such changes and fixes often seem trifling, even meaningless to the students, especially to those who do not understand the logic or rules behind the corrections. All they want to do is communicate, simply communicate; to this end, they feel that if, like in ASL, they express their message "clearly enough" in their writing, then it ought to be "good enough" to be acceptable (to use Roy and Snooki's words). As I will discuss in the next section, the belief that language and grammar should be permissive (like ASL apparently is, in the students' eyes) has a profound impact on how these students view English, hearing people, and language judgments concerning usage.

Not Aware of Hearing People Passing Judgment on Usage Errors

What Roy, Dani, and many of their peers do not seem to grasp here is how severely many hearing people will judge others based on how well they conform to standard English. I find it fascinating that even though all of the students know, at some level, that incorrect grammar and poor literacy skills are undesirable in the real world, many of them remain oblivious about how their character, their intellectual abilities, and even their personhoods will be judged in a negative light based on the grammatical errors they make. Most of them *are* aware that weak reading and writing skills will have consequences in the real world, as several students point out when they talk about the possibility of not being hired or getting fired if you can't read and write well (notably King, J-Dawg, Megan, and Dani), and Auggins emphasizes that it's because the boss wants you to write everything correctly so you can follow directions and do the job the way you are supposed to. Essentially, the students have bought into the language subordination model's promises of English, believing that better literacy skills will help them to be more successful in the workplace.

Even though the students believe English will benefit them in the workplace, it seems that many of them do not fully understand *why* such promises exist in the first place, as is made evident in the way many students speak as if the potential penalties for poor literacy skills never extend beyond workplace performance. According to Chris,

when hearing people sees a deaf person struggling with reading or making mistakes in their writing, then they would think that the deaf person needs to improve in English, but at the same time, he thinks they won't care. "They know that it's just the deaf person's personal way of doing it," he says. "They would just leave it." King insists that hearing people are "nice" about it. "They would point [the mistake] out and tell you how to fix it. Then it would be fine," he says, "They would not be annoyed by it. They're nice about helping you to fix it." Several students use the word "nice" to talk about how they expect hearing people to respond. Auggins, especially, describes himself as "a nice guy" when it comes to helping people with their ASL, and he expects that hearing people will reciprocate the feeling when he needs help with his English.

The phrase "deaf person's way" came up frequently, and for some students, the "deaf way of writing" seems to be closely associated with who they are as a person. Roy, Dani, and Bella assert that hearing people should be tolerant of deaf people's attempts to write in English—for them, it all comes down to respect. If the hearing person has any respect for the deaf person—or for deaf people in general—then the grammatical errors should not elicit any judgment from the hearing person. Roy and Dani, especially, don't think most hearing people pass judgment on deaf people because the hearing people know (or so Roy and Dani think) that it would be rude to do so.

> Q: Well, when that happens, if a deaf person writes a sentence and the hearing person sees that there are some grammar mistakes in it, something is wrong with the English sentence. What will the hearing person think when they see that?
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> Roy: They might not understand it, but I know they respect us because deaf people can't hear English, so, uh, most of my friends understand the deaf because they've experienced deaf kids mainstreaming at their school since, uh, long time ago, so they've seen it a lot. They don't think anything of it.

Roy's experiences with his hearing friends—who have had some exposure to deafness throughout their friendship—have been positive when it comes to their responses to his imperfect English writing. He thinks they don't think anything of it, and he generalizes this to hearing people in general, assuming that they all understand and respect deaf people the same way that his own friends do. Dani also expects that hearing people will know and understand why deaf people tend to struggle with English. "Probably—I expect—um, I hope and know that they'd probably be accepting and try to help [the deaf

person] because if they don't," Dani explains, "then they don't have any respect for deaf people."   She steadily asserts that she doesn't think hearing people judge deaf people for their weak English skills because they just know that it's the "deaf way," and to judge a deaf person for making a mistake would be to pass judgment on *all* deaf people, something that Dani finds inconceivable.

Interestingly, in spite of their own experiences in the past with unsuccessful attempts to communicate with hearing people by writing notes back and forth with them, situations in which the hearing person was visibly put off by the process, King and Auggins still do not attribute the hearing person's standoffish behavior to possible judgment of them or their weak English skills. Instead, they attribute it to the fact that the hearing person might have been rushed for time or that the hearing person had not had prior experience with a deaf person and thus felt awkward by the whole situation. Auggins explains it by talking about how employers might react to a deaf person's grammatical errors:

> Q: Okay. You said that the boss might go, "huh?" When you did that, you had this face expression with a frown. Why might the boss have that kind of facial expression?
> Auggins: Because he might not know the word I'm using, or he doesn't understand my sentence, so I have to change it somehow.
> Q: Okay. Are they generally nice about it, about those mistakes? Or do they seem annoyed by it?
> Auggins: Some—some—some of them seem a little bothered by it. But some of them seem pretty accepting about it.
> Q: Why do some respond one way and others a different way??
> Auggins: Some hearing people are just uncomfortable with deaf people. And some hearing people, some bosses, they can be comfortable around deaf people.
> Q: Are you saying that if they're uncomfortable with deaf people, then they might seem bothered by it, and if they're comfortable, they're more accepting?
> Auggins: Well, well, um, for example, the boss is usually hearing, and hearing people, when they talk with deaf, they can be comfortable communicating and working things out when we don't understand each other. Some bosses are not easy or comfortable with it. Some of them can be really strict.

Auggins clearly notices when hearing people seem ill at ease when they can't understand his English, but he attributes it to their discomfort around *deaf people*. He does not seem to have any idea that they might be put off by his incorrectly constructed sentences in

English, nor is he aware of how harshly many hearing people judge errors. Similarly, J-Dawg, DJ, and King all say that some hearing people might ignore deaf people if they can't understand them (which has happened to them on occasion), but they chalk it down to the hearing person being a rude person anyway, or perhaps just being pressed for time.

Snooki is probably the only one who expresses a sense of embarrassment about her low literacy skills, but her embarrassment stems from the knowledge that she is not at the same level as hearing people, a fact that she resents because she wants to be "equal with hearing" and prove that deaf people can do the same things they can do. In spite of herself, she sees hearing people as being above her because they can read and write English perfectly (which reveals yet again the extent these students subscribe to the language subordination model), and she struggles to reconcile this view with her instinctual belief that she is just as capable as anyone else. Knowing that her English is riddled with errors, Snooki is afraid to look "stupid" because she can't read, but yet she admits that "I really don't know" what hearing people might be thinking when they see her writing. King, Roy, Xina, and Reg also admit the same thing, saying that they have no idea what hearing people are thinking about these things. Reg shrugs it off, saying, "There are many different people out there, and each of them is different," so how can he be expected to know what they're thinking when they see a mistake in English?

In fact, most students in this study all assume that errors in English don't matter to hearing people. "The important thing is to be clear enough," Auggins says: as long as people can understand you, you will be able to communicate. Who, then, cares about whether your words might be out of order or whether you used the past tense incorrectly? Instead of asserting that grammar is important all of the time, Reg, a fluent reader and writer in English, says "If [grammar] helps people to understand you, then yes, it is important." For Roy, changing his mistakes in English seems silly sometimes because "the important thing is to communicate":

> Forget [grammar]. That's not important. The important thing is to communicate, to write with each other. Some of them will write back, try their best to understand what I said. They might write to ask what I meant, so I'll write it again, and we'll go back and forth.

Roy values communication—getting his message across—more than he does correctness. He sometimes gets frustrated when people correct his grammar because they already understand what he means, and he, along with other students, feel that hearing people should just respect "the deaf way."

Only Hendrix, Bella, and Megan—all of whom have enough hearing to be able to hear what people are actually saying in spoken English in addition to having stronger literacy skills—show any real awareness of what hearing people think when they see someone (deaf or not) with poor English grammar. "They'd look down on [the deaf person]," Hendrix says, "They'd think they're stupid people." He expects hearing people to be "perplexed" by the frequent errors and make judgmental comments like, "You go to school here?" Megan knows that hearing people do make fun of other hearing people for misspeaking and making errors in writing, and she thinks some of them might do the same towards deaf people; however, she thinks some of them won't be as judgmental because they don't want to be rude towards a deaf person. These students are much more aware of how hearing English speakers behave towards people who use English incorrectly or use non-standard English. They worry—and rightly so—that their deaf friends will be judged for English errors that they can't help making.

Coming from the more linguistically flexible and permissive culture of ASL (and especially with the leniency that novice signers are shown), many of the students expect hearing English speakers to be equally permissive, even to the point where it does not occur to these students that these speakers might, in fact, be passing judgment based on their failures to conform to standard English. Thus, when their teachers require them to correct their English sentences or to read paragraphs over and over again to tease out precise meanings, the students feel put off by the apparent tediousness and pointlessness of the exercise. In their eyes, ASL allows them many different ways to be correct, whereas in English with its prohibitive nature, there are countless ways to be wrong. This frustrates them to no end, because if the message was clear enough in the first place, then why should they expend extra energy and effort, especially with a language that they already find excessively hard?

Implications for Literacy/Conclusion

The data clearly indicates that these deaf students *do* find English hard, but its difficulty is not the only reason that they resist and struggle with learning it. These students have shown us that their views of English bleed over into the way they view ASL, and vice versa. And what is more, their conceptualizations of both languages are rife with misunderstandings and deeply-harbored feelings, which all come into play when teachers set them about the task of learning to read and write English, a task that many of them dread and resist. In these students, we see a complicated web of language subordination, resistance to that subordination, and misconceptions, all which are perpetuated by misunderstandings and ideologies about how each language works. Therein lies a paradox: even though the students view ASL as being "less" than English, instead of it leading to them seeing ASL as being weaker or less valuable, the students actually find ASL to be more freeing, fun, and flexible than English. Many of them still prefer (and treasure) ASL as the language they identify the most with.

This, combined with the more rigid, complicated, and difficult nature they perceive in English, leads to them disliking English even more, in spite of their acute awareness of the promises and threats associated with learning and failing to learn print literacy. What is deeply concerning is the fact that no matter how one slices it, many students—driven by their personal feelings or ideological stances, or both—end up resenting English and resisting it. As the phrase goes, "All roads lead to Rome," only in this case, all roads lead to the majority of these students disliking English. Further research needs to be done to explore why a few students (such as Hendrix, Bella, and Reg) who carry many of these ideologies somehow end up embracing and even enjoying print literacy more than the rest of their counterparts.

We, as educators, need to work towards a deeper understanding of what the students' linguistic experiences have been like as they grapple with two languages on a daily basis, one that many of them claim as their linguistic home and one that they find to be painstakingly complicated. For decades, teachers have tirelessly instructed deaf students in English grammar (as evidenced by the ways students in this study could tick off grammatical terms even if they did not quite understand what these terms meant), but perhaps we have failed to provide these students with the vocabulary to understand and

analyze the language that is the most comprehensible and accessible language for many of them (i.e. ASL). We need to find ways to correct the resultant misconceptions that they have constructed about ASL and its grammar, for these misunderstandings seem to be a major source of fuel for the antipathy that characterizes many students' attitudes towards print literacy.

Roy articulates better than I ever could how deeply ASL resonates with him and how deeply he—and I suspect other students, as well, even though they do not articulate it—resists the ways that people (including him and other deaf students) subordinate ASL, and yearns for equal status and validation of ASL as a part of who he is and as a part of his learning process. During his interview, Roy spoke of wanting to be able to take ASL classes, and the conversation unfolded as follows (note the language with which he refers to ASL and to English):

Q: Why?
Roy: Because, um, ASL is a more fun activity for the deaf, and so they don't have to keep focusing on the negatives with English. They can jump from one language to the other, back and forth. Kind of balancing it all. Maybe one day, it'd be ASL class, and the next day, it'd be English, they could put up with it and get through it until the next day when they could go back to ASL class and kick back to enjoy it. It's more like, for English—for hearing people, English is a piece of cake. They would struggle with ASL if they had to take a class. They'd go back and forth, and, um, uh, I think that would be fair, so…I should, we should be able to move back and forth between the two because, in the same way that English is so easy for hearing people, ASL is easy for us. So we'll have that, too, there's a benefit in that.
Q: Okay. Um, but some people might say, "But I already know how to sign. What do I have to take ASL classes for?" What would you say to that?
Roy: Well, I'd tell them that it's more fun, more enjoyable than English. You wouldn't have to pretend that you know what's going on and avoid it. I mean, if you feel like you know it all and don't want to take an ASL class, then fine, just stick with English and struggle with it for the rest of your life. Go ahead.
Q: So it's up to them, huh?
Roy: Yeah. And while you're at that, I'll be enjoying myself in ASL class.

Clearly, Roy is laboring under the delusion that an ASL class would be very easy (because the language is simpler and has vastly fewer rules, so he thinks) and that it would be purely an entertaining escape from the drudgery of his English classes. I suspect he would be very surprised to discover how complicated ASL grammar actually is, even for native signers; nonetheless, he does make a valid point about wanting—and needing—an intellectual space in where his stronger (and preferred) language is recognized, cultivated, and respected at the same level that English is.

I will close with pointing out that if it is true that using ASL comes more easily to these students, if it is true that they feel they understand ASL better, if it is true that they feel the most ownership in ASL, and if it is true that ASL is the language they are the most fluent in, then it all stands to reason that we should actively pursue ways to take advantage of and build upon the language knowledge that these students *do* have in their first (or preferred) language. And what is more, we need to work towards helping these students improve their grammatical knowledge of both ASL and English so that they can better negotiate the different linguistic cultures of the two languages. If this is achieved, then it is possible that these students will not only gain a better understanding of their own preferred language but also, importantly, they will no longer misperceive and unnecessarily resent English for being too complex and too strict.

Chapter 6
Opening up Story-Worlds to Struggling Readers:
The ASL Translation Unit in the Classroom

Introduction

"But now, reading…I like it because I feel smart, and I can do things. I'm opening up to new worlds, kind of. Like, reading…it's, uh, uh, it's just a weird feeling, like, you're not worried about anything. You just sit and, uh, think of your own world, like, you can picture yourself in the book."
-- Bella

"I like reading because it's a way to let my imagination run wild […] Sometimes imagination is more real than real life."
-- Reg

Bella and Reg, both of whom are avid readers, know very well the power of reading and are well acquainted with the extraordinary ability that literature has to transport readers to different worlds. When they read, they immerse themselves in the story-world—even to the point of imagining themselves in the book. For them, reading is "much more than words on the page," as Wilhelm puts it when describing strong readers: "The books were suggestions, maps to be consulted, edited, deviated from. For [strong readers], a book was a promise, and reading was an experiential fulfillment of the promise."[256] Rosenblatt calls this a "lived-through event" in which the reader and the text come together to forge a meaningful experience.[257] She argues that through literature, "readers seek to participate in another's vision—to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible."[258] Reg and Bella clearly see books as windows into other worlds; when they read stories, they do not read merely to decode the words on the page but

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[256] Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *You Gotta BE the Book.* 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 6.
[257] Rosenblatt, Louise M. "From Literature as Exploration and the Reader, the Text, the Poem." *Voices from the Middle* 12, no. 3 (2005), 27.
[258] Ibid., 27.

rather, they read to evoke and participate in the story-world—a powerful experience they eagerly return to time and time again.

The five students in Eva's third-period English/Language Arts class, however, struggle with basic reading comprehension and have rarely—if ever—experienced the "empowering" and "emancipating" power of literature (to use Wilhelm's adjectives).[259] With reading levels ranging from 1st grade to 6th grade, these high school students' reading experiences have consisted largely of children's picture books and basal readers—texts that they read purely for the sake of completing their assignments. Even with the "basic kiddie books," as Snooki scornfully refers to them, she and her classmates still find reading a difficult and meaningless process. "Forget it," says DJ. "It's not worth it. Boring!" His classmates echo his sentiment, admitting that they avoid reading as much as they can.

When these students received access to high school-level literature via the ASL translations in this study, they experienced for the first time the power of literature to "disturb," "engage," and "affect us viscerally," as Jago puts it.[260] What is more, several of them also began to realize what reading *could* be, that it could mean something far more than deciphering words on the page (even though they may not have realized that what they were doing at the time was actually a part of what "reading" is). The students spoke often and at length about how "fun" the translated stories were, how the stories "felt easy" to them, and how they all thoroughly enjoyed doing their final project related to the translations.

At first glance, these comments seem straightforward—the kinds of comments that teenagers might make about a new and interesting experience they've just had. It is very possible that they were simply excited about a novelty that broke up the daily routine of their English class, so they perceived the translations as more fun than it perhaps would have been if the experience had not been so unique. This could possibly be a part of it; however, I would argue that it is something far more than that, because the translations were anything but "easy" for these students. The two stories ("The Tell-Tale

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[259] Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 198.

[260] Jago, Carol. *With Rigor for All: Teaching the Classics to Contemporary Students* (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 2000), 12.

Heart" and "Harrison Bergeron") both deal with complex and difficult themes like human choice, individual freedom, evil, murder, guilt, justice, and mental illness, to name a few. Both stories resist simple interpretations; in order to fully understand them, readers have to not only follow the plotline but also engage in complicated assessments of various characters and their motives. These stories, as all good literature does, "force readers to examine the lives of others objectively from the inside out [and] educates our imaginations by engaging our emotions in powerful stories." [261] In short, they are not texts that can be easily unpacked in one quick read; rather, they require close, analytical reading.

What is more, the final project that the students were required to complete for the translation unit was challenging because it asked them to analyze the text and present evidence for an argument in response to an open-ended prompt, something that none of them had ever done before. Eva, their teacher, reported that all of the students were initially confused during the beginning stages of the project because they had never done the kinds of analytical moves that this project was asking of them. It took exhaustive explaining and re-explaining on Eva's part before the students understood what they needed to do. In spite of all the frustrating roadblocks, however, at the end of the project, the students uniformly spoke of it—and the translation unit as a whole—as being "fun" and "easy."

Clearly, the work *was* challenging for these students; it is intriguing that the students did not find the challenge to be a turn-off as they do the challenge of reading in English. It may have been a "fun" challenge, but "easy"? When we dig deeper into what the students actually *mean* by the words "fun" and "easy" as they talk about various aspects of their experience, we find that the ASL translations did far more than simply give them access to the stories in a way that was, indeed, easier for them. This is a crucial point, indeed, but two other equally important points also arise. First, the translations allowed the students to experience the power of literature and engage in reading for purposes beyond basic comprehension. Second, the translations made the texts available to the students in their own *preferred* language (or native language, in the cases of Snooki

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[261] Ibid., 12.

and King). In doing so, the translations allowed the students to play to their linguistic strengths while engaging in a variety of sophisticated reading practices, *in their stronger language,* in ways that they cannot yet do with print English. Not only this, but the translations also tapped into a vital part the students' linguistic identities, which provided them with a sense of validation about their language and literacy practices, and such validation is, as we will see, empowering and highly motivating for these students who struggle with reading in English.

Student Attitudes Towards Print Literacy

Before I discuss the effects of using ASL translations in the classroom, I will first provide an overview of the students in Eva's third period high school English class. As shown in the following table, these students are very much considered "struggling" readers—that is, their reading levels are at least several grades behind:

Table 6-1: Students in Eva's Third Period English Class

Student	Age	Hearing Level	Reading Level (English)[262]	Conversational Fluency in ASL[263]
Chris	16	Hard-of-Hearing	5th-6th Grade	3.0
DJ	15	Hard-of-Hearing	2nd-3rd Grade	2.0
King	15	Deaf	1st-2nd grade	5.0
Jayson	15	Hard-of-Hearing	3rd-4th grade	3.5
Snooki	18	Deaf	3rd-4th grade	5.0

This is a challenging combination for any teacher to handle, not only because these students struggle with reading but also because they do not all read at the same levels, which means that their vocabulary needs differ, as do their independence levels for reading texts. Thus, Eva must differentiate her instruction to accommodate the range of literacy abilities in her class, even to the point of assigning texts on the same topic that

[262] Reading level as reported by their teacher Eva and also based on the school's annual print literacy assessment of the student.
[263] Conversational fluency in ASL is presented on a rating of 1 to 5, with 5 being native-like fluency; ratings are the average of my own scoring and the scoring of an impartial third-party professional sign language evaluator, using standards from the Sign Language Proficiency Inventory examination. For more on this, see the Chapter Three: Methods.

are at least three different readability levels (roughly, 5th-6th grade, 3rd-4th grade, and 1st-2nd grade) in order to meet the students' individual needs. This translates into basically preparing for two or three different classes in one, and this also means that even though the students often do read about the same *topic* (such as about Renaissance-era explorers like Ferdinand Magellan or Christopher Columbus, for example), it is rare for them to all read, work from, or discuss the same *texts* as a class. Additionally, because fictional works (novels, short stories, poems, and so forth) rarely have the exact same stories available at such differentiated levels, these students usually read completely different literature books from one another.

On top of these differentiation challenges, Eva must also deal with the students' attitudes towards reading and writing, which are, at the very best, ambivalent, and at the worst, unwaveringly hostile. As I have discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the students expressed views of the English language as being complicated, hard, and even impossible for them to navigate. Here in this section, I will—as best as I can, given the interconnected nature of language—focus exclusively on the responses from Eva's students when they were asked specifically about reading, writing, and/or their English class. It is important to note that regardless of their attitudes about reading, all of the students speak of reading as if its ultimate goal is to decode what is printed on the page so that they can answer questions about the text.

At Worst: Hostile towards Reading

None of these five students enjoys reading. Far from it. Not even the hard-of-hearing students, whom some people might assume would have an easier time at it because they already have fairly good grasp of spoken English and more access to English vocabulary via auditory input compared to the profoundly deaf students. In fact, most of the students in this class (regardless of their hearing level) report feeling intense dislike—and even hatred—towards reading and writing. DJ, for example, has no qualms about calling it as he sees it:

> Q: Do you like reading and writing at all?
> DJ: (shakes head 'no' firmly)
> Q: Why not?
> DJ: It's boring.
> Q: Okay. Is it hard for you at all?

DJ: No, it's just flat-out boring. Not fun at all.
Q: Not fun, okay.
DJ: It's not—I'm, uh, just not really into—into (struggles with the sign) reading and writing.
Q: You are not into it (supplies sign), okay.
DJ: Yeah, I'm just not into that stuff (uses sign correctly).

Even though he uses spoken English fairly well, DJ finds reading "not worth it"; indeed, he struggles with it so much that he estimates he understands only about 10% of what he reads. If he is missing 90% of the information on the page, it is doubtful he can make much sense out of what he reads, so it is not surprising that he perceives it as being boring and pointless, and especially so because it's something he admits that he only does because his English teacher requires him to.

Like his classmate, King misses a lot of the information on the page, but he explains it this way: "I always forget stuff when I read." Upon being asked if he actually understands the words, King steadily asserts that he gets "most of it," even when it is obvious (from classroom observation videos, class discussions, oral and written assignments, and Eva's observations) that he has missed, not forgotten, most of the information he read. At first, King claims that he doesn't mind reading even though it is hard for him and, with his eager-to-please personality, he is generally willing to go along with whatever work the teacher asks him to do. He will rarely admit it—to the teacher or to any authority figure—when he is confused or bored or disliking his assigned work. Interestingly, it is not until *after* the ASL translation unit that King finally reveals his true feelings about reading, bluntly disparaging the English text and expressing a strong preference for the ASL because he understands it in more detail: "Forget the English, I don't need the English. I hate reading; I don't understand it." Perhaps at that time, he finally felt open enough with me (the interviewer) to express his honest feelings, or perhaps when he saw the translations, he realized just how much detail he had been missing all along in the English. I discuss this reaction in more depth at a later point in this chapter.

Snooki is much less tactful than King, and perhaps more honest (or more aware) than King is about how much she does not understand when she reads, as she explains:

[Reading] is a big struggle all the time. It's hard. I try and try, but it's frustrating. Very frustrating. When I look at it, it just all goes way over my

head. I struggle with it, I really do. It's just so hard for me. It's
exasperating. I'll be honest: I hate reading, I do. I despise it. Ugh.

Like DJ, Snooki finds the words on the page overwhelmingly incomprehensible. Most of
it goes over her head, which exasperates her because she can't make any sense of it no
matter how hard she tries; because she believes basic comprehension to be the ultimate
goal of reading, she perceives that she has failed at this simple task. And then, when
asked about the kinds of things she reads (under compulsion from school), Snooki's
embarrassed laugh speaks volumes about her feelings of shame and repulsion towards
print literacy:

> Q: What kinds of things do you usually pick to read [for reading
>   homework]?
> Snooki: The basic stuff, um, it's easier for me.
> Q: What kinds of books, topics?
> Snooki: Well… (laughs embarrassedly) It's kids' books.
> Q: Kids' books, okay. The thin ones?
> Snooki: Yeah.
> Q: Do you enjoy them or…
> Snooki: No. I just don't like to read!
> Q: Why not?
> Snooki: It bores me! I prefer to use ASL, not to read. It's read, read,
>   read, all the time. But I need it for my future, so, ugh.

Snooki certainly minces no words when describing her feelings towards reading.
Conflicted between her negative feelings and the knowledge that she will need stronger
print literacy skills after graduating, Snooki is embarrassed about how low her English
levels are. At the same time, however, her feelings towards print literacy are so negative
that she finds even just trying to be painful and frustrating.

At Best: Ambivalent towards Reading

Neither Chris nor Jayson *enjoys* reading, but they express somewhat more
ambivalent attitudes towards print literacy compared to their classmates. Chris, who is the
strongest reader in the class, finds books to be boring and unappealing, as he does school
in general. "I always fall asleep in English class," Chris says (the classroom observation
videos bear the truth of this statement), and of reading and writing specifically, he has
never enjoyed either. However, he admits that back when he was enrolled in public
school (during his elementary years), he didn't mind the hands-on activities that his

Language Arts class did. Now that he is older, however, such classes have become more reading-heavy and less "play" ("It's all book reports now," he grumbles), which has turned him off altogether. He will, however, occasionally read comic books in his free time, and finds them "fun," which suggests to me that with the aid of comic book pictures, he is more able to envision the story-world to some degree—at least enough to enjoy the experience (but this is an area that needs to be explored further). Anything other than comic books elicits disdainful grunts and a stonewalled mask of bored apathy from him.

Jayson also finds pleasure in *some* types of reading. Upon being asked point-blank about it, Jayson will insist that he doesn't like to read, for much the same reasons as DJ does ("not fun" and "boring"). But at one point in his interview, Jayson backtracks and concedes that he doesn't mind reading…maybe… sometimes:

> Jayson: Reading? Well, it depends.
> Q: On what?
> Jayson: On what level it is at.
> Q: So what do you like to read?
> Jayson: Stuff about motorcycles, racing, boxing, um, drag racing, stuff I
>   like to do.
> Q: You mean, like magazines on those topics?
> Jayson: Sure, magazines. Books. Anything related to those things.
> Q: What *don't* you like to read?
> Jayson: Everything but stuff about motorcycles, racing, um, those things
>   (laughs).
> Q: How much do you usually read in one week?
> Jayson: I never do. Unless I have to.

Here, we see that Jayson admits he likes reading a variety of texts, but only the ones that are related to topics that interest him. However, Jayson still never reads of his own volition (which Chris will do, sometimes). If he is required to read for coursework, Jayson will, more or less willingly, pick something from his preferred topics list so that he can answer the teacher's questions. Aside from this, he rarely picks up any text whatsoever, and he has never enjoyed writing, either—in fact, he dislikes it even worse than he does reading, as do all of his fellow classmates.

Reading: Over My Head, Missing Information

"It's hard." Each student reiterates this point one way or another in their interviews (sometimes almost echoing one another verbatim). One of their biggest explanations for why they find reading so difficult is simply the fact that, as DJ pointed out earlier, they miss a lot of information when they read. This is concerning, and rightly so, but what is also worrisome is how the students' comments reveal a disturbing attitude of acceptance towards living in a perpetual state of not knowing. They miss so much information on the page, but instead of feeling compelled to get help or to find out what they're missing, they simply shrug it off. "[Reading] makes me tired," DJ says disdainfully, pantomiming himself reading a book and falling asleep into it, and then concluding, "Yeah, forget it. Not worth it. Boring." He finds it a pointless exercise in skimming through words on the page, as does Snooki, who repeatedly complains that reading always goes "way above my head" and disdainfully asks, "What's the point?" Faced with a seeming insurmountable amount of things they cannot understand, they see little point in trying to figure it out; or, perhaps, they do not have enough pieces to even know where to begin.

King agrees with DJ and Snooki, and he offers a narrative that starkly illustrates how this throw-in-the-towel attitude towards print literacy can bleed over into the students' non-school-related reading and writing experiences:

> Q: Do hearing people usually understand you when you write back and
>   forth with them?
> King: Yeah. Most of the time. But sometimes, they write a really long
>   word, and I don't know it. I see a whopping-big word, and I don't
>   understand.
> Q: What do you do if that happens?
> King: I'll point to the word and gesture that I don't understand it. But
>   they can't sign, so, um, usually they just say, "Forget it," so we let
>   it drop.
> Q: Just forget it?
> King: Yeah. They can't explain it to me. They don't sign. So we just
>   forget it. (shrugs)
> Q: Do they try to explain it?
> King: No, not really. Like, if I'm in the store, and I can't understand
>   what they write, they're like, "Oh, forget it, don't worry about it."
>   I'm like, okay, so I just leave or whatever. (shrugs)
> Q: So they write back and forth with you until you don't understand
>   something, and then they say, "forget it?"

King: Yeah, exactly.
Q: Okay.
King: Especially if there is a line of people waiting in the store, they just
        say, "Forget it," because they don't want it to take a long time.
Q: Ok, how do you feel when that happens?
King: It's okay. I understand why they do it. I just leave.
Q: But you still don't understand what was written to you?
King: No, no. Sometimes there is a person who knows a little bit of sign,
        so that helps. But if there isn't, then no, I don't understand it.

King, with a perfectly matter-of-fact attitude, and as if it were the most normal thing in the world, accepts *not knowing*, and willingly stays in a state of *not understanding*. For him, it is "normal" to not know what hearing people are trying to say to him in writing (or, indeed, in speech, which King rarely understands at any time or in any place), so if he can't figure out the written message after one attempt to clarify, he lets it drop: "Forget it." He will simply walk away from the conversation, not knowing what has just happened, nor does he know whether he has missed out on vital information.

Most deaf people—myself included—can relate with King's experiences of walking away from a *spoken* conversation not knowing what the hearing person was trying to say, perhaps because they were difficult to lip-read, or because they wouldn't write down their message, or because they were not patient enough to repeat themselves. However, it is deeply concerning that King will fairly quickly give up on a *written* conversation without knowing what was just said. For him—and Snooki and DJ, as well—they have a lifetime of acclimation to the fact that they don't usually understand most of the words on the page, and now they seem to have accepted *not knowing* as their normal state of being when it comes to anything print literacy-related.

Closing Thoughts on Eva's Students

All in all, the five students in Eva's class are people who rarely pick up any type of text (whether it be a book, a magazine, a blog, a newspaper, and so forth) unless an outside force (e.g. a teacher) compels them to do so. Even though these students all readily acknowledge that reading and writing are important for the workforce and for college, none of them expresses much motivation about improving their print literacy skills, not even if it might help them in their day-to-day interactions with hearing people.

Chris apathetically shrugs off the idea, saying, "Nah. Not really. I don't need to [work at it]. I already know enough." Snooki, as we have already seen, knows she needs to improve; as such, she is the only student in this class who consistently turns in all of her work on time.

In spite of her excellent work ethic, Snooki admits that for her, the schoolwork is not about actually improving her skills. "What I see in print usually doesn't stick with me," she says, nor does she try very hard to make it stick beyond quickly memorizing things for tests and then forgetting them afterwards, which underscores the reductive view she and her classmates have of what the purpose of reading is: simply to figure out what the words say and remember them well enough to pass the test. Snooki's conscientiousness as a student is more about getting everything done so she can graduate. "I don't enjoy it, I don't enjoy the [English] class, I don't care about school," she explains, "But I have to take it seriously and stay caught up with everything." In her view, she engages with print literacy in her classes because it's a school thing that she is required to complete, so she gets the assignments done, but with minimal effort, little investment, and (in her view) virtually no payoff in personal improvement.

The rest of her classmates also acknowledge that they need to improve in reading and writing, but are much less diligent about staying on top of their English class assignments. "I don't really do any of the work," DJ says. "I'm just like, 'Yeah, sure, cool, whatever.' And I blow it off." The others are not quite as dismissive as DJ is, but they all more or less express sentiments of "going through the motions" to get through their English classes. Chris is routinely late with turning in multiple assignments, as are Jayson, King, and DJ, who generally avoid doing the work because, as Jayson puts it, "there's too much reading and writing in all of them." King, ever the diplomat, insists that he enjoys Eva's class even though he admits—in the same breath, what's more—that he finds most of the work hard, uninteresting, and not fun.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, an ASL sign that many students in this study use to describe English class (and also reading and writing) is "SUFFER," and all of Eva's students use this word to describe their experiences with reading and writing in English. Snooki, in particular, is very vehement in her negative inflection of the "SUFFER" sign, as is King. The other adjectives Eva's students use to describe reading are similarly

negative: boring, stupid, frustrating, impossible. As Wilhelm sagely observes about the importance of the reader's personal involvement and imaginative evocation of a text:

> This experience is the purpose of 'aesthetic,' or literary reading, and is a prerequisite to any interpretation and reflection upon that world. Without such an evocation, there is no experience, and therefore nothing to think about. Reading, in [a student in Wilhelm's study]'s words, *must indeed be impossibly "stupid" for those readers* who do not know how to evoke and enter a secondary world.[264]

Indeed, Snooki, Jayson, DJ, King, and Chris, unable to fully comprehend what they read, are unable to enter—or even conceive of—the possible story-worlds offered within the texts, so the reading experience for them is not rich or imaginative or immersive but rather a pointless and tedious schoolish exercise that they must 'SUFFER' through.

Translations: Evoking the Story-Worlds

For these students—who have never encountered high school-level literature before—the "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "Harrison Bergeron" translations opened them up to a world of knowledge and experience that their low print literacy levels had previously barred them from. Several of them, for the first time, found themselves immersed in a story-world as a result of an assigned reading and, instead of reading just to find the answers, they were able to engage in more sophisticated reading practices for other purposes— including enjoyment. Reading to connect with a text and evoke a story-world is a complex process, as Rosenblatt reminds us:

> As the reader submits himself to the guidance of the text, he must engage in a most demanding kind of activity. Out of his past experience, he must select appropriate responses to the individual words; he must sense their interplay on one another; he must respond to clues of tone and attitude and movement. He must focus his attention on what he is structuring through these means. He must try to see it as an organized whole, its parts interrelated as fully as the text and his own capacities permit. From sound and rhythm and image and idea he forges an experience, a synthesis, that he calls the poem or play or novel. [265]

For Eva's students, the translations made it possible for the text to become more than just words; instead, the words were ASL words were ones they could understand, respond to,

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[264] Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 132, italics added.

[265] Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration,* 27.

and visualize in order to forge a meaningful literary experience. When this happened, the students found themselves *enjoying* the stories, a sentiment most of them had never associated with English classes and/or with reading.

The ways that King and Snooki, in particular, describe their experiences are reminiscent of how avid readers describe the sensation of getting immersed in a good book, which suggests that they were actively evoking the story-world in their heads in ways they had never done before with print texts. "I was totally fascinated the whole time," King recounts of watching *Harrison Bergeron* for the first time in class:

> King: Like, I couldn't move while I was watching it. I just sat there, lost in the story, like I was frozen. When it stopped, when we were finished, I was tired and kind of in a daze when I got up and left.
> Q: So you really got into it?
> King: Yeah, in my mind, I saved it up to remember later, all of it. I memorized how it was signed.
> Q: Why were you so into it?
> King: It was the ASL. The signing lasted so long, um, it was, uh, uh, like a play. Yeah, it was exactly like that, the exact same. I watched it and was mesmerized by it.

And Snooki, who perhaps expressed the most animosity towards reading in English, echoes King's description of getting lost in the story, saying, "Oh, I was hooked. I couldn't stop watching. I loved the one with the guy and the Tell-Tale heart […] Oh, yeah, I was spellbound watching it." After a moment of contemplation, she laughed and added, "Wow." Comments like this from the student who used words like *despise, hate, exasperating* to describe reading in English show the powerful effects that simply having access to the stories in their native language can have on the students' experiences with the literature. The phrases that King and Snooki use here (e.g. *mesmerized, spellbound, frozen, couldn't stop watching, lost in the story)* suggest that they may have undergone some form of Csíkszentmihályi's concept of "flow"[266]—that is, getting so absorbed in a pleasurable activity (in this case, a story translated into ASL) that they lose track of time, space, and self, even to the point of leaving the room in a daze after the story ended. The

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[266] Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: Studies in Enjoyment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1974. See also Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.

translations had transported them to another world for a short space of time, and they were blown away by the experience.

Although the other students didn't describe themselves being as deeply affected as Snooki and King do, they still made it clear that they found the experience entertaining and meaningful. "I thought [the stories] were both fun," Jayson says, and he goes on to explain that he liked watching all of the action—the facial expressions, the personification, and the depiction—in the translations. According to him, the ASL "makes it all more interesting and more fun, instead of the same old stuff." The "fun" he sees in the translations may stem from the fact that he was able to better visualize the story and participate more fully in the meaning-making process that reading is when the stories were in ASL—that is, he was able to engage with the stories more fully, deeply, and purposefully.

Chris, too, found the ASL translations to be more meaningful than reading print words. In spite of his nonchalant tough guy act (in which he never admits it when he likes something), Chris concedes about the translations, "They were better, because it's like someone is telling the story to your face." Later, he tries to explain his thoughts again: "It's all acted out in front of you on the video. There's action. Like, drama and role-playing. You aren't just reading a piece of paper." In fact, Chris sees the ASL videos as being very similar to the comic books that he sometimes likes to read, insofar as the fact that all of the action is laid out there for him to see, which helps him to evoke the story-world in ways he is not able to with plain print text.

"I prefer *seeing* it," he concludes, "The ASL was way better. It was more entertaining." The verb Chris uses here is important: *seeing*. I suspect that it is not merely seeing the pictures (in comic books) or the moving panorama of signs (in the translations) that makes the story enjoyable for Chris; rather, he is able to see the symbols and interpret them in such a way that he can *see* the story in his head, and that makes it entertaining for him. If he were not evoking the story-world in his head to some degree, he would not enjoy reading his comic books or the ASL translations, for they all consist of abstract symbols that require active, meaning-making interpretations on his part as a reader.

In these students, we see how having access to the stories in ASL—perhaps from the fact that they did not have to struggle to understand it or from the fact that they identify more with ASL than they do with English, or a little bit of both—rendered the literary experience as being far more enjoyable and meaningful for the students than reading an English text. DJ, however, had the most ambivalent emotional reaction to the translations. While he says that he "liked" watching the videos, DJ still insists that he prefers reading the English (which, if you recall, he understands only 10% of when he reads):

Q: Why?
DJ: Because, um, it's faster to just read it instead of having to watch the video. Your eyes can move faster through the text. It takes a long time to watch it being signed out.
Q: Yeah, you can't really hurry a video along, can you?
DJ: (laughs) Yeah, and this [indicates print text], you can just look through it really fast if you wanted to.

"You can just look through [the text] really fast if you wanted to." Translation: He can skim through the print text quickly (perhaps looking only at the 10% of words that he does understand) and then feel like he is done and call it a day, even though he has no idea what he just "read." DJ clearly views "reading" as something to be gotten through as quickly as possible so he can say he has finished it—regardless of whether he got anything out of the experience or not.

Because the ASL translations were in video form, DJ had no choice but to watch all of the details in the story as the video played out, so he prefers "reading" the print instead because he can just rush through it without needing to understand anything. In spite of this perceived "drawback," though, DJ's enjoyment of the ASL stories bleeds through in his other comments, especially when he admits that "watching the video helps more than reading [print] does" for his comprehension, and insists that English teachers should bring many more ASL videos into the classroom. "You can just kick back and relax," he explains when asked why he thinks ASL videos are more fun even though he says he prefers to "read" the English: "Instead of just staring at a page and nodding off, you can lean back and just watch."

All of the students, at one time or other, mentioned how they especially appreciated various aspects of signers' facial expressions, use of visual vernacular, use of

classifiers, and so forth in the translated stories. However, for nearly all of them, one of their foremost reactions was to comment on how "clear" and "understandable" the translations were. In fact, Chris insistently maintains that the ASL stories just had to be somehow shorter than the print stories because they were so much less work for him to understand. "That video did all of this [*the six pages of Tell-Tale Heart*] in, like, four minutes," he says skeptically. (For the record, it was twelve minutes long, but the fact that he felt like it was only four minutes is probably a good indicator that he was very much immersed in the story.) Chris finds that the ASL videos are more than just something "fun" and "easier" than reading a book—they are, in fact, beneficial to him for his own comprehension:

> Q: So are you saying that you think they [your classmates] wouldn't
>   understand it as well if the ASL were not in it, too?
> Chris: I think they would understand it, but (pauses) I think having the
>   signing will help them understand it in full.
> Q: Okay. Does having the ASL help *you* to understand it more in full, or
>   is it just something you enjoyed watching?
> Chris: Oh, it's both.

This is an interesting response because Chris, as the strongest reader in the class and as a student who says he prefers to use speech, still found that the videos helped him to understand the story "in full," and he enjoyed it. But what precisely does he mean by the phrase "understand in full?" He could be referring to a literal understanding of the words on the page, but because Chris is already able to achieve this type of surface-level comprehension with most things he reads, I wonder whether by "understand," Chris is also referring to being able to engage with a story imaginatively and aesthetically in a way that he does not with print words. This suggests that he finds something more in the ASL translations that he does not in the print text, and this *something more* renders the reading experience more meaningful and powerful for him.

For Snooki, the translations were so much easier for her to understand that her initial reaction was, "Wow." Upon being asked to elaborate on that, she explains:

> Because it's concise and clear in ASL. I'd understand it. With reading, I
> don't even understand what they're talking about. But when I see it in
> ASL, I can understand what they're talking about with no problems. I
> know what they're saying.

Having the ASL translations make it possible for Snooki to comprehend the story easily, without sweat or frustration or ego bashing (ego-bashing will be discussed in the next section). Clearly, for this group of struggling readers, the ASL translations provided unrestricted access to the English text, and when the students could comprehend the story "with no problems," as Snook put it, they found themselves—in spite of disliking English class and in spite of the fact that their teacher presented the translations in class as a part of their English coursework—enjoying the stories immensely. The translations opened these students up to new kinds of reading that they had not done previously in their English classes, and by having the stories in their stronger language, the students were able to go far beyond merely deciphering words on the page to actually *reading* the stories in the same imaginative, evocative ways that strong readers do.

This brings to mind Scribner's three metaphors of literacy: literacy-as-adaption, literacy-as-power, and literacy-as-a-state-of-grace. Briefly, literacy-as-adaption and literacy-as-power focus, respectively, on the pragmatic (i.e. functional) aspect of literacy and the relationship between literacy and societal/community achievement. Eva's students have already experienced variations of these two aspects of literacy as they negotiate learning basic print literacy skills and the ways their weak print literacy skills affect how they function and advance in a society that consists of mostly hearing English speakers. However, they have not fully experienced the third aspect of literacy—literacy-as-a-state-of-grace—which Scribner describes as being (and being recognized as) a "cultured" or "literate" individual who derives deep, meaningful pleasure from the "intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual participation in the accumulated creations and knowledge of humankind, made available through the written word."[267] For Eva's students, this third state of literacy does not (yet) happen with print English, so they have never experienced literacy as a state of grace. However, through the ASL translations, they were able to more fully partake in two stories that are very much a part of the accumulated knowledge of humankind, and they found it to be an immensely enjoyable intellectual and aesthetic experience.

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[267] Scribner, Sylvia. "Literacy in Three Metaphors." *American Journal of Education* 93, no. 1 (1984): 14.

Impact on Motivation and Confidence

Being able to really *read* the stories—that is, being able to not only comprehend the stories but also evoke the story-world in their mind's eye—made the reading process feel infinitely easier and more enjoyable for the students. This, in turn, led to them experiencing a boost in their self-confidence when it came to doing the coursework related to the stories. With print texts, most of the students typically shirk their assignments, finding the reading difficult and overwhelming. Some students, like Snooki, feel embarrassed by being unable to handle "kiddie" books on their own, which deals a blow to their self-esteem as high school teenagers—both because they are stuck with the childish picture books and because they *still* can't read those picture books well. In contrast, with the translations, the students repeatedly speak of them and the accompanying coursework as being "fun" and "easy," but as I have already pointed out, the coursework was actually rather challenging.

The key here, however, is that the work *felt* fun and easy for the students. This suggests that having the text available in their preferred language made them feel empowered and in control of the content in a way that they had not with English-only texts. With the ASL, the students felt confident in their ability to do the work, and do the work independently without constant help from the teacher (and thus the work felt "easy" to them). We see this sense of empowerment and self-confidence manifested in the upsurge of motivation among the students when they did the coursework related to the translations. Motivation is an exceedingly difficult thing to measure, so I will approach it from two different vantage points: the teacher's and the students,' starting with what Eva observed as a teacher and then go on to explore the students' views. In doing so, I hope to provide a comprehensive picture of how the students' newfound self-confidence and sense of "I can do this" affected the way they went about their assignments.

Motivation: What the Teacher Saw

In the classroom, Eva saw a difference in how the students responded to their final project (related to the ASL translations) compared to how they usually respond to other assignments. For one thing, all five students—even the ones who had been chronically late with other assignments in the past—all completed their final project on time, to Eva's great surprise. And what's more, when Eva told the class that they would

need come in during their advising time (a 40-minute homeroom period at the end of the day) to work on the project, here is what happened, in Eva's own words:

> And typically, they rarely show up when I tell them to do that for anything we're working on. But when I told them to come in during their advising time, to work on writing their paragraphs, or to videotape themselves, all of a sudden, they all showed up right at the start of advising time. I didn't even have to contact the individual advising teachers and ask them to send the kids over to my room. I thought that was interesting. Usually, I have to chase them down in the hallways after last period, or email their advisors and ask them to send the kids to me. But this time, they all, independently, on their own, showed up, ready to work on it. I was surprised. But that was good. It showed me they were motivated to do it.

They all showed up. This never happens, and Eva was especially astonished by how Jayson, in particular, threw himself into the work. "He tends to put things off to the very last minute, and stalls a lot with his work, and is often late with turning things in," Eva explains, so for her, the fact that Jayson promptly came for advising time on the very same day she assigned the project was a shock, and it was a big indicator for her that he was really invested in the assignment, as were his classmates.

Eva was also impressed by the students' attitudes towards the work itself, especially when it came to revising the videos of themselves signing in ASL as a part of the assignment. According to her, Chris, upon watching the video he had just made of himself signing, decided that he wasn't satisfied with the quality of his performance. "I asked him, 'Do you want to do it again?'" Eva recounts, "And he lit up, 'Yeah, sure!' And off he went." Snooki also opted to re-do her video…four times. The first two times, she fell short of the two-minute minimum length, so she had to add more content in her next attempts before she was ready to call it good. According to Eva, it is typical of Snooki to struggle with meeting length requirements of assignments, but what she found surprising was how willingly Snooki went about revising her video. Indeed, as Eva explains,

> Several students, when they messed up during their videotaping, they were totally fine with re-doing the video. They just moved on to the re-dos without any complaining. Some of them re-did their videos several times, but they didn't—they didn't seem to mind doing that at all. They just up and did it.

Eva has rarely—if ever—seen this level of openness and even eagerness in the students towards revising their work. In her exit interview, Snooki unknowingly affirms Eva's observations, explaining how she re-did her videos multiple times and concluding, "I was totally ok with it."

In the written part of the project, however, the students showed more reluctance about revising—even though they all *did* complete the writing task (which is no small matter in itself). DJ, for example, wrote a draft and forgot to include the most important part of his conclusion. When Eva pointed it out to him ("Look, you have that part in the ASL video, but it isn't here in the written version."), he took it home to revise but then turned it in the next day virtually untouched. King, too, had a hard time with the writing. "I could see in his demeanor," Eva says. "He was…fearful, almost. He didn't want to be wrong in his sentences. He'd write something down, then erase it. Over and over again." When King finally, painstakingly, finished his draft, he didn't touch it again. In fact, all of the students reported doing one-shot drafts for the written part of the project; none of them did any revisions except to change a word here and there at Eva's direction.

Eva offers a possible reason for this difference in motivation. "So, the English part, they weren't as willing to do it over, to add stuff, to change it," she acknowledges:

> I think it's because they weren't sure of how to fix it, how to make it better without me helping them a whole lot. But with the videotaping, they could—they could go, "I know how I might sign this differently, or how I might add this part…" And they could do it on their own without a lot of help from me.

In other words, the students felt more capable of working independently on the ASL part of the project because they knew and understood the language well enough to be able to correct errors on their own, rather than waiting for the teacher to tell them what needed to be changed. DJ more or less agrees with Eva's assessment: "The other work, the reading, the writing, the vocabulary, all that stuff, the one-on-one, all that just wipes me out. But this project, it felt easy to me. Just one time and I did it pretty well." DJ is not remembering accurately because he actually did his video twice over, but the point is that it *felt* easy to him and his classmates—and more doable—so they felt empowered to make decisions and corrections by themselves, at least for the signed part of their project.

One thing Eva felt somewhat uncertain about, however, is how engaged some of the students actually were with the classroom discussions and the unit as a whole. Based on what she saw, Eva thought that Jayson, Chris, and especially King were more invested (than they usually are) throughout the whole unit. Eva was especially heartened by how Chris really engaged with the assignment to determine what kind of punishment he felt the *Tell-Tale Heart* narrator deserved. "[His writing] was…more descriptive than usual, I thought," Eva explains:

> Um, he took on the role of a judge pretty well [laughs]. The language he used was very 'official' sounding and proper—but he does have experience with juvenile court, unfortunately. Unfortunately. But I thought that was a good thing, him using his real-life experience and applying it to his writing. So that was good to see from him. And his work, what I saw, I thought was a step up compared to what I usually see in class from him.

Eva also saw a significant uptick in classroom participation and in the quality of work from King and Jayson, both of whom contributed heartily to the discussions and produced work that was more detailed than usually (in Jayson's case, he performed better on both the ASL and English parts of his assignment; King did extremely well with his ASL portion, but still struggled with the English).

As for Snooki and DJ, Eva felt like they weren't quite into the unit as much as were the other students. Because DJ's writing and his video seemed pretty similar in quality to previous work he has done in the past, Eva wonders whether he—as a hard-of-hearing student who is not as fluent in ASL as the others, and who also has some language processing delays—may have missed too much information in the ASL translations to fully engage with the assignments. "His work for this project, overall, was pretty typical of what DJ does," Eva explains. And for DJ, "typical" means that he skimmed through the text without much effort to understand it, dashed off the minimum number of sentences for the writing assignment, and turned it in with minimal effort. Eva acknowledges that Snooki usually puts a lot more into her work than DJ does, but Snooki's reluctance to contribute to the classroom discussions, compounded with the brevity of her signed ASL and written paragraphs, seems to Eva to be typical of her. This made Eva wonder whether the translations had no effect on Snooki's motivation and engagement, or whether the content of the stories were, indeed, too complex for Snooki to grasp.

Motivation: What the Students Felt

        Eva will be pleasantly surprised to hear that both DJ and Snooki were actually more invested than appearances would suggest. Upon being asked point-blank why she hardly ever talked in the class discussions, Snooki firmly asserts that she wasn't bored or uninterested. Laughing ruefully, she explained that that she actually was enjoying the discussions immensely, but as a painfully shy person, she almost never contributes a comment even when she knows the answer or has an opinion. And she enjoyed the final project, calling it a "funny" endeavor:

> Q: Did you like the overall project?
> Snooki: Sure, it was good. It was fine.
> Q: Why—why did you like the project?
> Snooki: Because it was funny (laughs).
> Q: Funny?
> Snooki: (laughs, nods)
> Q: Which option did you do for the project—were you the judge, or—
> Snooki: I did the *Tell-Tale Heart*.
> Q: You thought doing that was funny?
> Snooki: Yeah, it made me laugh.

I will admit that I am still not sure what she found to be so "funny" about the project (and especially one about a tale as grisly as the *Tell-Tale Heart*) but clearly she must have had fun with it. "Doing the video was way better than the writing we did before. That was always a struggle," Snooki explains, and then she describes her engagement this way, "The videos were better than print. I just don't get English. Psh, forget it. But the signing, I had to watch carefully and think about it, and I understood it and I did the project easily." Here, we see Snooki engage in a kind of reading, in that she noticed herself not only understanding the stories but also thinking about them and paying close attention to the details, presumably to visualize the story more completely. Even though her shyness limited her classroom participation and the length of her ASL presentation video, Snooki clearly was interested and invested in what was going on during the translation unit, and she told me so, in no uncertain terms, several times.

        DJ, whom Eva suspected might have had a hard time with basic comprehension of the ASL stories, also talks about enjoying the translations, even though he did not understand everything he saw during the class viewing (as Eva surmised from her observations). In class, DJ's work and apathetic demeanor seemed "typical" to Eva;

however, she had no way of knowing what DJ was doing *outside* of class. According to him, he invested quite a lot of time in his work:

> Q: How many times did you have to watch *Harrison* before you were
>   ready to do your project?
> DJ: One or two times.
> Q: Including in class?
> DJ: No, um, in class one time, and then two…no, three times on my own.
> Q: Ok. You watched it in the dorms?
> DJ: Yeah, so I could—so I could do my homework. And I did watch it a
>   couple times at home, too.

Considering that the ASL video of *Harrison Bergeron* is approximately thirty-five minutes long, it is remarkable that DJ watched and re-watched the story as many times as he did. Whether he did it simply for enjoyment or because he had a harder time understanding it (or both, but either scenario would be a valid—and desirable—reason for a student to revisit a text on their own), it all adds up to at least three or four hours of engaging with the story *outside* of class, and *of his own volition*. And why? *So I could do my homework.* Instead of blowing off the work like he usually does, DJ actually put considerable time into trying to do it.

The fact that he spent so much time with the translations at home suggests that as opposed to the English where he understands only 10% of what he reads, DJ feels not only confident enough in his ability to work with the translations on his own but also invested enough in the stories themselves to actually do his homework. "I had to picture it all in my head, about Harrison," he explains, "about what he was doing, all of the things that happened, why it was tough, why it was bad, um, yeah, why what he did was not a good idea." Here, we see that DJ was not only trying to picture the story in his head, but he was also was actively thinking about complex questions related to characters' motivations and choices. This suggests that he might have been scrutinizing the videos for answers to these questions (not simply *what happened*, but *why did this happen?*). Then upon being asked about his final project during his exit interview, DJ's eyes lit up, and his usual stoic demeanor crumbled away as he practically starts babbling:

> Q: So after you saw the videos, you had to do a project, right? You had
>   to sign and write a response.
> DJ: Yeah.
> Q: What did you think of that project?

DJ: I thought it was awesome.

Q: You did?

DJ: Yeah. The *Harrison* project was awesome! I talked about the
      handicaps they had and then when he escaped from prison, and the
      lady shot him, you know, and Harrison's mom and dad, they all
      saw it happen on their TV. Um, George and—what was the mom's
      name? I forgot?

Q: Hazel.

DJ: Yeah, that's right. The two of them were watching it on the news,
      you know, and I said they got mad about it, about Harrison being
      in jail. And then a dancer was killed, too. And then that lady, she
      said she had the right to kill him.

Q: So that was your project? You made a new ending to the story, yeah?
      Did you like doing that?

DJ: Yes.

Jayson also found the final project to be "a lot of fun," and what is more, he
claims that he learned more from working with both ASL and English because he could
use the writing to help him sign during his video, and rely on the ASL to help him think
of ideas for what to write:

> This was more fun, this project. It was more fun. The other stuff, the older
> projects, were not fun at all. This one was, because we could BOTH write
> and sign. The other projects were just writing. We'd write and turn it in,
> and that was it. There was no signing in it, there was no fun in it. Yeah, it
> was a lot more fun bringing the signing into it.

Whereas DJ felt invested in the stories themselves, a lot of Jayson's motivation came
from simply being able to do his homework in both languages, which made the work feel
more meaningful to him—that, and *more fun,* as he reminds us thrice. Interestingly,
though, Jayson *hates* being in front of the video camera. He actually would prefer to give
a presentation in front of class rather than be on-camera, but in spite of this drawback,
Jayson still found the project to be more fun than his other coursework and enjoyed doing
it.

It is important to note that both of these students are hard-of-hearing and very
much dependent on spoken English in most aspects of their lives (especially at home,
where their families don't sign). They are both less fluent in ASL than the rest of the
students in class, so it is striking that they respond so effusively to being able to
incorporate their own signing into an English class assignment. Snooki, perhaps, best

sums up the class's general sentiment towards the experience of working with the translations. "I don't bother with reading because it's just so hard for me," she explains:

> It's so much work, so forget it. I don't understand it. But the ASL, it's easy for me. I see it and I understand it right away. I know what the signer is talking about. But the book, I don't get it all. I look at the page and it makes me confused. So I just get frustrated, and, uh, just drop it. I—I don't know why.

Being able to "see it and understand it" right away makes a tremendous difference for Snooki and her classmates: they are able to read for the purpose of not only understanding but also enjoying the stories. With the translations, they can more easily know what is going on in the plot, so they have the confidence in her own ability to work with the story, as opposed to the English where many of them feel woefully disadvantaged and lost.

Eva, while reflecting on the overall experience, makes the key point that the students' positive reactions may have also stemmed from being able to play to their linguistic strengths when doing English-class-type work. As she puts it, "[The students seemed to feel] more confident…more validated in their language, that their language is a proper and good thing for—that it is good enough, not just something that they use for communicating with friends, but something that can be used for academics, too." Obviously, the students all liked the fact that the ASL was easier for them to understand, but Eva's point is an important one. It had not occurred to her before that this sense of validation would make such a difference, but in retrospect, she muses that it probably makes sense that it does. Indeed, there appears to be a profound impact on the students' levels of motivation, engagement, and enjoyment in their English class coursework when they are able to work from ASL versions of texts and incorporate ASL into the work that they produce for class.

What is more, the students, in feeling that a vital part of their linguistic identity has been validated, showed a fierce possessiveness towards the ASL translations that startled Eva. Somewhat unexpectedly, DJ asserted a strong sense of ownership over the translation DVDs that Eva gave all of the students in the class. Here is the rest of my conversation with DJ about how he re-watched the DVDs, which I only quoted in part earlier:

Q: Ok. You [re-]watched [the DVDs] in the dorms?
DJ: Yeah, so I could—so I could do my homework. And I did watch it a
    couple times at home, too.
Q: Oh, okay, so you—
DJ: And my mom watched it, too (laughs).
Q: Your mom watched it with you?
DJ: Yeah.
Q: What did your mom think?
DJ: My mom was like, "Oh, that's cool." She actually said that, she
    told me she wanted one, too.
Q: One of the ASL DVDs?
DJ: Yeah.
Q: What did you say?
DJ: (laughs) Oh, yeah, I told her, "Too bad. This one is mine. Go buy
    your own." (laughs) She said, "Very funny. Now go to your room
    and do your homework." (laughs)

"Go buy your own." DJ's snarky comment to his mother shows a sense of possessiveness towards the ASL translation: this is mine, and I will not give it up. In spite of being considerably less fluent in ASL than the other students, and in spite of (perhaps) having a harder time understanding the translations on the first viewing, DJ still felt engaged enough with the stories to re-watch them multiple times and also teasingly tell his mother that his DVD was not for sharing.

For DJ and his classmates, the translations seem to have tapped into a deeply important part of their linguistic identity. Even though the students never told Eva outright that the translation DVDs were important to them, Eva noticed a sense of ownership that she never sees in them towards print English books:

> With reading a book over and over again, though, I don't think they're
> motivated enough—that just seems more like work to them, when
> watching a DVD over and over again seems more like fun. It's something
> required for school, sure, but it's more enjoyable for them, I think. […] If I
> give them a copy of the DVD translation, I think they value it more and
> want to actually keep it for themselves because they enjoy watching the
> story over and over again. But books, they're good at losing them or
> forgetting them all over the place. "Oh, I can't find it…I must have left it
> in my locker…I must have left it home…" It's excuse after excuse with
> that, for not bringing the book to class, for not being ready for the
> discussion. So that—that's frustrating because (sighs) I, or the school,
> have to pay to buy the books, and then they just lose them or damage them
> and it's like… (sighs) "Now you've got to pay me to replace that." But the
> DVDs, I think they cherish those more, and will take better care of them.

Eva is spot-on in observing that the students treasured the translation DVDs, and it is not simply because they found the translations "easier"; rather, the students enjoyed the stories and found them to be meaningful for their literacy learning.

King, especially, talks quite a bit about re-watching the videos to improve his storytelling skills in ASL (a literacy practice). "I'd copy signs from [the videos] for my own signing. And I'd put them with the other videos I have," he explains, "I'd watch them again and again, like, every year, I'll sign them, and watch them again each year." Having just finished working on his final project for English class, King is already planning to add the two translations to his private collection of other ASL videos, and he envisions himself re-watching them once a year, not unlike the avid *Lord of the Rings* fanatics who re-read the whole trilogy on a regular basis. Not only does King want to read and re-read the ASL stories but he also uses them as tools for *creating* and *learning to create* for his own signing and storytelling. This is very similar to how *writers* read and re-read various texts in order to improve their writing skills. King is essentially reading and re-reading ASL literary works in order to create his own stories in ASL. This indicates that King does, indeed, have a set of literacy skills rooted in ASL, skills that he works earnestly towards refining and strengthening.

Other than Jayson, who also speaks of using the ASL stories to improve his own signing, the rest of King's classmates were excited to keep their DVDs more for the sake of pleasure. Both Snooki and Chris mention liking the fact that they could keep their DVDs, presumably to either show to their friends or to enjoy again at their own leisure. All of Eva's students admit to feeling more motivated about doing anything related to the translations and were eager to own the DVDs; King sums up the class's general sentiments with this comment: "I work so much harder at it. I do so much more work with the ASL stuff." When he and his classmates are able to access a story in ASL, they feel capable, empowered, and confident in what they are doing, so they find it a rewarding challenge—and more importantly, it is a literary experience that is deeply personal and meaningful because the work itself is rooted in their stronger language.

Meta-Knowledge Strategies in ASL, Reading in ASL

A crucial outcome—and in my mind, one of the most important—of using the translations is that the clarity and ease that the students felt with the ASL translations allowed them to do much more than simply enjoy the stories. The translations also provided the students opportunities to incorporate a number of meta-linguistic and meta-knowledge strategies that we do not see them use with print English. Essentially, as they went through the translated stories, the students began—without being prompted or directed to by the teacher—to employ a number of strategies to enhance their understanding and deepen their learning from the stories. These moves bear striking resemblance to reading strategies that are used with print texts, which suggests that these students already have a set of literacy skills in ASL that they call upon in order to interpret the signs, create meanings, and evoke the story-world as they engage with a text in ASL, skills that they do not yet have in (or know how to use for) print English. This is an area that needs further exploration, particularly because what we see these students do with the ASL translations calls into question what we have traditionally meant by the term "reading" and "literacy," for as I will show, these students engage in highly desirable readerly behaviors with not the static ink-on-paper symbols of English but the physically moving signs of ASL.

For example, Snooki finds the ASL translation much easier to understand, but she does miss a few details on her first encounter. However—and this is the new reading strategy behavior we see in her—Snooki's reaction is not to throw in the towel and "just drop it" the way she tends to with English texts. Instead, here is what happens:

> Q: Did you feel like you understood the story clearly when it was in
>   ASL?
> Snooki: Pretty much. Not all of it, because I've never seen anything like
>   that before. I mean, I understood them, but kinda—some things did
>   go over my head (laughs)…
> Q: Okay. So you missed some things in the stories because it was a new
>   thing to you. Would you have understood more if you watched
>   them again?
> Snooki: But I did. I watched them again and again. Yeah.
> Q: How many times did you watch them?
> Snooki: (laughs) I don't know. I don't remember. (laughs) Um…
> Q: Did Eva give you your own copy of the DVDs?
> Snooki: Yeah, she did. I still have them. I kept them.

Q: How often did you watch the DVDs in the dorms?

Snooki: Once…yeah, once. And at home, too.

Q: Okay. You said you were spellbound watching the ASL stories. Why were you so into them?

Snooki: Because it was cool. It was really neat, way better than writing. There's nothing in writing, nothing really. But with the ASL stories, I watched and I understood them. It was all clear to me.

Here, we see that Snooki had missed a few details in the ASL story during her first viewing (which was during class), but rather than saying "forget it" as she does with English, she took her DVDs home and re-watched them…of her own volition…without being told to do so by the teacher. By herself, she recognized that she had missed some information, and by herself, she took steps to fill in the finer details that she had not picked up on her initial reading.

Clearly, she had gotten ample information the first time through to feel interested enough to re-watch the DVD and figure out the details she had missed, much like a skilled reader will re-read a confusing passage in English. DJ, too, reports re-watching the DVDs on his own to help him prepare for doing the final project (as discussed previously). Without prompting or input from anyone else, these two students autonomously recognized that they hadn't understood every detail, and—perhaps partly because they felt confident enough in the language (i.e. ASL) and partly because they felt enough enjoyment and investment in the story—they were able to step back from the situation, assess what they still needed to know, and take steps to solve the problem, which is a valuable meta-knowledge ability.

Likewise, the ASL felt so clear for Jayson that when he watched the videos, he went a step above simply watching for comprehension; he began to engage in meta-linguistic strategies by analyzing the signers' storytelling techniques, looking for new vocabulary or stylistic choices that he might incorporate into his own signing.

Q: [You said that the signing helps you to understand it better], so how does having the ASL help you to do that?

Jayson: Because, um, you can…learn it all by watching this person, and with the action, you can pick up things about the story. And you can pick up signs to use yourself, in the future. You can see what that person does, and then use the same techniques, the same actions, yourself.

Q: Oh, did it help you to learn some new signs?

Jayson: Yeah, oh, yeah.

In other words, Jayson is reading like a "writer"—that is, analyzing the rhetorical and stylistic choices within the text and thinking about how he might use those "actions" in his own signing. He does not need to devote so much energy to basic comprehension (like he does for reading print English), so he has, apparently, plenty of space left over in his brain to also analyze *how* the signer is telling the story. King, too, describes a similar phenomenon, saying that he "locks away the stories" in his head and then goes back to the dorms and practices signing them repeatedly, and he "keeps learning from it" when he does that.

> Their teacher, Eva, notices these effects, too, and she explains it this way:
>
> They saw different ways that a person explained or described something using ASL, and they took that in, and then later they would express themselves using the same techniques they saw, the types of things they saw in ASL. If they read something in English, they will sign all of the words on the page, but then they don't express themselves the same way later. So, I think that was maybe one of the ways the translations helped with their learning […] and I think it just made them feel more confident…with their learning and their understanding, to be able to see something and *know*, understand it without a whole lot of problems. They just felt more confident in their ability to understand.

Basically, Eva noticed the students implementing various signing techniques from the translations into their comments during class discussions and also in their final projects. With print English, these students only "sign all the words on the page" (i.e. decode the words), but do not assimilate the words into their own signed, spoken, or written vocabulary. What Eva sees now is a powerful outcome because it indicates that the students are going beyond mere comprehension: they are interacting with the translations in sophisticated meta-linguistic ways and transferring linguistic "tools" from the stories into their own ASL repertoires.

This is key. When comprehension is not as much of a barrier for them, the students are able to—and seem to do so independently—go beyond simply understanding the story by engaging in practices like re-reading, rehearsing, imitating the style and delivery of the text, analyzing the language itself, and transferring bits and pieces from the stories into their own work—the very skills that strong readers and writers have. This holds monumental possibilities for how teachers might use ASL translations to cultivate the students' use of such meta-knowledge strategies in their stronger and more accessible

language, and then perhaps help their students see how similar strategies might also be applied to English. From what we have seen with Eva's class, the difficulties these students face in reading English texts tend to alienate them and lead to them "just dropping it" altogether, which means that with English texts, they rarely—if ever—get the opportunity to mindfully practice the analytical strategies that we see strong readers capitalize on when they read. (Nor do the students speak of the English texts as being designed for these kinds of analytical reading.)

This is an area that needs to be further explored in future studies. Even though I knew these students were most likely familiar with ASL storytelling (especially given its prevalence in Deaf culture), I did not anticipate seeing them—and particularly the students who are not native ASL signers—manifesting and utilizing their ASL literacy practices as strongly and clearly as they did with the ASL translations. What is more, I did not expect these ASL literacy practices to align so closely with traditional reading practices (e.g. re-reading, assimilating new vocabulary, visualizing the story). This opens up many further avenues of inquiry into what ASL literacy is, what kinds of other reading practices students who struggle with reading in English may already have in ASL, and how we might work towards a pedagogy that helps such students to strengthen their overall literacy skills and ultimately apply them to reading print English.

Teacher Epiphany

The students were not the only ones who experienced "*aha*!" moments in this study. For Eva, observing her students working with the translated texts also opened her up to new ways of thinking about how she teaches. This was the first time she had ever done high school-material texts with this group of students, and as a teacher, she was taken aback by the power of literature at work among her students as they interacted with the two very advanced stories. "This was, I think, really good for me to see what they're capable of doing with the content in a different medium, in a different language, a different way of accessing the information," Eva muses, and later, she gives an example (talking specifically about King and his final project):

> I was kind of thinking he wouldn't do very well with the project because I didn't think he really understood what I was asking him to do. But when I watched his video, I went, "Aha! So he did get it!" I was surprised and

> impressed by how well he did it. Um, that shows me that he is actually
> very capable of doing things that I sometimes would never expect those
> kinds of students would be able to do. Maybe it isn't fair that I…oh, I
> don't know.

I cannot understate the importance of this epiphany. Eva is now recognizing that she has, unbeknownst to herself, been influenced by a language ideology, prevalent in the United States, that associates print English proficiency with intelligence, which had led her to, in some ways, grossly underestimate what kinds of things these students are capable of doing. Because she works with the students exclusively in English, she has always been limited to only seeing them at what is perhaps their greatest disadvantage, and that, in turn, limited her perception of what kinds of higher-order thinking they could do (and I suspect this is also true of many teachers of the deaf, not just Eva).

Additionally, the students' low reading levels, by default, limit them to simple texts that typically do not tap into higher-order thinking or into complex themes, and because they struggle so much with basic comprehension, it did not occur to Eva that they could successfully engage in discussions about complex topics like free will, murder, and moral choices (all of which they broached with *Tell-Tale Heart* and *Harrison Bergeron)*. For all of these reasons, Eva had never gotten the opportunity to realize that these students *could* understand, connect with, and interact with challenging texts and ideas. Especially a student like King, who can barely read at the first grade level and has a hard time writing even the simplest English sentences independently. Seeing how well—and how intelligently—the students grappled with the thorny issues in the two stories "has shown me that they are capable of discussing high school content, not just, like, a third-grade story because that's what they can read independently," Eva concludes:

> I think that I've learned…um…that they're capable of a lot more than I
> give them credit for sometimes. I need to change my planning, my
> expectations, my thinking, my use of the tools I have available, things in
> the classroom, to give them that opportunity to show me what they know
> at a more advanced, complex level.

In fact, the challenging themes in the stories are precisely what appealed to Jayson. He liked how the stories were complicated enough for people to have multiple opinions, "because after we watched those two stories, we could, uh, talk about how we'd change what happened, or, or, tell the person in the story what we thought they should have done

differently. That sort of thing," Jayson tries to explain. When it comes to the texts they read in class, he usually finds all topics boring (unless, of course, they are about motorcycles), but with *Harrison Bergeron* and *Tell-Tale Heart*, Jayson was intrigued by the themes within the story and got hookd. "They weren't boring," he says several times throughout his exit interview.

What Jayson hints at here, but is not quite able to fully articulate, is that the stories were complex enough to allow the students to engage with what Wilhelm calls "essential questions"[268]: that is, challenging, real-world questions (or themes) that do not have a single correct answer; such questions help shape the students' purposes for reading a text. "Literature is transcendent," Wilhelm argues:

> [Literature] offers us possibilities; it takes us beyond space, time, and self; it questions the way the world is and offers possibilities for the way it could be. It offers a variety of views, visions, and voices that are so vital to a democracy. It is unique in the way it provides us with maps for exploring the human condition, with insights and perceptions into life, and with offerings for the ways to be human in the world. Literature helps us to define ourselves as we are, and to envision what it is we want ourselves and the world to be.[269]

For perhaps the first time, Jayson was intellectually stimulated by a story that, as Jago puts it, exposed him to the complexity of the world around him,[270] requiring him and his classmates to debate the characters' motives and articulate opinions that others might not agree with. So was DJ, who, upon being asked what he thought, does not give a response along the lines of having simply liked or disliked the experience; instead, he immediately starts espousing his opinions based on his personal reactions to each story:

> DJ : [*Harrison Bergeron]* was good. I liked that one. But the other one, eh, not so much. I don't know.
> Q: Why?
> DJ: Because I didn't like it that the narrator killed another guy, the old man, you know. Just because the old man's eye freaked him out. That was not a good thing to do. I just—I didn't like the story. I thought it was weird, especially when he lied to the cops about the

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[268] Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry: Promoting Deep Understanding in Language Arts and the Content Areas with Guiding Questions.* New York: Scholastic, 2007.
[269] Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 53.
[270] Jago, *With Rigor*, 13.

old man. I just, uh, it's not nice to lie like that. He should have told the truth, man.

Instead of saying, "I didn't like this story; it was bad," the way he might say "I don't like this book; it was boring," DJ bases his opinion of the *Tell-Tale Heart* on the *content* of the story itself and the deep, moral issues surrounding it. He articulates his reasons for not liking the story, and these reasons have nothing to do with surface-level issues (such as the signing style, or the experience of watching the video, or his own level of interest, or the story being boring, for example). Rather, his reasons come from his personal and moral reactions to what happens in the story, and also from the opinions he has formed of the characters themselves. According to Beach et al., DJ was using his own knowledge to explore and define the norms, beliefs, and purposes not only of the story but also of his own understanding of how the world ought to be,[271] and this led him to reject the narrator's immoral choices in *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Instead of dismissing the story altogether, DJ separates the *experience* of reading it in ASL from the *content* of the story by saying, "I didn't like this story," and then proceeds to explain his opinion.

DJ's and Jayson's reactions show that they are engaging with not only the stories but also the complex themes and questions posed by each. They are analyzing the decisions various characters made, trying to put themselves in the characters' shoes (a positioning that DJ found distasteful to do with *The Tell-Tale Heart*), and thinking about morality, ethics, responsibility, choices, and dilemmas: ideas they do not encounter with the lower-level, basic texts they are usually limited to reading. Through the translations, they seem to have experienced the power of literature in its ability to question, challenge, and refine their own perceptions of the world; as Jayson puts it, he found the whole experience "more fun" than anything else he had ever done in English class. For Eva, seeing her students engage with these kinds of complex themes in the translations has profoundly affected how she thinks about her teaching and her expectations for the students, as they should ours.

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[271] Beach, Richard, Deborah Appleman, Susan Hynds, and Jeffrey Wilhelm. *Teaching Literature to Adolescents* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006) 12.

Some Caveats

Thus far, I have shown a number of ways that the ASL translations allowed the students to go beyond simply accessing the stories and bring their linguistic strengths to the table in the English classroom. However, it is important to mention a few serious challenges that could come up when attempting to use the ASL translations with students who struggle to read in English. For Eva's students, the translations were powerfully positive experiences; however, they ran into a few roadblocks, which illuminate for us areas that we need to explore further as we consider ways that we might incorporate ASL translations into the English classroom, especially with struggling readers.

Writing for the Final Project

As discussed earlier, the students still showed reluctance towards revising the written part of their final project. While some of the students gladly re-did their ASL videos several times, their written English versions still mostly remained a one-shot draft. "I think there wasn't much motivation for that," Eva acknowledges, "because it's hard for them, you know." DJ and Chris agree with Eva, both dismissing the written part of their projects as "kinda hard," as does Chris. None of the students invested as much energy into their written draft, and the only type of "revising" they did was to neatly re-write (pretty much verbatim) their paragraphs onto a fresh sheet of paper to be turned in. This is concerning, because it suggests that the students saw little value in engaging with the written part of the assignment, or that they just "got through" the writing part in order to be able to do the ASL.

However, a few of the students do perceive the writing as serving a utilitarian purpose for the project. Jayson and Snooki, especially, talk about how they used their written paragraphs to help them remember everything they wanted to say when signing on-camera. "I liked writing first, and then signing it," Jayson says:

> Then I could have the paper right there in front of me, so I could see it
> while I was signing. If I had not written it, I wouldn't be able to remember
> everything I wanted to say. I'd always be pausing while I was signing. It
> wouldn't have been as good.

In his eyes, the written part of the assignment was not a stand-alone assignment in itself worthy of refining, but rather a tool to help make his ASL video performance better

(which was ultimately all he cared about). Snooki, likewise, uses her written paragraphs as prompts while on-camera because she gets "so nervous" that she forgets things. While it is heartening to see that these students *do* see writing as being useful for *something* (and this may be a valuable pedagogical strategy to pursue further), it is also a little concerning because they are essentially making writing subservient to ASL, reducing it to a cueing and prompting tool rather than recognizing it as a viable, creative mode for communicating their ideas.

It is interesting to note that King went about his project in the opposite process, opting to sign first and then use his ASL to help him write the English. He would then replay his own video, pause it, and write the English sentences. He claims to find this strategy to be easier, explaining, "If I just try to write it, it's really hard for me to think. So I like to videotape myself signing first, get it all out, then I write from the video. And it all makes sense." This may seem a viable strategy, but it did not quite work as well as one might hope. King, because his English vocabulary is so weak, struggled to write his elaborative ASL sentences into English, and thus got stuck.

In fact, Eva discovered that King actually asked another student in his dorm to watch his video and write the English for him. When she told him he needed to write it on his own, he did, but Eva noticed him still referring to the other student's paper often. "I think he was looking for the words he didn't know, or for the spelling. But, um, some of the word choices and concepts were wrong in that other paper because the other student wasn't in the class, and he didn't know the story," Eva recounts. "I'm guessing King looked for […] the words that he knew the sign for, but didn't know the English, so he'd look for it in the paper and use it in his own." It was a painstakingly slow process, and one that King found very difficult. His reaction also suggests that, like the other students, King sees the writing part as being secondary and less worthy of careful attention than the ASL component of the project.

However, with that said, the strategies that we see these students making use of here (writing first and then signing, or vice versa) could be valuable pedagogical strategies for encouraging students to work with both languages. Further exploration is needed in this area, particularly related to the concept of translanguaging, which refers to a process often used by bilingual students in which they translate back and forth (either in

their minds or while reading out loud) between two languages while working with a text that is written in their L2, and this often results in the process itself enhancing learning beyond what might have been achieved by thinking and working in one language only.[272]

Forget Reading the English

Another concerning trend is how the experience of being opened up to new kinds of reading through ASL seems to have not made the students feel any more amiable towards the English version. If anything, a few seem to view the English texts more negatively. For example, King, who in his earlier interviews, claims that he "doesn't mind" reading (even though he finds it really hard) and maintains that he can understand enough of what he reads (even though he really doesn't understand much at all), finally becomes more honest in his exit interview, saying, "Forget the print. I don't need the reading." Either he was putting on an act of bravado early on, or seeing the ASL translations made him realize just how much information he had been missing all along. Perhaps both. Nonetheless, King makes his feelings clear in the end interview when talking about English classes:

> King: I think they should focus on only ASL videos.
> Q: Just the ASL? With no books?
> King: Nope, not at all. […] Yeah, I'd watch the signing. Way more than I'd read the book. I mean, the book has no signing in it, there's no interpretation. It's just not right. And the ASL, it's just way easier and much clearer.
> Q: Ok. When you're done with the signed story, would you read the book afterwards?
> King: Oh, forget it. I already know the story, so I'd just put the book aside.
> Q: Okay, you wouldn't read it?
> King: Nah. The ASL is better than the book.

Here, King emphasizes that he wouldn't even bother to read the English text after seeing the story in ASL. "Forget the print" is clearly not an attitude that a teacher would want to

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[272] For more on translanguaging, see Creese, Angela, and Blackledge, Adrian. "Translanguaging in the Bilingual Classroom: A Pedagogy for Learning and Teaching. *The Modern Language Journal* 94, no. 1 (2010): 103-115. Also many thanks to my fellow student in the University of Michigan Joint Program in English and Education, Ryan McCarty, whose work on the new concept of translanguaging contributed to my understanding of the concept.

foster in students, and King's ideological-laden comments raise the question of how teachers might explore different ways to frame the use of ASL translations so that "hostile" students like King might gradually see the importance of engaging with print English.

The remaining students in the class, however, take much more of a middle road than King does. Snooki, who intensely dislikes print English, maintains that it would be better to have more ASL translations, but she does not go as far as King in saying that the print should be displaced altogether. "You need to keep advancing up [in English]," she says, and DJ asserts that having both languages will make you smarter and help you understand the stories better, as do Jayson and Chris. These comments suggest that even though the English is hard and often indecipherable, those students view it as a necessary thing, and ASL as something valuable in that it offers clarity and ease they don't get in English. They *do* see some benefits in studying both languages.

The problem is, however, that this "we need both" attitude does not bleed over to their behavior (yet) when it comes to doing the coursework. The students were directly asked about what the chances were that they would do their homework in English, in ASL, or in both. King steadily asserts that he would do the ASL homework immediately but the English reading he would put off until the last minute. Snooki observes that the ASL and English texts are the same thing, so she shrugs off the English texts, saying "forget it."

Jayson is not as dismissive as Snooki is of the reading, explaining that he would try to read the book if he has time in his family's busy schedule. He does admit, though, that he would be more motivated to make time to finish an ASL translation at home than he would for an English text. Chris minces no words:

> Q: Would you actually read it?
> Chris: (laughs, shakes head 'no') I'd probably watch the video instead.
> Q: What if there was no video? Just this printed text?
> Chris: Oh, then I probably wouldn't read it.
> Q: Wouldn't read it. Can I ask why?
> Chris: Mm…it just isn't my priority.
> […]
> Q: Would you actually watch the video, or would that be something you
>   say is not on your priority list, either?
> Chris: I'd probably watch it, sure.

Chris would probably watch the ASL translations for homework, but if he were assigned a book to read, he immediately dismisses it as "not my priority." Even though he—and his classmates—say that English is important for their futures, that knowledge does not seem to compel them towards engaging with print English. Being able to use ASL translations seems to up the chances considerably that they *will* complete the assignment, but their motivation towards the ASL does not bleed over into the English portions of their coursework (yet).

Challenges with the Final Project

One significant hurdle Eva had to overcome with her students in the translation unit was the final project itself. Even though everyone reported liking the project at the end, the beginning stages were actually riddled with misunderstandings and confusion. For the students, this was the first time an assignment required them to go beyond finding one correct answer. Instead, they had to engage in new kinds of reading and writing practices: choosing a prompt, forming an opinion, and then finding textual evidence to support it. This flustered the students and their persistent confusion, in turn, frustrated Eva. She recalls, with a rueful laugh, the difficult first two days after she assigned the final project:

> So I'd ask them which project option they wanted to do, number one or number two. "Well, I want to do this story." Then I'd be like, well, okay, but which option do you want to use this story with? Do you want to be the judge or to rewrite the ending? Then they would go, "I think I want to be the judge." Then I'd say, "Ok, so now pick a character from your story." And then they'd get confused and change their minds over and over again. It was a little frustrating. Where did the lines of communication fall apart? […] Maybe I should have just given them fewer options, like, telling them, "This is what your final project will look like," and leave it at that, just one choice. Maybe that would have worked better, I don't know. Because I was getting frustrated with the project, and I think they were, too. I think they weren't sure, maybe, of what my expectations were, or they didn't fully understand what to do, so I had to explain it again and again. So for me, that was frustrating.

Indeed, Eva had to explain the project *many* times to the students, and she began feeling like none of them would be able to do a good job because they were so confused. When

they *did* finally understand what they were supposed to do, however, the students actually did perform well.

This is something important to keep in mind when we consider using translations with other deaf students like Eva's: they may be able to understand, interact with, and discuss the stories well with minimal scaffolding, but, depending on their prior English class experiences, many of them likely have not had any practice in the kinds of thinking and writing that typically accompanies high school-level texts (such as developing a thesis, making an argument about a text, analyzing a text, using textual evidence, and so forth). As we move forward in exploring ways to incorporate translations into the classroom, we must be mindful of providing ample scaffolding for these kinds of assignments.

What About the Students Who are Between Languages?

Eva also brings up another area of potential concern when it comes to using translations: what about the students like DJ, who are "between languages"—that is, they can use both ASL and English to some extent, but do not have fluency in either? Those students tend to not be able to rely on ASL exclusively, but they are not adept enough in reading English to benefit from also having the subtitles on while watching the ASL translation. In Eva's eyes, these students miss so much information in both languages that she is not sure how much the translations would actually benefit them. "Some things still went over [DJ's] head, I felt," Eva says:

> So for him, I noticed he struggled with some of the questions I asked. There were still a lot of gaps for him. He just didn't fully understand the story, no matter what medium it was in. So for him to do the final project at the end, um, I think he finally kind of got most of the story, but just him watching the story on his own, I don't think he would have understood it well.

Eva's concerns are valid. Students who are novice signers but are fluent enough in English will be able to watch ASL translations with subtitles, using the English to help them understand the signing. But students who are not fluent in ASL *and* are not fluent enough readers to keep up with the subtitles may miss a lot of information. Of course, Eva did not know that DJ was engaged in repeated viewings of his DVD in the dorms, but still, the question remains: exactly how much did he really understand from each

story? This needs to be looked further into in future studies in which students actually take an assessment (i.e. a test) of their comprehension after one viewing, two viewings, repeated viewings, etc., rather than showing their comprehension through a final, analytical essay (which was what Eva's students did, in ASL and in English).

All in all, though, Eva considers the unit to be a success. "I think it really helped me to think more about how I teach and how I might do it a bit differently, a little more effectively," she concludes, "How to make it better for my students, so they learn through using their ASL skills more in the classroom to connect with the English." As Eva's comment shows, work still remains to be done to figure out how we might support the students in making connections between their ASL literacy skills and reading in English. Indeed, the students' reactions to this experience, despite being mostly positive and encouraging, do highlight a few concerning attitudes that we need to take in account when considering how we might incorporate ASL translations into the classroom in a way that allows the students to rely on their linguistic strengths while also encouraging them to invest more in working with the English texts, as well.

Conclusion

When Eva's five students were able to access complex works of literature in ASL, they were able to, for perhaps the first time in the history of their English classroom experience, interact with a literary text in rich and meaningful ways using their stronger language. Being able to understand the stories with ease—without needing to laboriously eke out meanings from the English sentences they struggle so much with—caused the students to view the work they were doing as "fun" and "easy." The ways that the students took ownership of the translations and of their work, the ways they spoke about the experience of interacting with the ASL stories, and the ways they used meta-knowledge strategies to enhance their learning—all of these behaviors indicate that the experience was far more than simply "fun" and "easy" for these students. Rather, as I have shown, they found working with texts in their preferred language to be deeply validating, meaningful, and empowering, which in turn made them show more motivation and independence in their coursework than they typically do.

These findings have tremendous implications for educators because, as any teacher of the deaf will attest, finding ways to motivate deaf students who struggle with print literacy is extraordinarily difficult. Many of these students tend to view English negatively, as do the five students in Eva's class, some of whom use the sign 'SUFFER' to describe reading and writing. When students feel lost and disadvantaged, as many of them do with print English, they understandably feel frustrated and reluctant towards doing any reading- or writing-related work. These feelings may also be exacerbated by the fact that they often have to rely on the teacher for help while trying to decipher an English sentence or string together words while writing. For these kinds of students, English is not a language they feel they can control or in which they can work independently; therefore, it is not (yet) a language in which they can truly experience the powerful, imaginative adventure that reading is.

Wilhelm points out that when literature is read transactionally and creatively, it has tremendous potential for transforming us as readers and as people. This may be very much true, but what he says next is key: "Transformative reading *begins where the reader currently is*, and works from there."[273] The ASL translations did precisely that: they met Eva's students where they were linguistically, and worked from there to provide them with meaningful reading experiences that led to heightened independence, self-assertion, and motivation (as well as delight and enjoyment of the stories) among the students. This all underscores the importance of further exploring how ASL translations might be utilized in more deaf English classrooms to foster students' literacy learning and, importantly, to strengthen their meta-knowledge strategies in their preferred language so that they can work towards applying such strategies to print English and eventually experience the power of reading books not only in ASL but also in English.

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[273] Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 51.

Chapter 7
Seeing "More": Stronger Readers, ASL Translations,
and the Question, "What is *Reading*?"

Introduction

Even though a high percentage of deaf students struggle with print literacy in English, a number do achieve higher levels of fluency in reading and writing. Some studies suggest that these students' success stems from a combination of heavy parental involvement with their language development, access to clear communication within their families, early exposure to reading in the home, high parental expectations, and the students' own enjoyment of reading from an early age, among other factors.[274] These students tend to have broader vocabularies in English compared to their peers who struggle with print literacy, and are also typically more adept in a wider range of reading comprehension strategies.[275] The group of additional students in this study (who were not in Eva's class but were interviewed about their literacy experiences and language ideologies) consisted of several such individuals, all of whom report experiencing varying combinations of the above factors throughout their childhood.

These stronger readers are able to read for pleasure, and many do so, citing the enjoyment of being immersed in a good story. Unlike Eva's struggling readers who perceive reading in English as consisting largely of decoding the words on the page, these stronger readers are able to go beyond this by attaching these words to meaning and combining various semantic and syntactic information with their prior linguistic experience in order to interpret the text and anticipate what is coming next based on cues

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[274] Toscano, Rose Marie, Barbara McKee, and Dominique Lepoutre. "Success with Academic English: Reflections of Deaf College Students." *American Annals of the Deaf* 147, no. 1 (March 2002): 5-23.

[275] For more, see Marschark and Spencer, *Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies*; Toscano et al., "Success with Academic English"; and Kimmel, *Silenced Voices, Signed Visions*.

in the text.[276] For them, "every reading act is an event, or transaction," in Rosenblatt's words:

> …involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context. Instead of two fixed entities acting on one another, the reader and the text are two aspects of a total dynamic situation. The 'meaning' does not reside ready-made 'in' the text or 'in' the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text.[277]

As Rosenblatt emphasizes, successful readers do far more than identify words and connect them to meanings—they actively make connections with the text in a variety of ways that help them make "live" meaning out of what they read, a meaning that—as Rosenblatt and also Wilhelm point out—is formed in a particular context and at a particular time, and continually evolves as the reader works through the text and then, afterwards, reflects on the text.[278]

The ways that the stronger readers in this study spoke of their reading experiences—using phrases like "lost in the story," "let your imagination run wild," and "opened up to other worlds"—suggest that they are able to engage in at least some variety of meaning-making strategies (e.g. visualizing, building and refining schemas, predicting, making inferences based on what is not explicitly stated in the text, or using contextual information to tease out meanings of unknown words) when reading a text in English. Initially, I wondered what kinds of benefits—or indeed, if any at all—this group would derive from seeing the ASL translations. Being stronger readers, these students are able to access most English texts on their own, so for them, it did not seem like the translations would make any meaningful difference for them insofar as it relates to their comprehension. Because these students are more bilingually proficient, I anticipated they might enjoy the novelty of seeing ASL translations, but did not expect much of a reaction beyond that.

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[276] Goodman, Kenneth. S. "Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game." In *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, 2nd ed. Edited by Harry Singer and Robert B. Rudell, 497-508. [S.l.]: Distributed by ERIC Clearinghouse, 1970.

[277] Rosenblatt, Louise M. "The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing." In *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, 5th edition, eds Robert B. Ruddell and Norman J. Unrau (International Reading Association, Article 48, 2004), 1369.

[278] Ibid; Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 25.

However, the students' comments upon seeing the stories in ASL bring to light ways that the translations do far more than simply provide basic access for reading comprehension and experiencing literature, as they did for Eva's students. For these stronger readers, the translations were also about developing nuanced understandings of the story as well as strengthening their literacy skills in *both* of their languages. Several students immediately identified the translations as being somehow "more" than the English version; as I will show in this chapter, by the word "more," they meant they found the translations to be a valuable tool for enhancing their comprehension beyond what they might achieve with the English text alone. In other words, the translations opened up a space for these students where they could practice their print literacy and ASL literacy simultaneously in a way that mutually strengthens each language. Further, the students' comments about the experience of "reading in ASL," to use Hendrix's words, pushes us to rethink and refine our understanding of what *reading* is when considering the literacy practices—from both languages—that these students bring to the act of engaging with ASL translations.

In these students, we can also see the powerful sway that language ideologies can have over the ways they respond to reading and writing in either language, and, importantly, how their ideologies may be driving them to or preventing them from engaging in literacy practices that may benefit them. In the eyes of most students, the stories, by dint of being translated into ASL, had become something belonging to Deaf culture. This fascinating shift of cultural ownership of a text (which will be discussed later in this chapter) led to some students—feeling that an integral part of their Deaf identity was validated—eagerly seizing upon the opportunity to work with the translations. For the students who did not identify as strongly with Deaf culture, however, the stories being in ASL was a distancing factor for them. Not wanting to associate themselves with something that, in their eyes, was so steeped in ASL and Deafness, they were more reluctant to embrace the translations *in spite of the fact that they saw numerous ways the translations might benefit them.*

The ways that some students distanced themselves from the stories in ASL underscores how powerfully their ideologies and identities are actively shaping their responses to various literacy practices in either language. This finding reminds us yet

again of the importance of understanding our students' language ideologies and the far-reaching effects those ideologies can have on the ways they distance or align themselves with texts and literacy practices in any given language. In this chapter, I will explore the varied reactions the stronger readers had towards the translations: the ways they perceived it as a reading practice, the benefits they saw, and the language ideologies and identity preferences that complicated their reactions to the experience of reading in both English and ASL.

Student Attitudes towards Literacy

Print English Literacy

Before I delve into those students' multifaceted—and sometimes contradictory—reactions to the translations, I will quickly outline who they are, their print literacy levels, and their attitudes towards English—especially reading—as I did in the previous chapter for Eva's third-period class.

Table 7-1: Students' Language Fluency and Print Literacy Levels

Student	Age	Hearing Level	Reading Level in English	Proficiency in ASL
Auggins*[279]	19	Deaf	2nd-3rd grade	4.5
Bella	15	Hard-of-Hearing	Above grade level: 10th grade	3.0
Dani	15	Hard-of-Hearing	7th-8th grade	3.5
Hendrix	15	Hard-of-Hearing	At grade level: 9th grade	3.5
J-Dawg*	18	Deaf	1st-2nd grade	3.5
Megan	18	Hard-of-Hearing	9th-10th grade	4.0
Reg	19	Deaf	At grade level: 12th grade	2.0
Roy	18	Deaf	8th-9th grade	5.0

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[279] *Auggins and J-Dawg, who were a part of the randomly selected group of students (those not in Eva's class), will not be discussed very much in this chapter because they are struggling readers; as such, many of their literacy experiences align closely to those of Eva's students, with phrases like "over my head" and "boring" and "hard" peppering their comments about reading and writing in English. Their reactions to the translations are also very similar to those of Eva's students. This chapter's analysis will focus primarily on

As the table shows, several students read at or very close to their grade level in English. Bella, Dani, Hendrix, and Reg have been voracious readers for most of their lives; they read for school, but they also enjoy reading during their free time. The *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies*, the *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* series*, and the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* all made multiple appearances in the students' interviews when they gushed about the books they love. Hendrix also mentioned liking Tom Clancy novels; Bella is a new fan of the *Twilight* novels (hence her choice of pseudonym: Bella, after the main character in that series). Hendrix, Bella, and Reg also mention thoroughly enjoying Shakespeare in their English classes (in public school, not at the deaf school[280]), especially *Romeo and Juliet.* For them, reading is a highly imaginative activity, and one that they enjoy escaping into. "I love to read," Hendrix says. "It's interesting. So many stories, and it never stops. There's always something to read." And Bella agrees, expounding in more depth about why reading appeals to her so much:

> I like it because I feel smart, and I can do things. I'm opening up to new worlds, kind of. Like, reading…it's, uh, uh, it's just a weird feeling, like, you're not worried about anything. You just sit and, uh, think of your own world, like, you can picture yourself in the book.

Hendrix and Bella are extremely busy students, involved with various extracurricular activities such as sports, the academic bowl team, and student government, but when they *do* have free time—especially on the weekends—they like to go off and lose themselves in a good book. Dani also enjoys reading, but unlike Hendrix and Bella, she is more of a social butterfly and prefers to spend her free time with her friends and family, reading books only when no one else is around.

Reg has an even deeper relationship with books. Unlike the other students in this study who have been attending the deaf school for at least two years (up to perhaps most

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the responses of the more bilingual proficient students. However, I am still including J-Dawg and Auggins in this table so that the reader has some knowledge of who they are when they *do* make an appearance.

[280] This particular deaf school allows qualifying students to co-enroll in some classes at the nearby public school for part of the school day (with ASL interpreters provided). This allows the students the flexibility of taking a variety of advanced classes that may or may not be available at the deaf school. Hendrix, Bella, Megan, Dani, J-Dawg, and Roy each spend at least a couple periods each day mainstreamed at the local high school for subjects ranging from math to science to English to art. Hendrix. Bella, Dani, and Megan took English at public school during this academic year, and a couple of them are also taking an additional English class at the deaf school, as well, for extra support with specific skills. Reg, however, has just transferred to the deaf school after being mainstreamed in public school for the entirety of his K-12 experience, so he has never had an English class at the deaf school.

of their lives), Reg was mainstreamed for his whole academic upbringing and has just transferred to the deaf school for his final semester. Growing up as the only deaf student in his classes year in and year out, Reg was usually socially isolated from his hearing classmates (none of whom knew how to sign), so for him, reading was an escape from the isolation of not having friends. Reg repeatedly speaks of it as a way of relieving stress and letting his imagination run wild, but his concluding comment implies that reading was also, in some ways, more than just an escape: "Sometimes imagination is more real than real life." This remark suggests that for him as a child, reading allowed him to use his imagination to participate in different story-worlds, to interact with the characters in ways that he could not with his hearing peers, and to live a life of sorts that was not possible to live out in reality because he did not have friends or any form of social stimulation at school except for his sign language interpreter. When Reg says emphatically, "I love reading!" he is not simply talking about a favorite pastime but something much more deeply personal and valuable to him.

Not all of the strong readers enjoy reading, however. Megan, a senior who reads at a high school level, is definitely not a fan. Outside of school, she rarely reads on her own. "I'm not really that kind of a person who, like, loves reading, has their nose in a book all the time," she explains, "but, um, it seems like I always have a hard time with just picking up a book and starting to read, so…." Megan describes herself as being more of a numbers person than a book person, and she is never interested enough in a book to pick it up on her own volition. For her, reading is a chore, an obligation she must complete for school, and one that she does grudgingly. One thing she does enjoy, however, is journal writing. She keeps a journal faithfully and likes to write about her day-to-day experiences, but she does not particularly enjoy English classes or any of the coursework therein.

Of all the stronger readers in this group, Roy is perhaps the most uniquely situated. A high school senior, Roy vehemently hated reading until about a year and half ago when something clicked for him, and he fell in love with it—or, more specifically, with reading young adult novels. It all started when he saw the first *Hunger Games* movie in the movie theater and the closed-captioning device malfunctioned. Roy watched the

movie anyway without the captions; mesmerized by the action but intensely curious about what had been in the dialogues, he later picked up a copy of the book:

> And when I started reading, I realized that, all of a sudden, I could read the words and picture it in my head from what I saw in the movie. I was like, "Oh, wow!" And I kept turning the pages. And I really got it. And I noticed that some thing were different in the book, so that grabbed my attention. So I started reading more closely, trying to picture what I was reading. They'd changed a lot of things in the movie. I kept reading and reading. And now I could picture things easily in my head. So I kept going and finished the book. I was like, mm-hmm, cool…now for *Catching Fire* [the next book in the trilogy].

Prior to his epiphany with *Hunger Games*, Roy read at about the 5th grade level, so he was already able to read intermediate texts fairly independently (which is significantly better than many of his deaf peers), but he hated it. He admits that he had a hard time picturing anything in his head while he read. "There were too many words," he explains. "Too many whopping-big words":

> Yeah, words I didn't know. I'd just skip them, and skip, and skip, and skip. So I skimmed along a lot. Like, if I tried to look up a word in the dictionary, I'd find it and read the definition, and I still wouldn't understand it. Sometimes there'd be several words in a row that I didn't know. I'd be like, forget this. Why bother?

The slow, tedious process Roy describes here is not unlike what other deaf students describe about their experiences with reading, and it reminds us that just because a deaf student can read fairly independently, it does not mean they are able to visualize the story well enough to experience the full power of reading literature. When Roy watched *The Hunger Games*, the movie provided images that he retained in his head, so upon picking up the book, instead of using words on the page to *create* pictures from scratch, Roy connected the words to the already-existing images. All of a sudden, he could easily picture the story-world in his head, and in doing so, discovered that reading could be fun. He has since progressed to a 7th-8th grade reading level in the young adult science fiction/fantasy genre.

Roy also describes, with vivid examples, how the books gave more insight into what various characters were thinking, so he came to appreciate the books for the depth they had to offer, as opposed to the movie versions. He has gone on to read *Hunger*

Games: Catching Fire, *The Giver*, and *Ender's Game* by watching the movies first, and then reading the books (and occasionally reading the book first and then watching the movie). Roy used to avoid and resist reading, but now he looks at his deaf friends who still do the same, and he cringes.

> Some of them are not as patient, so they are quick to drop it and only look at the pictures instead. Just glancing over the pictures and figuring out the story from that, because the pictures are pretty descriptive. So they flip through the books like that, the little kids' books, so I'm like, well, umm, they need to go find a book—a thicker book, with words, a fat book, so…but they're like, no, no, no, I prefer this, this is easier. I'm thinking, why don't you push yourself?

Roy recognizes his former self in his friends, and it frustrates him to see how much they are missing out on by refusing to read. His newfound love of reading, however, is largely limited to his favorite genre of young adult novels; moreover, his enjoyment of reading does not translate to writing, which he still hates with a passion. He also still dislikes his English class, citing it as "boring" because of the amount of writing it requires of him. Roy's story interests me deeply because, as I discuss later in this chapter, he has crossed an important threshold with his discovery of reading, but his language ideologies, which feed his already-strong preference for ASL and his distrust of English, seem to be preventing him from fully embracing the learning of English.

ASL Literacy Levels

Important to the discussion throughout the rest of this chapter is the concept of ASL literacy. It is nowhere nearly as well-developed in scholarly research as print literacy is, but because of the ways that the bilingual students in this study interact with— and talk about—the translations, this concept is well worth explaining in order to give us a richer understanding of what it is that these students are doing when they engage with the translations. Also, using the term *ASL literacy* to describe the sophisticated linguistic skill set these students bring to the act of engaging with the translations is important because it situates these students' literacy practices in the larger field of literacy and sets us up well for future studies of how their ASL literacy practices might compare to those of print literacy in English and—importantly—how they could refine and complicate our understanding of what the practice of reading/literacy is.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Czubek[281] and Christie and Wilkins[282] emphasize that no agreed-upon definition exists yet for what *ASL literacy* entails, nor are scholars in full agreement about whether this set of practices should even be called *literacy* or something else instead.[283] However, no one denies that ASL has a rich and vibrant body of literature. Various works of art in ASL, ranging from fictional stories to poetry to non-fiction narratives to jokes, and even rap, are enjoyed and shared by the Deaf community, either as live performances or in captured video form. Even though scholars have not yet been able to agree on a definition or label for the set of practices that go into creating, interpreting, and appreciating ASL literature, all of their proposed definitions recognize that a critical difference exists between being conversationally fluent in ASL and being able to successfully engage with ASL literature.

Unlike in ASL conversations, successful comprehension and appreciation of a piece of ASL literature requires the audience to decode, interpret, visualize, and make meaning out of a series of complex moving symbols, handshapes, gestures, facial expressions, and classifiers that are more inventive and complex than what is seen in the colloquial version of the language. Because a sophisticated skill set is necessary to do this, and because the students in my study were not all equally adept in interacting with the translations, I will use the term *ASL literacy* in this dissertation to refer to this linguistic skill set and the students' ability to use it.

The ASL literacy levels among these students vary almost as much as their English literacy levels do. I did not set out to collect data about the students' ASL literacy abilities; however, during the interviews, a fair number of students spoke about the importance of ASL stories to them, as well as the ways they shared these stories with each other (and on occasion, competed to outdo each other in storytelling or jokes) and also how they sought out ASL videos online to enjoy, imitate, and learn from. When I reviewed the interview data, I realized that ASL literature was, for many students, an

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[281] Czubek, Todd A. "Blue Listerine, Parochialism, and ASL Literacy." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 373-81.
[282] Christie, Karen, and Dorothy M. Wilkins. "A Feast for the Eyes: ASL Literacy and ASL Literature." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 57-59.
[283] For a more detailed overview of this discussion and varying definitions of ASL literacy, as well as the implications of using the term *literacy* or other labels, please see Chapter Two.

integral part of their literacy experiences, so I hastened to incorporate these parts of the data in my overall analysis. Unfortunately, I do not have as much data about this as I do about the students' print English literacy levels.

For example, in regards to print English, I had access to the students' most recent reading and writing assessments from their English teacher and also their formal annual reading assessment from the school's files. These documents, combined with the students' verbal self-evaluations of their print literacy levels, their coursework from English class, and their English teacher's verbal descriptions of the students' reading and writing, give us a fairly comprehensive picture of what each student's English print literacy levels are. I have no such documentation for their ASL literacy levels, except for the ASL proficiency assessment done by an outside evaluator (which assessed their conversational fluency in ASL, not their ASL literacy), the students' verbal self-assessment of their ASL literacy skills, and the observations I made while watching the students interact with the translations. Based on these, I will attempt to briefly sketch each student's ASL literacy level as best as I can, with the strong caveat that this data has not been as well-triangulated as the print literacy data.

Table 7-2: Students' ASL Literacy Levels

Student	Hearing Level	Conversational Proficiency in ASL, PSE, CASE, or SEE	ASL Literacy: Comprehension (5 = native-like fluency; 1 = novice)	ASL Literacy: Production (5 = native-like fluency; 1 = novice)
Auggins	Deaf	4.5 (ASL)	4.5	4.0
Bella	Hard-of-Hearing	3.0 (PSE)	2.5	2
Dani	Hard-of-Hearing	3.5 (PSE)	5.0	3.0
Hendrix	Hard-of-Hearing	3.5 (PSE)	5.0	3.5
J-Dawg	Deaf	3.5 (ASL)	4.5	3.0
Megan	Hard-of-Hearing	4.0 (CASE)	4.5	2.5
Reg	Deaf	2.0 (SEE)	4.0	2.0
Roy	Deaf	5.0 (ASL)	5.0	5.0

As the chart shows, most students tend to be stronger in their comprehension of ASL stories compared to their ability to produce and perform ASL stories (much like writing skills tend to lag behind reading ability in print English). Moreover, some students tend to sign more English-like (CASE or SEE), but even so, they generally still understood the ASL stories well. Megan, for example, who strongly prefers signing CASE because she thinks ASL is too vague, was startled at how well she understood the translation even though she found it to be "really, really ASL."

Most of these students have been exposed to a wide variety of signers—some who sign more ASL-like than others—and storytelling and language play make up a big part of the students' social lives at the school, so even though they may not be able to tell ASL stories fluently themselves, they have had experience with watching other signers. As such, their comprehension levels for ASL literature tend to be consistently high, with the exception of Bella, who had just learned to sign a year and half ago and has had the least exposure to ASL literature in this group. Future studies will need to be done to see whether deaf students' ASL literacy levels can be accurately assessed separately from their conversational fluency in the language, and whether there might be any correspondence between the students' ASL literacy levels, their English literacy levels, and their engagement with the ASL translations. At later points in this chapter, my use of the term *ASL literacy* leads quite naturally to me using the word *reading* to describe the students' interactions with the translations, a conscious decision that I discuss in the next section.

Student Reactions to Translations

The students in this group were not in Eva's class, nor did they interact with the translations as a part of their English coursework. Because they were randomly selected to be interviewed, these students are scattered across several different English classes, and even other English classes at the neighboring public school, as in the case of Hendrix, Bella, Dani, and Megan. It was not feasible to incorporate the translations as a part of their coursework; instead, during their interview, they read one excerpt from an English text and watched a video of its corresponding translation, giving me their thoughts and reactions *in situ* as the experience was unfolding. This approach limited how much I could observe the kinds of meta-linguistic strategies they were using with the

translations because I was not able to watch them over a span of time like I was able to with Eva's students. However, one benefit of this approach is that it allowed me to capture their immediate thoughts and impressions in raw form—that is, I was able to directly observe their various emotions, their unfiltered comments, and, in some cases, their struggles to reconcile their conflicting ideologies with what they were experiencing, all *as it happened*, not as a reflective looking-back at a past experience. As the next subsections will show, the students' immediate reactions do indeed complicate how we think about *literacy* and *reading*.

Seeing "More" in the ASL Translations

When I explained the concept of ASL translations to the stronger readers during their interviews, some of them responded with excitement and others with skepticism. Regardless of their initial attitudes about the idea (which were colored by their ideologies, as I will discuss later in this chapter), nearly all of the students experienced something of a jolt when they saw the translated version of *The Tell-Tale Heart* because they found something "more" in the translations than they had in the print text. This is an intriguing reaction because it suggests that even though these students are fairly strong readers already, they may not be fully visualizing the story-world when reading in English. With the translations, they were able to achieve a deeper, more nuanced reading of the text, and they found it to be—contrary to some of the students' expectations—a powerful experience. Their comments underscore the importance of not assuming that simply because a deaf student is able to read print texts fairly independently, they are successfully evoking all aspects of the story-world in their imaginations as they read.

Indeed, when the video excerpt ended, a common refrain was "Wow…". Even though they had just read the English version before seeing the video, and even though most of the students reported understanding the English "pretty well" and found it "mostly clear," they were startled at how much they got out of seeing the story translated into ASL. Dani, who relies more on spoken English for communication and says she feels more fluent in English than in ASL, sat in silence for a moment after the translation excerpt had ended. "It's way different," she finally says upon being prompted to share her thoughts:

> The signing, like, uh, I've never seen people sign, like, Shakespeare or this stuff before. Like, it's more, uh, movement and it's visual. It's more—it seems like there's more expression to it.

Even though she has never really struggled with reading, even though she often reads for fun, and even though she believes that ASL is "less" of a language than English, Dani—perhaps in spite of herself—still somehow sees the ASL translation as having something *more* than the English text does. She finally settles on calling that *something* "more expression," and later adds, "It's positive. I liked it." Her choice of words suggests that with the translation, she might be picking up on some of the nuances in the text—such as the mood and tone of the narrator—more than she did when reading it in English. Megan, likewise, finds the ASL translations "more fascinating to watch" and reports herself more able to "create a picture of the story" in her head than she can with the English, which suggests that she, like Dani, is picking up on more nuanced details in the ASL translations and is thus able to make more meaning out of the text.

Those kinds of nuances—such as tone, implied meanings, and mood—are typically not explicitly stated in the text, and must be inferred by the readers. Wilhelm and other reading experts call these skills *reading between the lines* and *making inferences* in order to create and refine one's conceptualization of the story-world while reading.[284] Beach et al. emphasize that a key element in a successful reading act is not only understanding the words on the page but also understanding how a given word is being used in certain contexts and by whom in the story, which can add to or even alter the meaning of a word.[285] Such meanings are not always transparent even if one understands the dictionary definitions of every word and phrase. Strong readers are able to bring their own knowledge to the act of reading, pick up on contextual clues, and note the shifts in meanings, all of which affect how they visualize the story-world.

Additionally, many hearing readers have grown up with stories being read out loud to them and are able to "hear" the words and sentences in their heads—complete with inflections, tone, and so forth—while they read silently to themselves. For strong

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[284] See Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book* and also Wilhelm, *Strategic Reading.*

[285] Beach, Richard, Deborah Appleman, Susan Hynds, and Jeffrey Wilhelm. *Teaching Literature to Adolescents.* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 149.

(hearing) readers who are able to do this, it further enhances their mental representations of the story-world and more fully capture the nuances in the story. Some hard-of-hearing students may have enough hearing to access some of the information available from the inflections, tone, and mood of a story being read out loud (or silently in their heads), but it is doubtful they are able to fully "hear" these sentences in their heads. As for the more deaf readers, their reading process is not sound-based,[286] so auditory inflections and tone are not a part of their "toolbox" for making meaning out of printed words. Strong readers who are deaf must therefore use other processes to pick up on these nuances in the texts.

A strong reader, for example, would be able to pick up on the often unspoken hints about the narrator's sanity within the *Tell-Tale Heart* to construct their understanding of the narrator's personality. In his own words, the narrator insists that he has not gone mad, and declares that he will prove that he is rational, yet his spastic, self-interruptive sentences and his sometimes cool and rational, sometimes frantic tone call his claim into question, as does his erratic behavior within the story. Being able to pick up on these kinds of contextual clues, tone shifts, and juxtapositions within the text is a highly desirable reading behavior, but the fact that Dani and Megan—both of whom could read nearly all of the English words on the page independently—saw *more emotion*, *more expression,* and *more pictures* with the translations suggests that they are not picking up on all of the nuances in the print text. To wit, the translations opened up deeper aspects of the story for them and makes these nuances available to them in a more fully accessible way. This is particularly interesting because they both initially expressed skepticism about whether seeing the story in ASL would be of any benefit to them.

Roy also sees the translations as having more details than the English text. He is not quite as strong a reader as Dani and Megan, so the translations probably benefited his basic comprehension; nevertheless, he still saw "more" in the ASL, saying, "This is more real than the story I read." Roy explains that the facial expressions made the story feel more "full" and "enjoyable" for him, and he goes on to elaborate:

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[286] For more on deaf readers and research on their reading processes, see Musselman, Carol. "How Do Children Who Can't Hear Learn to Read an Alphabetic Script? A Review of the Literature on Reading and Deafness." *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 9-31.

Roy: Because it's more fun to watch the facial expressions, and I
     understand the story much more clearly, uh, like the way he describes
     how he hates the old man's eye, what it looks like…
Q: Yeah, it's pretty vivid.
Roy: So it would mean, like, uh, uh, I'd understand more, like, how he's
     feeling, his disgust.

Even though he can read fairly well on his own, the story resonated with Roy at a much deeper and more meaningful level when it was in ASL rather than in English, perhaps because he was able to better visualize the story and, importantly, pick up on the mood and emotion within it.

This is crucial because he is able to empathize with what the character is feeling, which leads to him enjoying the story much more than he would if he were reading only the English, a claim that Megan also makes when explaining why she would be much more likely to read the ASL version. It appears that some of these students—Roy and Megan, in particular—in spite of being fairly strong readers, are not able to fully employ as wide a range of reading strategies in English as they are capable of using in ASL, so upon seeing the translations, they could bring a fuller arsenal of meaning-making strategies to the story, and thus achieve a deeper, more layered comprehension (and, importantly, appreciation) of the story. This is a crucial finding, for it suggests that ASL translations have many potential benefits not only for struggling readers but also for the stronger readers, even those who we might assume can read the text well enough on their own.

Use of the Verb "Reading"

Hendrix, a strong reader, also felt that the translations provided more clarity for him, but his use of the verb *read* to refer to what he was doing explicitly calls into question for us what we mean when we use the word *reading*. Like Dani and Megan, Hendrix has virtually no problems reading the print text and is more fluent in English than in ASL, but like Roy (and unlike Dani and Megan), Hendrix strongly identifies with ASL as his preferred language and was excited at the prospect of seeing the translations. Even though he expected to enjoy the story in ASL, Hendrix still experienced a moment of stunned silence after the experience. "Wow…" he finally manages to whisper. "That was *very* clear." Our conversation then proceeded as follows:

Q: So how was watching that for you? Was it also clear for you like the
   printed text was?
Hendrix: It was really, really clear. It was like I was reading the signs. It
   was like watching a movie. The hands and the face moving.
Q: Yeah, his facial expressions.
Hendrix: It was easy, way easy to read.
Q: How does the video compare to reading the print text?
Hendrix: Reading this [indicates print text], I don't always understand,
   like, this little part here, I don't fully understand, and this part over
   there, I don't get [pointing to specific phrases on the page]. But reading
   that [indicates video], it is much more clear.
Q: So you're saying that with the print text, you miss a little bit here and
   a little bit there, yeah? Maybe words you don't know?
Hendrix: Yeah, it was a little unclear in places, so it confused me a bit.
Q: Okay. But you felt you understood the overall picture pretty clearly
   when you read it?
Hendrix: Yeah.
Q: But with the video, it was even clearer?
Hendrix: [nods] Yeah, like, wow! It's so vivid the way he describes it in
   the video. He described that just perfectly.

Hendrix admits that even though he is a strong reader (and has read other Poe works

before, as well as Shakespearean plays and numerous young adult novels for his English

classes), he still misses a word here and there, so he might walk away from the text with a

mostly clear understanding of what he has read (enough to score pretty well on a test, for

example) but not necessarily all of the finer details in the story. Upon seeing the ASL

translation, Hendrix is blown away by being able to understand so much more than he did

in the English. "It was clear, so clear," he kept repeating. By this statement, I suspect he

means that, like the other students in the previous section, he was picking up on nuances

in the story that he had either missed in the print text version or not been fully confident

of in his interpretation while reading the English.

What interests me here is how Hendrix refers to the experience of ASL

translations as "reading" and "reading the signs." Upon being asked what the experience

of "watching that" was like, instead of following suit by also using the verb "watch,"

Hendrix immediately responds with verb "reading." What is more, when he signed the

phrase "way easy to read" soon afterwards, Hendrix modified the ASL verb *read* (which

is signed using the V-handshape to represent a pair of eyes sweeping up and down across

the open palm of the other hand, which denotes a flat, print source). He dropped the open

palm altogether—eliminating the flatness of the source—and shifted the V-handshape

upwards so that it faced away from him (as opposed to facing down towards the palm), and did the up-and-down motion, as if the eyes were reading something in the empty air in the front of his face. Essentially, he did the sign *reading* but without the flat, print text component of the sign, instead applying the verb *reading* to something without a specified shape, directly in front of him.

Roy also modifies the ASL sign in a similar way when talking about the translations. Neither student uses the sign *watch* to talk about the experience of the translations, except to say that the experience was *like* watching a movie. It is important to note that in these situations, the students do not use the verb *watch* with the translation as the direct object (such as *watch the ASL* or *watch the stories*); rather, the only time they use the verb *watch* is when comparing the translation experience with something else in an attempt to describe the experience. For them, the literacy act of engaging with the translations felt like reading—in fact, it *was* reading, according to them.

Upon being asked directly about his use of the word *reading*, Roy asserts that what he is doing *is* reading. "It's not, uh, reading English, you know," he explains, "[The translation] is the only easy reading for the deaf, it's something that's easy for them to read." Note how he distinguishes between reading the translations and reading in English, much like one might distinguish between reading a text in any other two languages, and he emphatically makes the point that reading the stories in ASL is a practice that comes more easily to him and his fellow students. Roy and Hendrix are not the only ones who insist on this verb choice; a number of other students also immediately and unequivocally answered, "yes, of course," when asked if what they had just done could be considered "reading." Auggins repeatedly maintains that it's "the same thing," and Chris (from Eva's class) compares it to the kind of reading he does when he reads comic books. In their eyes, engaging with ASL literature (whether it is a translation or not) is unquestionably a form of literacy and a form of reading, and it is one that many of them value and enjoy highly.

To be honest, before this study, I initially balked at the idea of calling ASL translations "reading." For me, *to read* has always been a verb reserved for engaging with symbols printed on a page, whether they are in English or Spanish or Japanese or any other language. These students' comments, however, combined with my experiences

translating English into ASL for this study and watching the study participants interact with the translations, pushed my thinking towards an expanded definition of *reading*. Time and time again, I saw the students engaging in deeply meaningful and complex reading practices while working with the translations: re-reading multiple times, visualizing the story-world, noticing techniques and rhetorical devices to incorporate into their own signing, analyzing the signer's choices, comparing words between both languages, empathizing with the characters, analyzing the characters in the stories, making connections between the stories and their experiences, and so forth.

Additionally, these students saw *more* in the ASL translations than they did in the English, and whatever that "more" may have been (e.g. more expression, more nuances, more layers, more clarity, more complexity), it contributed towards making their experience of that story even richer and more meaningful than did the English text alone. This led me to realize that even though the ASL translations do not come in print word form like traditional texts do, the students nonetheless were, indeed, doing a form of reading, and what is more, the translation could stand on its own as a literary experience completely separate from the original text.

As discussed in Chapter Two, a number of literacy scholars in recent years have emphasized the importance of recognizing multiple literacies and how these how literacy practices can vary widely according to different cultures and social contexts. Through the ways they interacted with the translations, the students in this study show us that perhaps there are particular ways of "thinking about and doing reading and writing" (to use Brian Street's words)[287] in the cultural context of ASL—ways that differ from those in English. If we consider Wilhelm's assertion that literacy is *the ability to traffic in meanings* through evoking and creating meaning through various sign systems (including music, drama, physical movement, and art),[288] then it becomes clear that the deaf students in this study, as they assert in their comments and in the ways they interact with the texts in ASL, have ways of reading and writing that are intricately bound up in ASL.

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[287] Street, Brian. "What's 'New' in New Literacy Studies? Critical Approaches to Literacy in Theory and Practice." *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 5, no. 2 (2003), 79.
[288] Wilhelm, *You Gotta BE the Book*, 96, italics added.

For them, their literacy practices in ASL revolve around the ability to engage with, appreciate, and compose with texts in the language—whether through the medium of video or via live performances—through which they traffic in meanings and do reading (and by extension, do a form of writing when they compose, revise, and edit stories and poems in ASL). This strongly suggests that we need to reconsider what we mean by *reading* and *literacy,* and, in future studies, explore ways that these deaf students' literacy practices in ASL might continue to expand the thinking of literacy scholars (as well as teachers, who are the ones that work directly with the students) towards more inclusive understandings of literacy.

Clinging to the traditional view of *reading* (as in reading print symbols on a page, a view that most teachers and lay people continue to subscribe to) and clinging to the assumption that literacy practices necessarily involve print text of some form (as some literacy scholars' definitions still do) essentially implies that all of these complex literacy practices that these students are using in ASL is *not* reading. My question if: If it is not reading, then what is it? "Watching a video"? "Listening to an oral performance in ASL"? It may be tempting to use a different verb (such as *watching* or *listening* or *engaging*), especially because the ASL translation, by its nature, comes in a different medium (i.e. video form) rather than in print as literature in most other languages do. However, such a move takes us into dangerous territory, for calling this practice something else other than *reading* not only undercuts the importance of what these students are doing in terms of engaging with the story, but it also disregards the literacy practices that they *do* have in ASL.

Further—and chillingly so—it also sends a strong message that a story in ASL or an ASL translation of a text is somehow less equal, less complex, and less valid than a story or translation that is read in any other language. In other words, by not recognizing the students' ASL literacy practices as a form of reading in the same way we do literacy practices in other languages, we are essentially saying that ASL is linguistically inadequate, even inferior to other languages for the purpose of conveying literature. As I argued in Chapter Two, by the act of translating literature into ASL and providing deaf students with access to texts in ASL, we are recognizing that ASL is linguistically equivalent to English, Spanish, and any other full-fledged languages that are used for

literacy instruction. If we still insist on calling the engagement with ASL literature *not reading* because it does not fall in neatly with our pre-existing conceptions of what reading and literacy are, then we are also saying that an ASL translation is somehow less equal than translations in other languages, and that the literacy practices these deaf students use with the translations (and, indeed, with ASL literature) are something else other than what happens in the literacy practices of other languages.

This is a disquieting notion, especially because if we call the students' engagement with ASL translations *not reading*, how, then, can we expect them to make connections between the metalinguistic strategies (e.g. reading strategies) that they already use with the ASL texts and the strategies we want them to use in English? Unfortunately, the belief that ASL lacks the complexity of English has been firmly entrenched in the ideologies of many signers and non-signers alike for decades, so the concept of ASL literacy seems alien to many people. Even some of the students in this study who identify closely with ASL do not see it as being linguistically equal to English; because of this, several of them balked at the notion of considering their interaction with the ASL translations as a form of "reading." Megan, in particular, struggles with it:

> Q: Would you say that watching the story in ASL could be considered a way of reading?
> Megan: Mm…mm (slow shake of head 'no'). Well, it's the same story, yes, but uh, it's different. It is not really the exact same words. It's just—I mean, it does explain all the details of the story, yeah, but it is not, um… (trails off and shrugs).

When I tried to elicit further comment from her, Megan simply repeated, "It's just different," but couldn't elaborate. Here, we see her trying to reconcile—and not quite succeeding—her belief that ASL stories are *not* reading with what she has just observed about her actual experience with the translation: that it *did* have "all the details" and was "the same story." For her, the translation did not have the exact same words as the print text, and this, combined with her view of ASL as being a simpler, broken version of English, leads her to reject the idea that her engagement might be considered a form of reading or that the translation might be an equivalent substitute for the story.

J-Dawg and Dani, too, view ASL as a "more concise" or "less complete" version of English, which colors their reactions to the translations. J-Dawg insists that the ASL story he saw must be an abbreviated form (instead of being a faithful translation) because

everything in it was simpler and because reading is something that you do in English, not in ASL. Dani sees it more like "just talking," complaining that the ASL translation felt like someone was just telling her the story. Even though she enjoyed it, she prefers to read the English, because according to her, the English words on the page make English words pop up in her mind, whereas the ASL translations do not trigger any English words in her head (even though she was comprehending the story). This led her to assume that the ASL story was not equally detailed as the print text because no English words were involved—rather, it was "just talking."

These students, under the influence of their ideologies, believe that ASL is not complex enough to be interacted with in the same way as we can with print English. Thus, they restrict their definition of reading to print words, and in doing so, they are not unlike the majority of people who take it for granted that literacy practices in all cultures and languages are rooted in print symbols on a page. It does not occur to them that literacy does not necessarily require print words, as a number of literacy scholars have discussed in recent years, particularly those argue that some cultures have "writing without words" and/or literacy practices that are rooted in images, movement, music, and other forms of expression.[289] The students' skepticism is fascinating, for they had just found their experiences with the ASL translations to be meaningful, enriching, and entertaining in different ways than they did the English text. Many of them found themselves engrossed in the translated stories, and a number of them even perceived themselves using the translation as a tool for improving both of their languages (which I will discuss in the next section).

In short, what they had just experienced mere moments ago (that the story was more clear, more detailed, more meaningful) flatly contradicts their claims about how ASL is less detailed and inadequate in comparison to English. Most of the students do not notice this contradiction: a number of them firmly assert that the ASL translations are not a form of reading, but a few, like Megan, find themselves uncomfortably stumped because they cannot reconcile their ideologies about ASL's lesser status with what they

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[289] For more on the concept of literacy without words, see Boone, Elizabeth Hill and Walter Mingolo, eds. *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994). Also note that Wilhelm, *Ya Gotta BE the Book*, and Street, Brian, "What's New in Literacy Studies?" also discuss forms of literacy that do not consist of words or print symbols.

had just experienced. When in doubt, they fall back on their ideologies and insist that ASL translations are *not reading*, for various reasons (e.g. it's a video, there's no English words, it's not the full story, and so forth).

They—like the rest of us—may feel more secure in holding on to their ideologies rather than allowing their experiences to re-shape their beliefs about ASL and about the nature of reading. However, as I have shown, the ways that the students spoke about using the translations to help them visualize the story better, understand characters more deeply, and pick up on the mood and tone more easily—these are all reading behaviors that happened naturally for many students when they encountered the translations. This strongly suggests that there *is*, indeed, such a thing as ASL literacy, and what is more, by being able to use their ASL literacy combined with their English literacy, these students were able to construct a deeply meaningful reading experience that far surpassed what they were able to achieve with the English text alone. If we recognize the skills and strategies that the students use when interacting with ASL literature as literacy practices, and if we recognize ASL as an equally valid language as any other (and therefore perfectly capable of faithfully translating literature from other languages), then it stands to reason that we recognize and call the act of engaging with ASL literature by what it is: a form of reading.

Bilingual Reading

Even though not all of the stronger bilingual students used the word *reading* to refer to their experiences with the translations, most, if not all, of them saw the potential benefits of using ASL translations to help struggling readers and also themselves with reading comprehension, but they did not talk about this very much in their comments. Instead, they spoke often and at length about the ways the translations might used as a valuable linguistic tool for strengthening *both* of their languages. For instance, where Eva's students—and the other weaker readers in this study—generally preferred not to have the English subtitles on while watching the ASL story, the stronger readers almost universally agreed that they wanted the subtitles on, and when I asked them why, their reasons reveal very sophisticated and practical meta-linguistic strategies for engaging with the translations, strategies that merit future research.

As Hendrix explains, having the English subtitles accompanying the ASL is very useful because if he doesn't know the sign, he can simply look at the English word on-screen, or vice versa, and, using both languages, he can achieve a "fuller understanding" and also learn the words or signs he doesn't know. Indeed, while the video of the translation was playing, Hendrix frequently looked at the print version that he held in his hands, meticulously comparing the words on the page to the signs he saw as the story unfolded. Megan and Bella also mention using the subtitles to play both languages off one another to learn both of them better; Bella in particular, as a novice-intermediate signer, likes the idea of using the English subtitles to help her learn new ASL signs. Thus, instead of seeing the translation as simply another version of the story, these students see a language-building resource that allows them to use *both* languages simultaneously and improve in both. This seems to be perhaps a form of translational learning, or translanguaging,[290] a learning process that needs to be explored in further studies. Even Reg, who was not a fan of seeing the story in ASL, admits that it would be easier to have the signing and the subtitles simultaneously for learning purposes. In other words, the advanced readers take the "reading as a writer" technique that Eva's students use for gleaning new ASL techniques for their signing, and they take it further by applying it to *both* languages, using the two languages to enrich their vocabularies in *both*.

From these students' comments about using each language to learn more about the other, it seems clear that they have achieved enough mastery in both print English and in ASL in order to be able to draw on their literacy skills from both languages simultaneously (and perhaps even engage in translanguaging) when working with the translations. Where the weaker readers saw little point in having both languages available (preferring the ASL version only), the stronger bilinguals were insistent about wanting both the English and the ASL. "I'd watch the ASL first," Hendrix explains, "Read it that way, understand all of it, and then read the book [in English]." Megan agrees, suggesting that she might watch the ASL video, and then get at least some parts of the story in English, saying she would want to know the specific English words. Other students prefer

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[290] As discussed in the previous chapter, translanguaging is a process of switching back and forth between L1 and L2 (either while speaking out loud or thinking to oneself) in order to draw on knowledge bases of both languages and further enhance comprehension and/or learning, a process that can by itself result in deeper, richer learning than if the student had stayed in one language exclusively.

reading the English first and then using the ASL translation as reinforcement afterwards to shore up their basic comprehension of the story. Many also liked the idea of subtitles so that they could see the two languages at the same time.

At any rate, the stronger readers all wanted both English and ASL available to them, and they all wanted to be able to watch the videos on their own (as opposed to watching with a class) so that they could pause and rewind when they missed something or wanted to compare between the two languages. These reading and re-reading strategies are powerful meta-linguistic moves that strong readers make, and here, we see these students describing how they would use this strategy while reading in not one but *two* languages at once in order to further strengthen their linguistic and literacy skills in English and ASL. Findings from bilingual research on the importance of developing and using strong L1 literacy skills for supporting L2 literacy learning validate the instinctive move these students are making here in wanting both of their languages available for learning.[291]

In his article "What is Literacy?" Gee makes the argument that literacy—not unlike one's first language—is mastered largely through acquisition (in the home and through natural socialization) rather than through formal learning.[292] As he ponders the "non-mainstream" students whose home discourses and literacies do not align with those valued in school settings, Gee points out that such students will always have more "conflicts" in using and mastering the dominant literacy practices.[293] He argues that we need to better understand the connection between meta-level cognitive and linguistic skills and the acquisition of secondary literacy practices (i.e. the type that is dominant in schools), and—key to my point here—he emphasizes the importance of working with the non-mainstream literacies that students have even though these literacies may seem to conflict with the dominant form of literacy we want them to acquire:

> This does not mean we should give up. It also does not mean merely that research and intervention efforts must be sensitive to these conflicts, though it certainly does mean this. It also requires, I believe, that we must

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[291] For more, see the compilation of research on bilingual teaching and learning in Ortega, Lourdes. *Understanding Second-Language Acquisition*. New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2009.

[292] Gee, James Paul. "What is Literacy?" *Journal of Education* 171, no. 1 (1989) :18-25.

[293] Ibid., 25.

> stress research and intervention aimed at developing a wider and more
> humane understanding of mastery […] We must remember that conflicts,
> while *they do very often detract from standard sorts of full mastery, can
> give rise to new sorts of mastery*. This is commonplace in the realm of art.
> We must make it commonplace in society at large.[294]

The stronger bilingual students in this study seem to have instinctively understood the point that Gee is making here, that their literacies in ASL and in English—even though these may differ in appearance and perhaps even "conflict" with one another—are not necessarily exclusive of one another. They highly value their bilingualism and jumped at the opportunity to be able to engage with both languages in an effort to achieve a new kind of mastery—perhaps not the kind that Gee had in mind, but certainly one in which they could bring all of their literacy practices from both languages together in order to achieve a stronger "whole" in their experience of the story.

This is a powerful point not to be understated: even though some of these students already read fairly well—or fluently—in English, they still found "more" in the translated version, which strongly suggests that ASL translations have much to offer—as a mode of reading, as a bilingual tool, as a form of literacy enrichment, and as an avenue of enjoyment—for these students, so we need to further explore how translations might be used in the classroom with not only struggling readers but also intermediate and stronger readers like these students. Also, as I will detail in the next section, this area needs further research because even though many of these students report seeing tremendous potential in the translations for supporting their literacy practices, their language ideologies—as well as the ways they identify or do not identify with English and ASL—often interfere with their willingness to engage with texts in one language or the other.

Ideological and Identity Hurdles

Most of the stronger bilingual students responded enthusiastically to the idea of using the translations to work on both of their languages simultaneously. Reg and Roy were the only two who—for different reasons—did not embrace the idea. In fact, neither of them showed much investment in developing their bilingualism; instead, each expressed a strong desire to focus most of their energies on their preferred language

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[294] Ibid., 25, italics added.

(English for Reg and ASL for Roy). I will therefore begin this section by exploring how their language ideologies and sense of personal identity strongly shape their reactions. These two students remind us that bilingualism is a complex state of being, and not all signing deaf students value their bilingualism in the same ways, nor will they all want to engage with literacy practices in both languages—for different reasons. Reg's and Roy's stories will serve as a springboard to further explore other ideological hurdles that came up among the whole participant pool in this study.

Reg, as the most stringent SEE signer and one of the least accustomed to ASL in the group, prefers to only read the English text. Even though he enjoys watching the translation and sees how the translations would help him learn new vocabulary in both languages, Reg greatly dislikes having to follow the pace of the signer, who he claims is "too slow." According to him, he is a very fast reader, so having to wait for the ASL signer (and the accompanying subtitles that follow the signer's pace) felt too slow and cumbersome. For this reason, he did not want both languages at the same time; in fact, being able to read at his own faster pace was so important to him that Reg was the only student in the study who would strongly prefer to read the English text exclusively.

His preference is also possibly compounded by his views of ASL as being "broken English," and he describes the language as being incomplete because it skips a lot of words. Several times, he emphatically says he prefers to use spoken English whenever he can, but he still has to fall back on signing frequently to understand what people say back to him because even with his cochlear implants, he still generally has a hard time comprehending spoken English. His own speech is fairly clear most of the time, and he always tries using it first before resorting to signing.

For him, English is his preferred go-to language (and he is a far better reader and writer in English than he is a signer, even though he has been signing his whole life); what is more, he strongly identifies himself as feeling "more hearing culture than deaf culture" because he is "used to the hearing." In his eyes, ASL seems to be merely a back-up communication tool, and one that is glaringly incomplete compared to English. Even though he sees the potential benefits of using the translations to enhance his ASL skills or to help build his English vocabulary, Reg sees little need to do so because his ideologies

are so strong that they drive him to distance himself from any literacy practices associated with ASL.

Like Reg, Roy differs from the rest of the rest of the group, but in the opposite direction. Even though Roy has recently become a stronger reader in English, the tremendous value that he places on ASL colors his view of using English texts in parallel to ASL translations. As a voracious signer who is fiercely proud of his Deaf identity, Roy feels especially protective towards ASL, and during his interview, he repeatedly expressed a marked antipathy towards hearing people who try to impose English onto ASL (i.e. signing PSE or SEE). Because ASL has a long history of being oppressed and displaced by English and/or English signing (especially in deaf education), Roy views the English subtitles accompanying the ASL translation as yet another form of English's rude imposition onto his own language, saying that it would bother him and that he'd "rather to have just the ASL." And a moment later, his comments reveal that he sees the translations as something *for* and *belonging to* deaf people; I have mentioned snippets of these comments previously, and here they are, quoted in full:

> Roy: This one, the video, is for Deaf culture, but it's not, uh, reading
> English, you know.
> Q: So you don't see a connection there?
> Roy: [shakes head no] This is the only easy reading for the deaf, it's
> something that's easy for them to read.
> Q: So does watching the ASL feel like reading to you?
> Roy: [laughs, nods]

Roy views "reading ASL" and "reading English" as separate things, and doesn't want there to be a connection between them, perhaps for fear that the ASL might be "polluted" by the English, or that his literacy experience reading in ASL—what he calls "easy reading for the deaf"—might be diminished by the addition of a language that he finds much more difficult and alienating (i.e. English). For him, reading the story in ASL is infinitely valuable, and it is something that belongs to Deaf culture—or, in other words, to ASL literacy. English, in his mind, has no such connection to deaf people. The addition of English subtitles seems to be an imposition of hearing culture, which Roy fiercely resists, instead preferring to immerse himself into ASL literature without any English.

In fact, Roy says of his past experiences with English and English signing, "I didn't want English in my mind for learning." He prefers "just ASL, pure ASL" instead. Even though he has finally found pleasure in reading young adult/fantasy books, Roy's negative attitude towards English makes him want to keep the two languages separate for literature, lest the English overpowers and smothers the ASL—and in turn, smothers his language and his Deaf identity. Roy's attitude is understandable, but yet concerning, for he is one of the students who might be ideally situated to truly utilize the translations for building up his English vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. He might be persuaded to read an English text after watching the ASL story, especially because he says his motivation level in English classes would be much higher if he could have the ASL translations available. However, it is not clear how willing he would be to work closely with the English texts if he perceives them as polluting his experience of the ASL translations.

Roy and Reg, each in his own way, remind us that navigating between two languages is neither simple nor clean-cut, and their stories remind us that *all* of the students' experiences of print English and ASL stories will be complicated by (and perhaps even challenged by, or arrested altogether by) their language ideologies and the language with which they identify, so we need to be cautious about giving a group of bilingual deaf students ASL translations with the expectation that they will all embrace and utilize the translations. In the sections that follow, I explore two major areas in which these students' ideologies seem to be interfering with their engagement with literacy practices in either language.

Not Trusting ASL

Most—and perhaps all—of the students in this study believe that ASL is linguistically inferior to English, and this belief comes out clearly in the skepticism that several students express towards the translations. In their eyes, the inadequacy of ASL necessarily renders the translations as incomplete and lacking in detail compared to the English original. In spite of enjoying the translations, in spite of noticing—to their astonishment, in some cases—that they understood the story more clearly, and in spite of observing that it was the same story as what they had read in English, these students did not believe that ASL translation alone would be enough to provide the whole story. For

them, the ASL version simply *had* to be simpler and less detailed because, well, that's just how ASL is. Thus, they did not trust the translations (i.e. ASL) to provide them with all of the information they needed to, for example, answer questions on a test or write an essay about the story.

This was yet another reason several of the stronger readers wanted to have the English subtitles on while watching the ASL. "Because if you have to write down the answers to questions," Megan explains, "then I'd want the captions on so I'd know the exact words to put down." Her sentiment is echoed by Dani, who I described in the previous section as feeling like she's missing out when watching only the ASL because the English words do not "pop up" in her head. Without the actual English words, she does not see how the ASL stories could be used for schoolwork or writing, something she clarifies later when talking about the importance of English:

> Dani: Because we all need to know about Shakespeare, we need to know about our grammar, our nouns and verbs, our, uh…
> Q: Why is that so important?
> Dani: It helps you to write, it helps you to read. It helps you to know the answers to the things they ask you. So, yeah.

In other words, learning English is important because it has all the answers: you need the words in English in order to answer the teacher's questions. Both Dani and Megan associate English with "correctness" in schoolwork, so even though they both enjoyed and saw benefits in using the translations, it seems not to occur to them that the ASL version might also be fully adequate for providing all of the answers. J-Dawg concurs with this sentiment, calling the ASL "abbreviated" compared to the English, saying that "the video is more concise" than the words on the page. According to him, the videos need "more details" and "more explanations."

Possibly, these reactions may stem from the simple fact that for these students, most—if not all—of their schoolwork has always been in English, and especially in their English classes. They read English texts, write down the answers in English words, and receive grades based on the correctness of such English words. As students, they have learned that it is very important to mimic the same vocabulary that their teachers and textbooks use. This may be what Megan meant when she said, "write down the answers." Even though most of the students in this group are considerably fluent in English and are

bilingual, they may not have enough meta-linguistic understanding to grasp the two following facts: (1) multiple English words can mean the same thing, ergo more than one word could possibly be the correct answer, and (2) a good translation between any two languages may not provide you with the exact same words, but it will provide you with the *meaning* of the original. In other words, a good translation would be just as detailed, even though it may not lend itself to a perfect one-to-one parallel between words in the two languages.

For these students, seeing the ASL translation without any English words may be unnerving because they are not getting the exact English words that they believe they need in order to write down their answers. (And even when they watch the translations, they will ultimately have to write out most of their assignments in English; knowing this may be a perfectly understandable reason they want the English text with the ASL, so they will get the exact word they think their teacher wants.) Many ASL signs have more than one possible English equivalent, so if there were not any subtitles with the translation, these students would have to choose an appropriate English word themselves, which might, in their view, increase their chances of being wrong on the written assignments.

This was also true of Eva's group of weaker readers, to some extent. Chris, who is much more fluent in English than the other struggling readers in his class, admits that even though he doesn't want the subtitles on while watching the ASL, reading the stories in English (in addition to the ASL version) would "help me understand the English in full" because the ASL "is not always in full. You always lose stuff, like, word are missing from it." Like Dani and Megan, he doesn't trust the ASL translations to give him everything he needs to understand, well, everything. He is not a particularly strong reader compared to the group of stronger readers, but he knows perhaps enough English to question whether the translations *are* giving him all of the information.

Chris certainly views ASL as being "broken" and "less full" compared to the English, and so does Bella, who is highly skeptical of ASL's ability to communicate every detail. As a novice signer of intermediate fluency, she admits that she still doesn't comprehend enough ASL to really understand it well. Because of this, she feels like a lot

of information is missing in ASL, as she explains with her example sentence, "The butterfly flew through the garden":

> Like, in English you would say, "The butterfly flew in the garden" and then in ASL it would be "flew garden butterfly." [Demonstrates butterfly flitting around with CL:B] Uh, so it's like, the more, it's like, you have more than just words, but the words you do have are bigger or...you don't really describe how the butterfly flew or which garden […] Uhh…I mean, like, you know what they're doing [in an ASL sentence]…uh, you don't really know why or who or what. You're just assuming like—in public school, they tell you "the Big 4s" or Threes, or whatever. Who, Why, When, Where, that stuff. Then with ASL, I feel like I miss so much with *why* the butterfly flew. *When*…uh… like, and…? And…? Uh, it's like…they tell you a part of the book, but they don't tell you want you want to know. Like, give me more, give me more. I'm waiting. Come on. But it's like (shrugs)…I feel like I miss so much.

Bella struggles to explain what kinds of details seem to be missing in the ASL version; she seems to be saying that even though ASL sentences may show what happens (a butterfly flew), they do not give details about the subject's motives or thoughts or precise location, something she finds frustrating. Even though she briefly toys with the idea that the words in ASL are somehow "more than just words" and that those words are somehow "bigger" (by which I suspect she means the signs are supplemented by facial expressions and in an ASL sentence, each individual word does more "work" than its corresponding word in an English sentence), Bella still thinks a lot of details are missing in ASL.

She admits that it may be because she is still fairly new at learning ASL, but her distrust becomes very evident when she is introduced to the concept of ASL translations. Bella has seen a wide range of signing styles (more English-like, more ASL-like), and to her, the "pure ASL" seems to be much more unpredictable compared to the precise, ordered nature of English. Bella is quick to identify a slew of benefits that the ASL translations would have for her deaf friends, but because of her views of ASL, Bella feels deeply mistrustful about the whole idea:

> Bella: I mean, like, the only thing that would bother me would be if—
> because I think I'm more aware of how much translation can miss
> the point now because of my music class, I mean, some songs I've,
> I've talked with people about them and they have the same point of

view as me, and then it's translated, and I'm just like, huh? That's it?

Q: It's a different way of expressing it, yeah.

Bella: It's a different way, yeah. And I don't want the deaf people to miss the point, yeah? I feel like they always need the opportunity to show or to express, or if they like the book, um, I don't want someone to miss out and not liking the book just because of not having the correct translation or not getting it. So, yeah.

Even though she expressed excitement about the idea of her deaf friends being "opened up to more" by being able to see the stories in ASL, Bella is afraid that the translations may "miss the point" and thus skew—or even ruin altogether—the story for her deaf friends. "The thing is," she concludes, "I've learned that when you translate, it's hard to get the real point." Indeed, she is right in saying that translation is a challenging task, especially given the ambiguity of language itself, but I cannot help but suspect that her distrust of translation may stem mostly from her as-yet-not-fully-developed fluency in ASL and from her view of ASL as lacking in details.

What fascinates me about these students is that their doubts and mistrustfulness mirror common beliefs and apprehensive attitudes that the general public has towards ASL as a language. And they also reflect the kinds of comments I have heard from "typical" hearing people who do not know anything about ASL (and indeed, from some deaf people, as well) about the notion of providing deaf students with ASL translations of literature—comments such as: "Won't a lot get lost in translation?" "But we need to give them the English. That's more important." "ASL isn't a real language, so it can't do all that." "ASL won't be enough; wouldn't the text get dumbed down?" "Won't that prevent them from reading the English?" These comments and their ilk I have heard repeatedly from a wide range of people. However, it surprises me somewhat to hear them coming from the students in my study because they are teenagers who actually use ASL on a daily basis and who know virtually nothing about literary translation between any languages.

Because those students probably have never been told or taught that "true translation is impossible," the fact that they instinctively distrusted the ASL translation for academic work (in spite of their enjoyment of it and in spite of how much easier they thought it was) strongly suggests—to me, at least—that their language ideologies are a driving factor behind their apprehension about relying on the ASL translations without

268

also having the English words. This, compounded with the knowledge that English literacy is highly valued in "the real world," may be partly why some of the students cling to English as the language that has all of the answers, and do not see ASL as being equally sufficient. This underscores the importance of not only being aware of our students' ideologies and these ideologies affect their willingness to engage with a text in either ASL or English or both but also of providing these students with a more thorough linguistic understanding of ASL, for if they do not understand and trust the language itself, then they will not be able to fully utilize the powerful bilingual-building tool that ASL translations could potentially be for them.

Translation and The Transfer of Linguistic Ownership

A fascinating ideological "move" that nearly all of the students made in this study was to immediately associate the translated stories with Deaf culture and identity, which is intriguing because they knew very well that the stories were translations *of English texts*. In fact, the translations were presented as something that might be a part of their English classes, and what is more, the students saw the story in English first. In spite of all this, they—to my genuine surprise—very unthinkingly (as in automatically, without question) and unhesitatingly perceived the translated stories as something that belonged to ASL and to Deaf people. For instance, as we have already seen, Roy refers to the translations as "reading for deaf people" and Snooki, J-Dawg, King, Jayson, and Auggins also make remarks about the translation along the lines of "it belongs to the deaf," "this is in my language," and "it's mine." This swift and seemingly automatic transfer of linguistic and cultural ownership of the translated stories—which was perhaps reinforced by the students' view of reading in English as a practice that belongs to hearing people, as discussed in the previous chapter—led to a few different types of reactions from various students, reactions that most certainly bear thinking about and that are illuminated by their language ideologies and the way these students identify themselves.

It is not surprising that the students who identify the most with Deaf culture and who have the strongest Deaf identities (e.g. Roy, King, and Snooki) would be quick to enjoy stories in ASL. As other Deaf Studies research has shown, ASL has long been a

highly valued and prized part of the Deaf community and culture.[295] Even though it is not the first or native language for a high percentage of deaf people[296], many deaf individuals strongly identify ASL as their linguistic "home"—that is, the language that they prefer and over which they feel the most ownership. Knowing this, I was not surprised when the students in my study talked about ASL as being extremely important to them. For example, King, when reflecting on what a deaf person's life is like without ASL, succinctly summed up what I have just described:

> It would be bad. He would be lonely. He would have to bottle everything up inside because he can't talk with other people. He'd just have to go off and be by himself. When a deaf person learns ASL and gets to know other deaf people, then he can really be a part of the group, more than if he were with hearing people. Knowing ASL is what brings deaf people together. If we meet someone who is deaf and knows ASL, we are immediately connected. But without ASL, you are just with hearing people, and you are left out.

Like other deaf people, King strongly identifies with ASL because it is what connects him with other deaf people and gives him a group to belong to; without it, he would be isolated in an ocean of hearing people, including his own family. Roy echoes King's sentiments, and he adds, "[ASL] is mine, my language."

Such comments about ASL were not unexpected; however, the possessiveness and sense of ownership the students showed towards the translations went beyond my expectation, as did the way all—not some, but all—of the students perceived the translations as somehow transferring ownership of the stories themselves from English to ASL. The fact that the stories had originally been in English seemed not to matter; students embraced them simply for being in ASL, identifying them as "belonging to the

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[295] For more on ASL and its integral part of the Deaf community, see Padden, Carol. A. "Folk Explanation in Language Survival." In *Deaf World: A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook.* Edited by Lois Bragg (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001), 105-115. See also the collection of articles under the heading "The Noblest Gift God Has Given to Deaf People: American Sign Language" in: Bragg, Lois, ed. *Deaf World: A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook.* New York: New York University Press, 2001.

[296] 90%, maybe even 95%, of deaf children are born into hearing families, and it is rare for hearing families learn to sign fluently, so many deaf children do not begin to learn ASL until they enter school (or much later in life, such as during adolescence, college, or adulthood). (For more, see Holcomb, *Introduction to American Deaf Culture.)* Even so, those individuals often come to value and identify ASL as their true linguistic "home," and for many of them, ASL is the first language they feel complete ownership over (unlike spoken English, which does not come naturally to many of them); for this reason, they will often call ASL their first language, even though it is not.

deaf" and being "for Deaf culture." Actually, Snooki and King make no distinction between ASL literature and the translations, deliberately calling the translations "ASL stories" in the same way that they talk about original ASL poetry and stories. Roy puts it succinctly when he explains why the ASL translations feel like they belong to him: "[English-related things] turn me off, makes me not want to listen. Forget that. But if it's ASL, I'm zoned in." For many students—and these three in particular—the act of translation brought the stories from a distant "other" language into the one they identify the most with, which made the stories feel like they belonged to the students in a deep and personal way.

Interestingly, the students whose Deaf identities are not quite as well established also saw the translated stories as being a part of Deaf culture, which led to some of them feeling their Deaf identities to be validated and others feeling alienated by the association of the translations with ASL. Many of the students who fall in this group (having Deaf identities emerging and/or not as firmly established) are hard-of-hearing. Such students are essentially suspended between two worlds: neither fully hearing nor fully deaf. Because they can use spoken English with some degree of fluency and therefore function "like a hearing person" in some situations, hard-of-hearing people are often not perceived as being "deaf" in the same way that, say, someone who was born profoundly deaf would be. But because they have hearing loss and can't hear all of the same things that hearing people can (as well as having imperfect speech patterns in many cases), they can't live fully like a hearing person; thus, they are not really "hearing" either. Thus, they live in perpetual limbo, not fully belonging to either world; they often struggle with their identity: am I hearing or am I deaf?[297]

When presenting the ASL translation sample to the hard-of-hearing students during their interviews, I anticipated their general reaction to fall along the lines of, "Sure, that's cool, and it might be good for some of my deaf friends, but it's not for me." It thoroughly startled me when a high proportion of these students reacted with unbridled enthusiasm towards the ASL translation. Their comments afterwards give tantalizing

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[297] Holcomb, Thomas K. *Introduction to American Deaf Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45-47.

insight into how they perceive themselves, their hearing loss, their languages, and their identity (as well as how all of these factors came into play when they saw the translation), and suggest that some of the hard-of-hearing students saw the ASL translations as a way of strengthening their claim to "deafness"/the deaf part of their identity.

Take Hendrix, for one. In spite of being able to converse easily with hearing people in spoken English (and spoken Spanish, as well), Hendrix strongly identifies himself as Deaf. Of the three languages in his repertoire, he prefers ASL and identifies it as the language he wants to improve the most in, and also as the one that he personally *needs* and *prefers* as an essential part of himself. Upon seeing the translations, Hendrix remarks:

> I think it would be really, really good because the story is a lot easier. It's easier to read the signs; it's better. I think it would be perfect for everyone…we could sign it all in ASL. We'd be very well-spoken.

Even though Hendrix is, by his own admission, not completely fluent in ASL yet, he found the signs "easier to read" than the English original, and in the translation, he saw a way of becoming more "well-spoken" in ASL, something that he highly values and desires. For him, the translations become not only a bilingualism-enriching tool (as discussed in previous sections) but also a way for him to interact with and improve in the language that has felt the closest to his identity since first learning it in the fifth grade. Perhaps, to use Scribner's terminology, Hendrix was able to experience the state of literacy-as-grace in his own preferred language, and felt both invigorated and validated by that experience.

For Bella, the journey towards accepting her hearing loss (meaning her physical hearing loss) and her deafness (meaning her identity) is much fresher in her memory; in fact, it had just taken place over the previous year and half. She used to be embarrassed of her hearing loss and would hide it from her friends, viewing herself as "broken" and "stupid." For years, she tried her utmost to pass for a hearing person. When her parents decided she needed to learn ASL in case her residual hearing went away one day (a very likely possibility), she had to be dragged kicking and screaming (almost literally) to the School for the Deaf in eighth grade. Even though Bella hated learning ASL at first, she came to a realization:

> Learning to sign made me realize that this is who I am, and I cannot fix it. I can't, I can *not* change me. I need to learn to accept it, so learning to sign was the first step for me to accept myself.

And when she began to accept herself and identify as a deaf person, Bella realized that the process of learning ASL had changed her perception of herself.

> So that really opened me up and made me realize that I am special. I was made this way for a reason (slow shrug), to, to find out why. And just move on with life and enjoy it and show everyone that I can do things because I'm not broken, I'm not stupid, I'm not…uh…I'm ME. You can't—you have to accept me. And finally, I'm happy with where I am.

Bella has recently shifted from perceiving herself as a "broken" child to a *whole* person, and for her, ASL was a vital part of that process, of coming to terms with her identity as a deaf person. Jayson reports a similar experience with ASL being integral to him accepting himself as a Deaf person; however, his journey happened at a much younger age than Bella. Even though they both might still struggle with understanding people who sign "pure ASL" or sign really fast, Bella and Jayson both love learning ASL and derive a sense of pride and pleasure from being able to switch between both languages. They also identify ASL as a sort of gateway for embracing and enacting their identities as Deaf persons; they see the translations as something distinctly "Deaf" that they can use to enhance their ASL skills and better understand their deaf friends.

Even though the stronger bilingual students all seem to associate the translations with ASL and Deaf culture, not all of them perceive this as a positive thing. Megan, for example, identifies herself as a hard-of-hearing person rather than a deaf person, and she prefers to use spoken English most of the time because it "keeps my options open with hearing people […] I mean, I don't want to just work exclusively with the deaf, no. I just want to broaden my possibilities to whatever." When she saw the translation, she perceived it as something that would be good for *other* students. "I think the students who kind of struggle with ASL should really watch that, to see how he signs everything," she explains, "Because his ASL was pretty good, it would be a good example for others to see." *A good example for others to see*—in other words, it's cool, but it belongs to others, not to me.

Upon being asked if she saw any use for herself, Megan hedges: "Well, I watched that, and yeah, I understand it pretty well, but it's really, really ASL. Wow."

Even though she admits she understood the translation (a fact that seemed to surprise her) and even though she said that she enjoyed it and would prefer to watch the translated story rather than read the English, Megan is still struggling with the strong ASL-ness of the translations. Later, she adds that she would have preferred the signer to be less ASL—that is, signing in a form of English signs (PSE or CASE), which she feels has more details and accuracy. This suggests to me that Megan, who does not identify as Deaf, feels like the ASL nature of the translation is too heavy a dose of Deafness for her, and so she seeks out ways to keep it at a distance or to "Englishify" (or "hearingify") it by making it more closely aligned with the language that she more strongly identifies with.

Like Megan, Reg sees the translation as something that belongs to the "other," and he distances himself from it. He has signed English (SEE) his whole life, but he was mainstreamed for nearly all of his K-12 education, and he had never been around other deaf people until this semester. Because of this, Reg experienced cultural shock when he arrived at the deaf school, and it all seems very "strange" to him.

> Q: Ok, um, now that you're at this deaf school—you've just started here, right? How has that experience been for you, with all-deaf students here?
> Reg: Yes, it has been very different.
> Q: Has that been a good thing, a bad thing, what?
> Reg: More like a bad thing.
> Q: Really? How so?
> Reg: (shrugs) Because, I think it's because I was raised in a hearing environment, and personally, it is weird for me being here, surrounded by so many deaf. And hearing, too. Mm…that is something that did not happen often for me. I've always been surrounded by just hearing people. The deaf act very different.
> Q: Different how?
> Reg: Mmmm..um…uh…yeah, they seem to, they seem to be more blunt. […] Mm, they're pretty frank, and they like to create drama.
> Q: What's it like for you to have people signing around you all the time?
> Reg: It does help to communicate. It's much easier. But sometimes they talk, and it's because I can see them sign, they talk about some really strange…and stupid things.

Reg is still reeling from the shock of being able to listen in to various conversations of the other teenagers around him, which he never could do at his other school. Instead of

attributing the "strange and stupid things" they talk about to normal teenager behavior, Reg thinks it is Deaf culture that is to blame for it (this very much underscores the distance he feels between himself and them). Indeed, he feels more comfortable in a hearing environment, something that he emphasizes again later, "I'm a very English person. Mm…I was raised in a hearing family and environment, so…" (Note the association of "English" with "hearing" in this statement.)

Also, very tellingly, when Reg talks about his cochlear implants, he talks about the other deaf students in a very distant manner. "You know," he muses, "I've heard that some students can't speak with their voices, even though they have cochlear implants. I think it's because they have mental problems, so it makes them not able to speak with their voices very well." His remarks here reveal a very biased attitude towards spoken English and a belief that speech ability is tied to intellect. Reg sees the other deaf students who have not learned to speak (the "them"), and he decides that their non-speech status must be because something is wrong with them. Clearly, Reg carries a lot of "hearing" ideologies about languages, and his preference shows through in his reaction to the translations. He sees the benefits for using translations with the "deaf them" who can't read well, but the ASL translations held little value for him; instead, in his eyes, they belong to an "other" that he feels he has little in common with.

These students' stories remind us that language itself is an entity that is heavily embedded into culture and identity. By translating English texts into ASL, we are changing the language that the story is in, and thus changing the way that the students perceive the story itself, who the story "belongs" to, and who might interact with those stories. Upon seeing the ASL translation, virtually all of the students perceived it as something belonging to Deaf culture, and as such, some students, feeling their desired identities validated or encouraged, gravitated towards it more than they would with the English text; a handful of students, however, carried identities that felt more distant from the "Deaf cultureness" of the translation, and thus were less enthusiastic about engaging with the story in ASL.

In retrospect, perhaps this is not such a surprising finding, that students who more strongly identify with Deaf culture and with ASL would be more enthusiastic about ASL translations of literature than would students who feel more "hearing." However, it

intrigues me that it was not only the "deafest" students (i.e. those with the most hearing loss) who identified the most strongly with the translations; it was also some of the students that seemed the *most* hearing on the outside who also identified the most strongly with being deaf and with the translations. Hendrix and Bella, especially, were among the most "hearing" students in the study, but yet they identified themselves as being deaf, and for them, ASL was the key to asserting that Deaf identity. Perhaps, then, for them, the translations gave them yet another way for improving their ASL and also strengthening their claim to deafness and/or "proving" their Deaf identity. As educators, we need to be mindful of the implications of presenting literature in one language or the other and how the language mode itself may affect the ways students might view the "ownership" or "linguistic allegiance" of the text itself and thus, feeling their identities affirmed or alienated by it, either align themselves with the text or distance themselves from it.

Implications

Literacy practices are deeply intertwined in language, identity, and culture. Indeed, it is difficult to separate out the individual strands.[298] For the group of stronger bilingual students in this study, having the ASL translations available to them meant something more than simply a way to access a challenging English text. Many of them immediately saw the translations as an outlet for them to use their literacy practices from both ASL and English in order to enhance their overall reading experience. Importantly, instead of setting these two literacies against one another ("either/or"), many of these students recognized that both versions of the text have different things to offer, so they wanted to engage with both languages at the same time.

This is a tremendously important finding for educators because strengthening both languages will do nothing but benefit these students in the longer run. Bilingual research has consistently found that the stronger literacy practices a student has in their native

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[298] Moje, Elizabeth Birr. "Youth Cultures, Literacies, and Identities In and Out of School." In *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through the Communicative and Visual Arts*, vol. 2, eds. James Flood, Diane Lapp, and Shirley Brice Heath (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 207-17.

language, the better they tend to do with literacy in their second language,[299] which for many hearing bilingual students in the United States and for many deaf students, tends to be English. That many of the bilingual students in this study are *already* engaging in these kinds of linguistic practices on their own with the translations is extraordinary, and it is a practice we want to cultivate and encourage in them. Indeed, for several students, being able to work with the ASL translations was exciting and validating because it provided them with a space to not only use their ASL literacy academically for the first time but also to bring both of their languages and literacies into play. As educators, we need to pursue ways that we might provide this type of space for our bilingual deaf students—whether through translations or through other means—to practice their ASL literacy *and* English literacy together so that these students can become better at both languages.

However, the bilingual students' responses to the translations were complicated in a number of ways by their ideologies, which merit further attention. More work also needs to be done in this area to develop a better understanding of the students' varying levels of ASL literacy and precisely *what* constitutes ASL literacy, and how we might help our students to draw parallels between the skills and strategies they *already* use with the ASL texts to the similar strategies we want them to use with the English texts (and how students might transfer strategies from one literacy to the other), something that would be of tremendous value to deaf students who are considerably stronger in their ASL literacy skills than in their English skills.

In closing, Roy speaks at length about wishing that he could take an ASL class so that he can "jump from one language to the other, back and forth" by studying English texts in his English class and ASL literature in his ASL class. He sees the ability to "go back and forth" between English and ASL classes (or English and ASL texts) as being something deeply validating and which will allow him to receive a "re-energization" of sorts from the ASL. According to him, this would give him a boost for getting through and "overcoming" the English. In Roy's eyes, the benefits of an ASL class stems

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[299] August, Diane, and Timothy Shanahan. *Executive Summary of Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (*Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 5.

primarily from its ability to create a space for him in which he feels linguistically proficient and can engage artistically with the language that feels closest to his identity. However, I would also argue that it would provide him and other students with the opportunity to study both languages (separately and/or together), which would, in turn, likely enhance their literacy skills in both—especially if their teachers actively teach them meta-level cognitive strategies for transferring the literacy practices that they already have in ASL to the reading and writing we ask them to do in English.

Chapter 8
Implications

Introduction

This qualitative study responds to the gap in research with a combined focus on deaf students' language ideologies and literacy, as well as on ASL translations, and it offers new insights into the beliefs, values, and attitudes that students have about both English and ASL, looking specifically at how these may affect students' literacy learning. This study also explores the possibility of using ASL translations in the English and Language Arts classroom as a way that creates a space for bringing together the students' literacy practices from both languages to create richer, more meaningful literary experiences for these students. The fourteen deaf and hard-of-hearing students who participated in this study reveal how their attitudes towards print literacy in English are fed and complicated by the ideologies they carry about not only English but also ASL.

What is more, their complex reactions to literacy practices in both languages remind us that print literacy and the teaching of English are not neutral entities but are, in fact, ideologically charged practices that can align with or run counter to the cultures, languages, and identities of these students. As such, the aims of this study were twofold: (1) to inquire into the participants' language ideologies, and (2) explore how their ideologies come into play when they encounter English-to-ASL translations in the classroom. Because very little research has been conducted on using ASL translations with deaf students, another goal of this study was to see what might transpire when a teaching unit centered on translated works of literature was implemented in a high school classroom of struggling readers.

In this final chapter, I consider the implications of the major findings of this study and what they suggest for future research. This study reveals that deaf students' language ideologies are not predictable and that the often inaccurate beliefs they have constructed about both English and ASL lead to tensions between them subscribing to the language

subordination of ASL and upholding of ASL as a vital part of their personal identity. The ways that many of these students responded enthusiastically to the ASL translations suggest that they found the translations to be highly engaging and meaningful literacy encounters that tapped into their language and identities in a way that reading in English does not. Also important to note are the few students who distanced themselves from the ASL translations, finding them too "Deaf culture" for their identities. Indeed, the translations opened up new kinds of reading experiences for several of these students—especially the struggling readers, and even the ones who found the ASL-ness of the translations to be an alienating factor—and their comments about the translations raise a number of intriguing implications for language and literature pedagogy.

Findings

Through qualitative interviews with fourteen deaf students—all of whom use ASL and print English with varying degrees of fluency and some of whom also use spoken English—I collected information from the participants about their language ideologies, their understandings of how both languages work, their personal experiences using English and ASL, and their impressions of the ASL translation experience. Five students in this study underwent an intervention unit based on ASL translations in their English/Language Arts class and were interviewed before and directly after this experience, whereas the rest of the students encountered the translations only during their interviews and gave "real time" responses as the experience unfolded. As a result, I was able to gather some students' retrospective reflections about their overall experiences with the translations while also capturing other students' immediate, unfiltered reactions.

Beyond the specific findings about the students' ideologies about English and ASL as well as their reactions to the translations, the results of this study suggest that more qualitative and longitudinal research on deaf students' ideologies about language—and particularly their conceptions of English and ASL—would enrich the deaf education field's understanding of the complex ways that deaf students take up and resist print English. This is especially important given the prevalence of deaf students who struggle with reading and writing (and dislike it). In its exploration of the roles that students' language ideologies, identities, and linguistic preferences seem to play in the ways they embrace or resist print literacy, this study offers potential new directions in the teaching

of language and literacy to the deaf. Even though this study was limited to high school students at one school for the deaf, the findings strongly suggest that a better understanding of the interconnected beliefs, values, and attitudes that underlie the deaf students' relationships with both English and ASL would provide valuable information for educators who are seeking ways to make literacy instruction more effective for deaf students.

It is no secret in deaf education that a high proportion of deaf students struggle with print literacy and dislike it. Although several participants in this study did express negative, even hostile feelings towards reading and writing, the ideologies underlying their feelings were more complex and paradoxical than I anticipated. At the same time that many students claimed ASL as their preferred language and as a part of their Deaf identity, they also subordinated it to English, deeming ASL lacking in grammatical features and, therefore, a lesser language. Instead of this causing the students to look down on ASL, however, the perceived agrammaticality of ASL gave the students the illusion of having complete freedom to sign things however they want in ASL, which they liked—and which made them view English even more negatively for being excessively strict because in their eyes, it has all of the rules and grammar. What is more, the students' accumulated experiences with missing large amounts of information in spoken and written English made them see English as being the property of hearing people, thus leading many of them to consider reading and writing as "hearing" practices.

This perceived "hearingness" of print literacy may partially explain why many students in this study responded so enthusiastically to the ASL translations, with some calling it "easy reading for the deaf" and identifying the translations as belonging to Deaf culture (and therefore to them). Being able to access the stories in a language that comes more naturally and easily to many of them, a number of students engaged in a variety of sophisticated literacy practices with the translations that they were not able to do with print English, such as re-reading, visualizing the story, interpreting nuances in the text, and analyzing linguistic features of the signing. This suggests that deaf students who use ASL—even the ones who struggle with reading in English—have a robust set of culturally-embedded literacy practices rooted in ASL, practices that they have typically not been given the opportunity to bring into the reading and writing that they do in the

English classroom. For the weaker readers, in particular, being able to play to their linguistic strengths while working with the translations resulted in a surge of motivation and ownership in their work that astonished their English teacher and me.

Another key finding centers around the stronger readers of this study, many of whom could read well enough to understand the short stories independently. In spite of being strong readers (and for a few of them, in spite of their negative views of ASL's competency as a language), many of these students reported seeing "more" in the translations than they did in the English texts, which indicates that they were able to achieve a more nuanced reading of the story when both languages were available to them. What is more, several students spoke of translations as an appealing bilingual tool that allowed them to play both languages off each other in order to enhance their comprehension, vocabulary, and linguistic repertoires in *both* languages. These students were eager to strengthen both of their languages, and many seized upon the translations as a rare opportunity to do so.

The very "ASL-ness" of the translations, however, was an alienating factor for the few students who did not identify strongly with Deaf culture and/or with ASL. Even though these students noticed that the translations felt much more "clear" and "understandable" to them compared to the English text, they still distanced themselves from the translations. Essentially, they rejected a tool that could potentially benefit their literacy learning, which is very concerning for us as educators. What is more, this finding reminds us that each deaf student brings a set of language ideologies with them to the act of reading and writing, and these ideologies may—and seem to do so in this study— hinder some students from engaging fully with certain kinds of literacy practices even though they know these practices may be beneficial for them. Further research is needed in this area.

This phenomenon also underscores the dangers of us ideologically assuming that English, ASL, print literacy, and/or ASL literacy are neutral practices that take place inside and outside of the classroom. This assumption is particularly true of English, the de facto language in the United States and thus considered the most valuable one to learn, but the results of this study powerfully show that neither language nor its accompanying literacy practices are, in fact, neutral. As the students in this study show us, each

language is intricately intertwined with a specific culture, certain kinds of literacy practices, and particular types of identities, none of which are neutral entities and all of which come into play in the process of language learning. This calls to mind Rosenblatt's argument that reading is more than a meaning-making transaction between an individual and a text; rather, reading (and literature) is a culturally potent practice in which reader, text, and culture form and reform one another in constant conversation.[300] Language and reading are both culturally-embedded entities that can act and be acted upon by the students in powerful ways as they work with texts in either English or ASL.

Complicating this are the students' own language ideologies—complex and self-contradicting as they are—and the ways they *do* appear to powerfully influence how the students perceive print English, spoken English, and ASL as well as the ways they align themselves with or distance themselves from each language. The ASL literacy practices that surfaced while the students engaged with the translations, combined with the general sentiment of enthusiasm and motivation amongst the students, suggest that the use of English-to-ASL translations of literary works may create a powerful space in which the deaf students' literacy practices from both languages might come together to create richer and more meaningful reading experiences for many of them.

Significance and Contribution

This study makes a number of different contributions to a few fields. I will begin by discussing the significance of the abovementioned findings for the literacy and deaf education fields, and then extend out into the translation field. First, this study underscores the importance of using a research methodology that adds deaf students' voices to the ongoing conversation about their literacy learning, voices that have not gotten as much attention as they deserve in the general discussion about the teaching of reading and writing to deaf students. Although research that examines areas in which deaf students struggle with print literacy is important, as are studies that measure student performance and teaching strategies quantitatively, this study shows that it is essential to understand our students' complex ideologies and how they come into play when we set

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[300] Elizabeth Hutton, "Informing Culture: Rosenblatt's Model of Transactional Reading and the Practice of the Literary." Manuscript submitted for publication in *Special Topics: Cultures of Reading*, 2016.

them about the task of learning a certain set of literacy skills and practices. It is not possible to fully understand why some students are more successful with print literacy than others or why some students distance themselves from one language and not the other without actually talking *to* them about their linguistic experiences.

Further research is needed to explore in more depth the ideologies and linguistic experiences of a wider variety of deaf students across different age groups and how such data might inform our pedagogical approaches in the deaf language arts classroom. More significantly, the findings of this study indicate that deaf students carry complex, contradictory, and often misinformed beliefs, values, and attitudes towards both English and ASL, all of which underscore the fact that they do not arbitrarily resist English or print literacy just because they find it hard. Rather, their resistance is rooted in their ideologies and their linguistic experiences, which suggests that educators need to work towards a better understanding of these ideologies and how they might be addressed within the classroom in ways that enhance the students' learning.

Secondly, the visual analytical skills (e.g. picking up on the signer's use of space in order to visualize events within the story or correctly interpreting a character's tone based on the signer's depiction) and the metacognitive strategies (e.g. re-reading, gleaning new signs to incorporate into one's own vocabulary, comparing the English text with the ASL, or knowing when to use a specific comprehension-enhancing strategy/tool) that the students brought to the table when they engaged with the ASL translations suggest that they *do* have a set of literacy practices that are rooted in ASL. Literacy practices in any languages are very much embedded in that particular language and its culture, and these students appear to have acquired a set of skills and strategies specific to the visual and kinesthetic nature of ASL literacy. In other words, they have ASL literacy practices that they are able to call upon in order to make meaning out of the ASL literature that they encounter (including the translations in this study). The kinds of cognitive "moves" we see these students making indicate that they are indeed engaging in a form of reading when they work with the translations, rather than merely "watching" the videos.

This raises a number of questions about ASL literacy, what it means to read (and write) in ASL, and how these students acquired these practices, as it is rare for ASL or

ASL literature to be taught in the classroom. Further work is needed in order to fully articulate what ASL literacy is and what it means to be literate in ASL. However, the findings of this study suggest that visual analytical skills are very much a part of being literate in ASL, as is the meta-cognitive ability to recognize and apply appropriate visual interpretative strategies as needed. A few students in this study who were still novice-intermediate ASL signers struggled with fully comprehending the signer's use of space and picking up on nuances in the signed stories, so they appear not to be as competent in some of the visual analytical skills necessary, such as the ability to interpret classifiers, pick up on shifts in meaning when the signer modifies a sign or a classifier, correctly construct a mental representation of the 3-D space in front of the signer, or simultaneously process multiple visual input from the signer's face and hands, to name a few.

Further work needs to be done to develop a comprehensive definition of the meta-cognitive strategies, visual analytical skills, and other components that comprise ASL literacy. Such a pursuit will also help to put the concept of ASL literacy into a position to perhaps refine how literacy scholars define and think about what *reading* is. This is an area that direly needs further research, for it holds tremendous implications for how we view ASL as a language and our attempts to understand and recognize the reading practices that we see the students in this study use.

Finally, this study suggests that teachers and researchers in the larger field of literacy and also deaf education must carefully consider the importance of recognizing diverse students' literacy practices (even the kinds that are typically kept out of the English classroom) and allowing them to bring these practices—along with their identities, language preferences, and linguistic strengths—to the act of learning print literacy (for example, see Wilhelm's or Moje's research on literacy and identity). This study offers evidence that ASL translations made it possible for the deaf student-participants to do so, thus forging deeply meaningful literacy experiences at a level that many of them had never experienced before. The finding that the students saw "more" in the translations than in the English text and felt ownership in the translations is important because it shows us that it is the English language that many of these students struggle with, *not literacy itself*.

The boost in motivation and investment observed in the students indicate that when the English language was not a roadblock for them, they were eager and willing to engage in literacy practices, even when the assignments were difficult and new to them. This is significant because it suggests that educators need to seek more inclusive literacy pedagogies that tap into their students' linguistic identities and the literacy practices that already exist within the students' native and/or preferred languages. This may also include developing a broader definition of literacy, one that recognizes and accommodates reading and writing practices that do not necessarily involve print words or even ink and paper, a move that a number of literacy scholars have argued for,[301] and one that would be inclusive of ASL literacy.

This brings to mind the definition proposed by Paul (which I discussed in Chapter 2) in which literacy is defined as a form of "captured verbal information." As Paul points out, this definition makes it possible to recognize script literacy (i.e. verbal information captured in written form) and performance literacy (pre-rehearsed signed words captured on video) as both being equally valid components of the larger concept of "literacy." Such a definition would be inclusive of ASL literacy and other literacy practices that may not consist of print words. Thus, defining literacy as "captured verbal information" seems to be a promising place for literacy scholars to begin exploring how we might refine and broaden our understanding of literacy so that it recognizes and includes non-traditional literacy practices that are not rooted in print symbols—such as ASL literacy. This is essential because as long as ASL literacy is not recognized as a real and valid form of literacy, it will continue to be largely excluded from the classroom and withheld from the development of literacy skills in deaf children whose first—or preferred, and often stronger—language is ASL.

This study offers translation as one possible pedagogical approach to achieve the goals of richer, more meaningful, and inclusive literacy instruction in the deaf English classroom, and it is important to note that the act of translation also holds tremendous

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[301] Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *You Gotta BE the Book*. 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008); Paul, Peter V. "New Literacies, Multiple Literacies, Unlimited Literacies: What Now, What Next, Where to? A Response to 'Blue Listerine, Parochialism and ASL Literacy.'" *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2006); Boon, Elizabeth Hill, and Walter Mingolo, eds. *Writing without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

potential for the linguistic status of ASL. Translations scholars point to how different cultures' literatures are mutually enriched by translations, and how translations can help affirm a language's status and capital in the ever-shifting hierarchy of world languages.[302] In the study, the students' responses to the translations indicate that they found the experience of working with texts in ASL to be a profoundly validating experience of their language and of who they are, a phenomenon that their teacher also observed. More research is needed to explore various approaches to ASL translations and how a body of translations might be developed for bilingual teaching and learning with deaf students. This is especially crucial because the larger field of bilingual research has consistently found that students with stronger L1 literacy skills also tend to achieve better L2 literacy skills compared to those with weak L1 literacy skills.[303] Thus, finding ways to incorporate ASL literature, translations, and even linguistics in the classroom to build and enhance deaf students' L1 literacy skills in ASL can only serve to benefit their L2 skills in print English.

Also, importantly, given the meta-linguistic strategies use by some of the stronger readers in this study to enhance their skills in both English and ASL, the concept of ASL literacy—as well as our definitions of what it is, which scholars in ASL studies still have not agreed upon—needs to be more thoroughly developed and understood so that it can be taught in meaningfully and theoretically-sound ways to deaf students so that their L1 skills (and, in turn, their L2 skills) can be strengthened. Considering that many deaf students enter kindergarten with an incomplete L1 foundation compared to their hearing peers,[304] it becomes all the more important to develop ways to strengthen these students' L1 competency—not only in conversational fluency but also in their L1 literacy fluency.

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[302] For more, see Grossman, *Why Translation Matters* and also Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything.*

[303] Bourgoin, Renée. "The Predictive Effects of L1 and L1 Early Literacy on Reading in French Immersion." *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue Canadienne des Langues Vivantes* 70, no. 3 (August 2014), 355-57; Cárdenas-Hagan, Elsa, Colleen D. Carlson, and Sharolyn D. Pollard-Durodola. "The Cross-Linguistic Transfer of Early Literacy Skills: The Role of Initial L1 and L2 Skills and Language of Instruction." *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools (*July 2007), 250-52. For more, see also: Ortega, Lourdes. *Understanding Second-Language Acquisition.* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2009).

[304] Livingston, *Rethinking*, 12-16. A note of explanation: Over 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents; it is relatively rare for hearing parents to achieve enough fluency in ASL to be an effective language model for their deaf child, especially if these hearing parents emphasize the learning of speech and spoken English. Thus, deaf children often do not have full access to spoken English *or* to ASL until

Closely related to ASL literacy and English literacy, the concept of translanguaging also needs to be further explored with deaf students so we can better understand how these students are (or are not) working from both languages to help themselves better learn and comprehend unfamiliar terms and content. In my view, bilingual researchers have not yet fully articulated the distinction between *translanguaging* and *code-switching*, but I find the term *translanguaging* useful for separating what the deaf students in this study are doing (when they translate between both languages as they interact with the parallel English and ASL texts) from the code-switching they may do when shifting between ASL, PSE, SEE, and/or spoken English while they communicate verbally via speech or signing or a combination of both. The fact that translating between ASL and English includes not only a shift to a different language but also a change in the medium (e.g. a print medium to a spatial, kinesthetic, and visual medium) also makes this distinction helpful for capturing what the students do when they translate between English and ASL.

Thus, by the term translanguaging, I refer to a learning tool—e.g. a megacognitive strategy—that the deaf students might use when working with a frozen text (e.g. a story in English or a story in ASL), whereas code-switching consists of students shifting back and forth between two languages (or registers or dialects of the same language) as they communicate, which can also be beneficial to their learning. However, *translanguaging*, for the purposes of this dissertation, refers explicitly to the use of translation as a deliberate act of learning when working with a text: by the process of translating the text into another language (either ASL to English or English to ASL) the students are able to tap into the knowledge bases and lexicons of both languages, combining the two together constructing their comprehension of the text. This strategy not only enhances their linguistic skills in the two languages but also, by the very process of translating and working with both languages simultaneously, leads to a deeper, richer understanding of the content itself than if the student had stayed in one language exclusively. Strategies for

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they enter kindergarten, and have not fully acquired a L1. Some deaf children enter kindergarten with virtually zero language, either because the parents did not learn to sign well or because oral communication was attempted first and was not successful. For some students, this leads to permanent language and cognitive delays. In this study, King was one such student; he did not learn ASL until he enrolled in a deaf school in his early elementary years. Even though he is of normal intelligence and converses fluently in ASL, he is still far behind in all academic areas and struggles to grasp abstract content matter.

teaching deaf students how to use translanguaging as a learning tool need to be developed and explored, particularly because a handful of ELL studies have found that many ELL students do strategically use and learn from various forms of translanguaging.[305]

Finally, it is important to consider that the process of translating print texts into a visual language like ASL brings to the surface a number of intriguing challenges that could potentially make significant contributions to how translation theorists think about translation, and especially the role of the translator, who is much, much more visible in ASL translations than in conventional print-to-print translations. More theoretical work, ASL translations, and research needs to be done to consider how the process of translating between ASL and English (in both directions) might enrich the field of translation studies and also ASL Studies. This is especially true concerning the highly visual role of the ASL translator and the performative nature of doing ASL translations, both of which would complicate translation studies' current understandings of the role of the translator as "invisible."

Implications and Future Research

Learning to read and write in a language that is not one's native language—and especially a language that one might feel alienated and excluded from, as many students in this study do towards English—is no easy task. Deaf students must learn to comprehend and navigate the grammar and idiosyncrasies of English, which seems excessively strict to them, and currently, they must do so with very little, if any at all, parallel linguistic knowledge of ASL that they might use as reference points for understanding English. Even though many students in this study identify ASL as being their preferred and/or native language, they have rarely gotten any formal instruction about how the language itself works, which means that they must navigate the grammar

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[305] Orellana, Marjorie Faulstich, Jennifer Reynolds, Lisa Dorner, and María Meza. "In Other Words: Translating or 'Para-phrasing' as a Family Literacy Practice in Immigrant Households." *Reading Research Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2003): 12-34; Creese, Angela, and Blackledge, Adrian. "Translanguaging in the Bilingual Classroom: A Pedagogy for Learning and Teaching. *The Modern Language Journal* 94, no. 1 (2010): 103-115.

of English without having a basic linguistic understanding of (or the terminology to talk about) their own language, let alone English.

The misconceptions and gaps in understanding that the students in this study hold about ASL and English (even to the point of a few students believing that spoken and print English are two different languages) point to the critical need for more research into the following areas: (1) how deaf students perceive both languages, (2) the ways they construct their understandings of these languages, (3) how the formal instruction of ASL might be utilized in schools in order to provide these students with a linguistic knowledge that is rooted in their native language rather than solely in a language that feels alienating and "other" to many of them, and (4) how ASL translations might be used as a part of literacy instruction in the classroom.

This study was limited in its scope, as it explored the ideologies of fourteen deaf and hard-of-hearing students from *one* school for the deaf. Every school for the deaf has its own unique culture; ideologies and linguistic attitudes may vary somewhat with different groups of students across different schools and various age groups. Because of this, more research is needed on deaf students' language ideologies, particularly on specific subsets of the deaf population, such as deaf children of deaf parents, deaf children of hearing parents who sign, deaf children of hearing parents who don't sign, deaf children who learned to sign later in life, college-aged deaf students, elementary-aged deaf students, and so forth. The participants in this study brought a diverse range of backgrounds and linguistic experiences to the findings of this research, but far more work needs to be done to capture a full range of language ideologies that are contained within the larger population of deaf students in the United States.

This study's findings indicate that more research is needed on translation as a pedagogical approach for bridging the students' ASL literacies and English literacies, as well as on what it might mean to approach bilingual instruction for deaf students through the use of translated texts (and perhaps translanguaging, as well) in which both languages are made equally available to the students. Before this can happen, however, a robust anthology of easily-accessed ASL translations needs to be developed so that teachers and researchers can have them at hand for use in the classroom. Deaf composition scholar Bruggemann makes a salient point about how not having a central anthology or database

of ASL literature cripples not only teachers and students but also the very concept and definitions of ASL literacy:

> The implications of the lack of such a literary resource on ASL literacy should be obvious, but allow me to press the point with a simple comparison: how would we talk about literacy in English without literature in English from which to draw and build that literacy?[306]

Indeed, literacy is rooted in the literature of a language (which was how *literacy* was originally defined in the 1400s: as the ability to read literature in one's own language). For ASL literacy and for pedagogical purposes, a collected body of ASL literature and/or translations is direly needed; a helpful place to begin for creating such an anthology would be to (1) collect and archive historical and current ASL literature works, and (2) prioritize texts for translation that are most commonly taught at the middle- and high school level across the country: short stories, poetry, novels, and non-fiction texts. Only when a variety of ASL translations and literary works are widely and cheaply available can teachers and curriculum developers begin to explore ways that they might be used as a bilingual teaching tool to not only teach literature but also close reading, writing, grammar, and linguistic analysis (in both languages) to deaf students.

This type of bilingual teaching might include not only translations but also coursework on ASL's structure and grammar, which may help to correct the many ideological misconceptions that surfaced in this study about how ASL works and regarding its status as a bona fide language equally competent as English or any other language. Coursework also might include the explicit study of ASL literature in parallel ways to how English literature is currently studied in by hearing students, as well as the teaching of how to compose and revise stories, poetry, and other genres in ASL (akin to how writing in English is taught). We need more curriculum development and pedagogy that incorporates bilingual teaching and learning in the deaf classroom using not only translations but other resources and activities that allow students to engage with both languages and their accompanying literacy practices.

Additionally, future studies need to explore the students' attitudes towards ASL translations as they experience them over a long period of time (as opposed to over a 7-

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[306] Brueggemann, Brenda Jo. *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* (Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 70.

week period), and also on how teachers might use translations to help students make connections and comparisons between English and ASL that might facilitate the students' transfer of various reading and writing skills from ASL to English. A useful activity might be to have students analyze and critique the translator's choice of signs for a specific English word or phrase, or compare the syntax of the English on the page and its parallel excerpt in ASL to better understand how both languages work. This might work particularly well with passages that require a lot of visualization: the students could analyze how the translator renders descriptive phrases visually into ASL (or in the opposite direction, from ASL to English), and attempt similar evocative moves on their own.

The findings in this study suggest that there is potentially great power in using ASL literature and ASL translations to create a space in the English classroom that provides deaf students with the opportunity to play to their linguistic strengths while engaging in literacy practices. Additionally, such a move would also make it possible for deaf students to experience Scribner's concept of *literacy-as-a-state-of-grace*.[307] As pointed out previously in this dissertation, for many of students in this study—Eva's students in particular—this component of what it means to be a literate individual is not fully accessible to them in print English, but this meaningful, aesthetic experience of participation seems to occur for number of them when reading the ASL translations. Thus, teachers of the deaf can—and should—give students opportunity to engage with literature in ASL and teach them to recognize the literacy practices they already use in ASL (as well as recognizing various features of the language and their corresponding features in English) and make explicit how these literacy practices parallel the kinds of reading and writing practices that should ideally happen in English. As this study did not specifically focus on how such connections between the two languages might be explicitly taught, more research is needed in this area.

Even though this study specifically examines deaf students and ASL translations, other bilingual populations could benefit from research that explores ways to invite bilingual students' home languages and literacies into the English classroom to enhance

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[307] Scribner, Sylvia. "Literacy in Three Metaphors." *American Journal of Education* 93, no. 1 (1984): 13-15.

their learning. Bilingual students must constantly code-switch between their languages (as well as between registers) as they move to and from various contexts in and outside of school, and their literacy practices in their native language might not be acknowledged, encouraged, or affirmed as a legitimate part of their learning repertoire for acquiring print literacy in English. Thus, they may, like the students in this study, carry a tangled mass of ideologies about language(s) that may complicate the ways they align or distance themselves with English literacy practices. Even though this study focuses on a very specific student population, it speaks to educators and researchers who are interested in helping all students successfully acquire print literacy in English, and suggests that in addition to a more thorough understanding of our students' language ideologies, the use of translated texts might serve as a highly valuable meeting-point in which bilingual students' languages, literacy practices, and identities may come together to enhance their reading and writing experiences in the classroom.

Octavio Paz speaks of translations as "intercrossings" between different literary traditions, cultures, and languages, arguing that "the works [of literature], each rooted in its own verbal soil, are unique…unique, but not isolated: each is born and lives in relation to other works composed in different languages."[308] Indeed, in this study, the translations acted as powerful intercrossings for the students between not only English and ASL but also the literacy practices of both languages. As Wilhelm reminds us, effective literacy instruction meets the students *where they are* and builds from there.[309] ASL translations, by bringing English literature into the deaf students' preferred—and for many of them, stronger—language, made it possible to do precisely this with the students in this study. And the results are powerful: several students were able to experience for the first time what Wilhelm calls the "empowering and emancipating" experience of reading literature[310] and, importantly, they were able to engage with the stories in the language in which many of them felt most "at home."

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[308] Paz, Octavio. "Translation: Literature and Letters." Translated by Irene del Corral. In *Theories of Translation*. Eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 160.
[309] Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *You Gotta BE the Book*. 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 51.
[310] Ibid., 198.

Appendix A: Translation Unit Overview and Sample Lesson Plans

Note: The teacher and participating students received their own copies of the translations on DVD. Here, I have included links to the online version of each.

Link to Translation of "The Tell-Tale Heart":
https://youtu.be/p8MMBpsYye8

Link to Translation of "Harrison Bergeron":
https://vimeo.com/channels/translationsinasl/137649452

Unit Lesson Plans & Sequence:
Short Story Unit on *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *Harrison Bergeron*

Theme, or Essential Question, of the Unit

As Wilhelm (2009) puts it, *essential questions* are an integral part of an inquiry-driven unit—that is, a unit that poses authentic, real-world questions without a single correct answer. In inquiry-based units, the essential question guides and drives the students' exploration of texts as they work together to understand the text and pursue answers and/or solutions to the problems/challenges/ideas posed by the text. In other words, the essential question provides a real-world purpose for the students as they interact with the texts.

The essential question driving this unit is: "Why do people sometimes make bad choices?"

This unit is also rooted in "I-do, we-do-together, you-do" approach to instruction. The teacher first models the target behavior, skill, or strategy for the students, then does it *with* the students, providing support and scaffolding as needed, and then, when gradually turns over the work to the students to do more independently. Various pedagogical "moves" in this lesson have been marked with [*I do] [We do together]* and/or [*You do]* to help clarify how the mental "work" of a particular activity might be divided between the teacher and the students.

Overall Objectives of this Unit

1. Give students opportunities to interact with complex stories and the ideas, themes, and essential questions arising from these stories.

2. Expose students to ASL translations of English texts.
3. Encourage students to make personal connections, judgments, and opinions.
4. Guide students in interacting with the stories by making readerly moves such as predicting, asking questions, identifying key moments in the narrative, and forming opinions about characters and events.
5. Foster discussion among students about their interpretations, opinions, and reactions to the stories.
6. Encourage students to make text-to-text connections (connections within a single story or connections between different stories), text-to-self connections, and text-to-world connections.
7. Give students opportunity to express themselves using both ASL and English.

Lesson 5: Students' Reactions to the Story—Performances

Lesson Objectives
1. Give students the opportunities to express and compare their reactions to *The Tell-Tale Heart.*
2. Model articulating a well-supported opinions
3. Guide students in articulating their own opinions about the narrator's choices.
4. Encourage students to consider possible alternative choices (and consequences) to the narrator's dilemma in the story.
5. Return to the overall theme of "choice" and the question of "Why do people make bad choices sometimes?"

How Lesson Fits in the Unit Framework
This lesson acts as a sort of wrapping-up of the Poe story and begins the transition towards the next story in the unit, *Harrison Bergeron*. In this lesson, students will articulate their reactions and opinions to *Tell-Tale Heart* and use that discussion to return to the overarching question of the unit.

Lesson Procedures & Activities
Estimated time length: 30 minutes
1. Put in the *Tell-Tale Heart* DVD and show the first 15-20 seconds of the story, in which the narrator claims he is not crazy. Point out places where the narrator repeats himself and re-emphasizes that he is not crazy [*I do*].
   a. Then show the ending of the story, where the narrator thinks he hears the heart beating. Discuss with the students whether this could possibly be a real phenomenon or whether it is in the narrator's head.
2. [*We do together*] Ask the students if they think he is really crazy.
   a. Ask: WHY did the narrator do this crime?
   b. Point to specific places on the DVD where the narrator explains why he decided that the old man had to die.
3. [*I do, we do together*] Tell the students that you will all (together) write a letter (or a signed response) to the narrator, explaining your opinion of what he has

done. [This is very similar to one of the prompts from the final project assignment]

    a. First: you model [*I do*]:
- List the key events in the Tell-Tale Heart (signing, or on the board)
- Explain your own reaction to each event (your emotions, your questions, your puzzlements, your opinions).
- Elicit from the students other possible options/choices that the narrator had. Make a list [*we do together*].
- You think-out-loud, exploring possible reasons that the narrator made the choices he did (if you like, elicit ideas from the students)
- Elicit from the students what they would like to say to the narrator (for example, to convince him to make a different choice, or to articulate their opinion of him) [*we do together*]
- Finally, you "perform" – either write or sign – a short speech or letter to the narrator *[I do]*.
    - In the letter, make sure you reference specific events in the story, why you think the narrator made these choices, and articulate your own opinion about what the narrator did.

    b. Second, *with* the students [*we do together*]:
- List possible consequences that the narrator could face for the murder (i.e. if the narrator were on trial, what might the punishment be?)
- Ask students how serious they think the punishment should be (the narrator did, after all, confess at the end, and there is a possibility that he is certifiably insane) – with the students, ponder possible reasons for more severe punishment and possible reasons for less severe punishment
- Discuss whether they think the narrator really is crazy and/or to what extent he should be held responsible for his actions.

    c. [*You do]* Turn it over to the students: assign their homework (suggestion: let them start in class)

        Homework Option 1: Students write (or sign) a letter to the narrator of the story, telling him what their opinion of his choice is, and what they think he should have done instead.

        Homework Option 2: Have the students write (or sign) a letter to the narrator explaining/arguing whether they believe his claim that he is not crazy. Tell them to use examples from the story to support their argument.

        Homework Option 3: Have students choose one of the punishments from the class's list that they believe is the most appropriate for the narrator, and give reasons why (signed or written letter).

Note: Students will receive their own copy of the DVD to bring home. Encourage students to re-watch the DVD to find evidence and reasons to support their opinions.

Suggestion: If you opt for students to do this homework assignment in writing, then you will most likely want your own modeling during class to include writing a letter similar to what you will be asking the students to do. Also consider providing students with a template for writing, if they need one.

Materials Needed
- *Tell-Tale Heart* DVD
- Copies of DVD for each student
- Pre-selected time-stamps where you plan to pause the video
- White board
- Homework assignment prompts

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Lesson 6: Transitioning to Harrison Bergeron

Lesson Objectives
1. Introduce the concepts of equality and handicap, both of which are important in the story.
2. Use students' own skills and experiences to explore the concept of handicap.
3. Explore real-world examples of diversity in skills and abilities.

How Lesson Fits in the Unit Framework
This lesson marks a shift in the middle of the unit, a shift towards the next short story. Even though the next short story, *Harrison Bergeron*, also includes a series of bad choices by various characters, this particular lesson does not focus on that aspect (yet). Instead, the goal of this lesson is to introduce some of the other key, complex concepts that are central to understanding *Harrison Bergeron* and understanding the choices that the characters make.   This lesson taps into students' own experiences with unequal abilities and talents.

Lesson Procedures & Activities
Estimated time length: 30 mins
1. **Prior to the lesson,** choose an activity that you know at least a few of your students are skilled at (for example, drawing or basketball or dancing). This activity should be something that can be done in your classroom (unless you fancy a mini-field trip to the gym or outside), and it should be something that requires at least a little bit of skill (i.e. not everyone should be able to do it easily). Some suggestions:
   - speed-drawing an object
   - imitating a short dance sequence
   - standing balanced on one foot for a long period of time
   - throwing a ball into a cup (or go to the gym and have them shoot basketballs)

<center>297</center>

- balancing a pencil on one finger as they walk across the room
- a spelling contest
- stacking Styrofoam cups in a pyramid as quickly as possible (timed)

Then, for whichever activity you choose, come up with a few ways to "handicap" the students who turn out to be more skilled at that activity. Some example handicaps:
- for drawing:
  - covering one or both eyes while drawing
  - drawing with a thick mitten on
  - drawing with "blind" or visually-impairing glasses on
  - drawing while someone else moves the paper around the table
- for throwing the ball into a cup:
  - putting weighted bands on their wrists
  - moving the cup farther away
  - using a bigger-size ball and/or a smaller-sized cup
  - covering one or both eyes while throwing
  - flashing a strobe light while they are trying to throw

→ these are just suggestions to help you come up with an activity and its corresponding handicaps. The goal is to find an activity that is semi-competitive, that can be done within a few minutes, that your students will enjoy doing, and that not everyone will be able to do equally well.

2. Once you have your activity and its corresponding handicaps set, you are ready for the lesson. To start, tell the students that they will be doing a little contest. (Promise a prize for the winner, if you like). Explain the terms of the contest and what the students will be doing.
   - In the first round, everyone will do the activity normally (no handicaps).
   - You should end up with a fairly clear winner at the end.
   - Have students return to their seats.
3. Tell the students, "_____ won because he/she was skilled at _____."
   What are some of the other things that you are very talented at? *[I do, we do together]*
   - You share, and have students share the things they are really skilled at (maybe make the list on the board as they share, or have them write down on their own paper first and then share)
   - Compare lists: Are any of their lists identical? (probably not)
   - Ask: Why are your lists not the same? Why are you not equally skilled in all of these things?
4. Tell the students that we will try the activity again.
   - This time, you will try to make everyone completely EQUAL so everyone has an equal chance of winning.
   - Assign handicaps to each person, depending on how they placed in the previous round (i.e. the first-place person gets the most egregious handicap, the second-place person gets a lesser handicap, and so forth. Whoever came in the last two places will get no handicap).

- Introduce the concept of "handicap." Explain that the more skilled people need a bigger handicap so that the game is fair. Distinguish between the word "handicap" (as in being physically disabled) and the word "handicap" as in being made weaker on purpose. Use the example of when bigger kids playing with little kids: bigger kids will let littler kids have extra turns, give them a head start, etc. – this is the same idea.
- Have the students do the activity again. (This should be amusing…)

5. Have students return to their seats. Ask them:
   - Was the game fair? Why or why not?
   - How did the more skilled students feel, having more handicaps?
   - How did the people with no handicaps feel?
   - Who won? Why did that person win?
   - What are the advantages of everyone having a handicap? What are the disadvantages?
   - Why was this a good or bad idea?

6. Refer back to the students' lists of things they are skilled at. Ask them to imagine what kinds of handicaps they would need to make them more "equal" with other people who are not as skilled [*we do together, you do*].

7. After a few students have brainstormed what specific handicaps they would have, ask them to imagine having these handicaps all day, everyday. Would this be a good idea?

8. Tell the students: Tomorrow, you will see a story that is about an imaginary America in the future where EVERYONE is equally skilled at EVERYTHING.

SUGGESTION: Since the activity game could get a bit rowdy (and be wildly entertaining), maybe consider implementing this lesson during the last half of the class period, so that you can send the students out on a high note once you're finished, rather than trying to harness and refocus their energy for quieter work after the lesson is done.

Materials Needed
- An activity and its corresponding handicaps (if you like, you could even do two different activities that require a very different set of skills, but this would make the lesson last even longer)
- The materials you need for the activity
- A list of things you are skilled at (if students need examples to help them get started)

Appendix B: Sample Discussion Guides and Teaching Materials for Translation Unit

Lesson 1 Interview Protocol for Students to Use for Interview Activity
        ** You can modify and use these questions to make a worksheet for the students to fill out as they interview each other, or just have them ask the questions and listen to each other.**

WHAT HAPPENED?
        1. Can you tell me a story about when you made a bad choice?

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS?
        2. Why did you make that choice? What did you hope would happen?
        3. What other options did you have?

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER?
        4. What happened after you made that choice?
        5. How did you feel afterwards?
        6. What were the consequences for you? For other people?

Lesson 1 Narrative Template Guide
        ** This is an optional tool to use if you anticipate your students will struggle with using a narrative structure or need extra support with telling (or writing out, if you choose to use writing) their narratives; feel free to modify this template as needed, or to model your own oral narrative using this template, if you like. The goal is for the choice narratives to be told orally at first using ASL, and then be put in writing later. This template might be useful for students to use when doing homework.

When I was _____ years old, I made a _____ choice.
               (How old?)   *(Adjective: What kind of choice?)*

What happened was that _____
                               (Tell the story about what happened before, during, and after the choice)

I made this choice because I wanted or felt _____.
                               (Why did you choose this option?)

But instead, this happened: _____. **Afterwards, I felt**
_____(*How does the story end?*)

_____.
(How did you feel?)

Other people _____. **My choice resulted in**
_____(*How did other people feel? How did your choice hurt or help other people?*)

_____.
(What were the consequences?)

If I could go back and choose again, I would choose to
_____ **instead.**
(What were the other options you had? What do you wish you had done instead?)

Lesson 7 Suggested Discussion Guide

To be used after viewing the first half of *Harrison Bergeron*. The questions here are suggestions: you are welcome to pick the ones you think would work the best, to add different questions, and to organize the discussion in any way you like.

1. **"Understanding Who, What, Where, and Why": Questions on the Plot**
   - Who are George and Hazel?
   - What happened to Harrison? Why was he imprisoned? Where is he now?
   - What kinds of handicaps do people have in the story (list)
     o Prompts: Why doesn't Hazel have a handicap?
     o What are George's handicaps? Why does he have those handicaps?
     o What are the handicaps that are seen on TV? (ballet dancers, announcer, etc.)
     o What is the punishment for taking off handicaps?
   - Why do people have handicaps?
   - Who is Diana Moon Glampers, and what is her job?
   - What do George and Hazel see announced on the TV?

2. **Forming Opinions & Making Text-to-Self Connections**
   - Have students compare their ability lists (from the previous lesson) with the abilities and handicaps they see in the story.   Ask: What kinds of handicaps would you have if you lived in that society?
   - Would you like living in that society? Why or why not?
   - Why doesn't George take off his handicaps? What would you do if you were George?
   - How do you think George and Hazel feel about what happened to Harrison? Why don't they do anything?

- Why does the government want Harrison in jail?
- Do you think Harrison is really dangerous? Why or why not?

3. **Making Predictions and Text-to-World Connections**
   - Is this a good country to live in? Why or why not?
   - What do you think of the "handicap" law? Would you want a similar rule here at your school or here in America? Why or why not?
   - Now that Harrison has escaped from prison, what do you think will happen next in the story?
   - What do you think George and Hazel will do now that they have heard that their son is out of prison?
   - If you were Harrison, what would you do? Where would you go?
   - What do you think the government will do now that Harrison has escaped?

Translation Unit Final Project Assignment Suggestions

Assignment Objectives

The overall goal of this assignment is not only to evaluate the students' basic understanding of the stories and ideas that the class has been discussing but also to encourage them to interact with the ideas within these stories to make connections between their experience/opinions/perspectives and the characters or events from the stories.

More specifically, the assignment's objectives are to:
1. Prompt students to interact with the stories and the ideas from the stories.
2. Encourage students to make personal connections between their own experiences and opinions and the stories.
3. Have students articulate a clearly stated opinion about a character or an event in one of the stories.
4. Give the students an opportunity to use both ASL and English to express their opinions in a creative mode.
5. Evaluate the student's understanding of the overall "choice" theme of the unit..

Assignment Options

Note: The following prompts are suggestions. You can give your students two or three options to pick from, or give them only one option for the assignment. You are also welcome to modify or change the prompts as needed. Notice that specifics like length, format, language mode, and so forth have been left largely unwritten, so to give you, the teacher, as much flexibility as possible for adapting these assignments to best fit your students' levels and needs. You can also have students complete the assignment in pairs or individually.

Prompt #1:

One of the main characters from the two stories we have read is on trial (e.g. the narrator of *Tell-Tale Heart*, George, Hazel, Harrison Bergeron, the ballet dancer, Diana Moon Glampers). You are the judge. You must decide what—if anything, in your opinion—they choose wrongly, and then explain why, using examples from the story and your own experience to explore why they might have made that particular choice, why it was wrong, and determine what their punishment—if any—is.

Prompt #2:
If you had the power to intervene in one of the stories we have read, in a specific scene where a character is about to make an important choice, and send that character a message (being the good angel on the character's shoulder, of sorts) trying to either convince the character to go ahead with the choice that he/she does make in the story or convince the character to make a different—in your view, better—choice (and explain why you think it is a better choice), what message would you send?

Prompt #3:
Pretend you are one of the characters who suffered negative consequences in the story because of someone else's choice. What would you say to the characters whose choices affected you? What is the message you would send: what are your thoughts, feelings, and opinions about what happened to you in the story? What do you wish the other characters would have done differently, for your sake, and why?

Prompt #4:
 Pick one of the stories (*Tell-Tale Heart* or *Harrison Bergeron*), "zoom in" onto a key scene where an important choice is made, and rewrite that scene and the rest of the story that follows to show what might have happened if one of the characters had made a different (better) choice. Alternative: rewrite the ending to show how the character might make amends for the poor choice—how might the character fix or resolve the negative ending?

Genre Suggestions: Here are some suggestions for the genres/formats that the above prompts could be done in: a speech, a letter, a diary entry, a short essay, an email

Language Suggestions: The goal is to give the students the opportunity to use both English and ASL to express themselves. Here are a few logistics suggestions for how this might be accomplished:
- One-half of the message is videotaped (or performed live) in ASL and the other half is written in English
- Let students alternate between signing and writing several times throughout the assignment (either on video or in a live performance)
- Have the students produce both a written version and a signed version of the same text (i.e. do the same assignment in both languages)
- Shorten the length requirement and have the students do two different prompts: one signed and one written

Appendix C: Sample Informed Consent Form (Parent/Guardian for Student)

Note: After the parent/guardian gave consent, each student also signed an assent to participate form that looks virtually identical to this one.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study:
Form for Parents/Guardians of Students Under the Age of 18

Study Title: Literatures, Languages, Access, and Translations: Examining Deaf Students' Language Ideologies Through English-to-ASL Translations of Literature

Principal Investigator: Ruth Anna Spooner, Ph.D Candidate,
Joint Program in English and Education
University of Michigan
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Anne Curzan, Faculty
Joint Program in English and Education
University of Michigan

Invitation to Participate
Ruth Anna Spooner invites your child to participate in a doctoral research study about the teaching of literature, reading, and writing to deaf students via American Sign Language (ASL) translations of short stories in the classroom; this study is funded by the University of Michigan's Rackham Graduate School, and has been approved by the University's Institute Research Board (IRB).

Description of Your Involvement
If you agree to allow your student to be a part of this study, then your student will be asked to do the following:
- Participate in an individual 45-minute interview, in which the researcher (Ruth Anna) will ask your student questions about their prior experiences with English, with signing, with reading, and with writing.
- Allow the researcher (Ruth Anna) to come observe your student's English/Language Arts class when the teacher is doing a lesson on reading or writing.
- During the study, the teacher will be testing new teaching materials in the classroom, which include ASL translations of English short stories. Your student will be asked to participate in class as usual when these lessons take place.
- Participate in a 20-minute focus group discussion with the researcher (Ruth Anna) and their classmates about one of the short stories they read in class (this will happen during class time).
- Participate in a 30-minute individual interview at the end of the study, in which the researcher (Ruth Anna) will ask your student questions about your experiences with the ASL-translated stories.

Altogether, Ruth Anna will be observing in your student's English/Language Arts class for a total of 10-12 hours over three weeks, and your student will spend approximately 75

minutes altogether doing the two individual interviews with Ruth Anna (outside of class time).

Benefits
Your student will be one of the first groups of deaf students to experience literature being taught by using ASL translations. Beyond the novelty of this experience, however, your student may or may not benefit directly from this study. However, your student's teacher, many other teachers of the deaf, and future deaf students might benefit tremendously from your student's participation in this study. No one has yet tested the effectiveness of using ASL translations in the classroom, so your honest feedback and opinions may help shape new and innovative approaches to teaching English to deaf students like your student.

Risks
There is very little risk associated with this study because data collection will be kept confidential and the topic is not a deeply sensitive one. During the interviews, your student may feel mild discomfort if he or she chooses to recount negative or embarrassing memories in response to a question, but your student will always have the choice to decline answering a question. Your student will also have opportunities to review the transcriptions of his or her interviews and delete parts of it that he or she feels uncomfortable sharing. Your student's identity, and any identifying information, will be kept strictly confidential.

Compensation
Your student will be compensated with the following for participating in this study:
      (1) A complimentary set of DVDs containing 10 short stories, poems, and prose texts that have been translated into ASL by the Accessibility Materials Project (AMP), a non-profit educational group that is working to translate literature into ASL. Their translations are publicly available on YouTube, but your student will receive a conventional DVD set of middle-and high-school literature translations for personal enjoyment at home.
      (2) $50 in the form of a VISA gift card.

Confidentiality
We plan to publish the findings of this study, but we will not include any information that would identify your student, your student's teacher, or the school. There are some reasons why people other than the researcher may need to see the information your student provided as a part of study; this includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly, such as the University of Michigan research oversight board or the study sponsor, Rackham Graduate School.

Every step will be taken to protect your student's privacy. To keep this information safe and confidential, researchers will:
      - Use pseudonyms for your student in all transcriptions, documents, and reports associated with the study.
      - Exclude any information that overtly identifies who your student is.

- Store all data securely where only the researcher will have access.
- By default, destroy all videotaped interviews and observations after the videos have been transcribed (using pseudonyms for all individuals appearing within the videos)
- After data collection has been completed, your student will have the opportunity to review his or her information (e.g. transcriptions) and strike any portion of it from the study if he or she feels uncomfortable for any reason.

Storage and Future Use of Data
Data collected during this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet and/or in password-protected files on the researcher's password-protected external hard-drive. The researcher will retain the raw data (e.g. interview videos and/or other data that may identify your student) for a limited period after the study has ended. After all of the raw data has been transcribed (using pseudonyms and filtering any identifying information), the researcher will destroy all videos and identifying data unless you give explicit written permission for the researcher to keep your student's videos on file (see Video-Recording section below). The destroying of files will happen by December 31, 2014.

The researcher may use your student's data for other publications and/or studies at a later time after this study has been completed, but the data will not contain any information that could identify your student.

Voluntary Nature of the Study
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you give permission for your student to participate, you or your student may change your mind and stop at any time. Should this happen, all of the data collected about your student will be destroyed within 24 hours of your withdrawal from the study. Also, if you withdraw your student from the study early, or if your student withdraws from the study early, your student will not receive a VISA gift card, but he or she will still receive the complimentary 10-DVD set as a token of our gratitude for his or her willingness to participate.

Our interview questions will not be sensitive or highly personal; nevertheless, your student will always have the option of declining to answer any question for any reason.

Contact Information
If you have any questions about this research, including questions about your participation, about scheduling, or about compensation, please contact:
 Ruth Anna Spooner (the Principal Investigator)
raspoon@umich.edu
(208) 918-2145 (videophone)

Dr. Anne Curzan
acurzan@umich.edu
(734) 936-2881 (voice)

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board: 540 E Liberty St., Ste 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, or at (734) 936-0933 [or toll free, (866) 936-0933], or via email at irbhsbs@umich.edu.

Permission to Use Video-Recording during Data Collection
Data collection in this study will include videotaping of interviews and of everyday classroom activity. All videos will be kept confidential; the researcher will be the only one who sees the raw video data. _After the videos have been transcribed (by the researcher), then all of the videos associated with this study will be destroyed to protect your privacy, unless you give explicit written permission at the end of the study for the researcher to keep your student's individual interview videos on file._ (A separate form will be provided after the study ends for you to indicate which—if any—videos you give permission for the researcher to keep. Any video files you give permission to be saved after the study will use pseudonyms and contain <u>no</u> personal identifying information.)

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your student to be videotaped during this study, and indicating that you understand that by default, any videos containing images of your student will be transcribed and then destroyed by December 31, 2014. Please initial here to indicate your agreement for your student to be videotaped as a part of this study: _____

Throughout the study, your student will be given the option of declining to be videotaped if he or she feels uncomfortable. Should this happen, the researcher will instead take notes on your student's responses to interview questions.

Consent
By signing this document, you are giving permission for your student to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this document for your records, and one copy will be kept with the study records. Please be sure that the questions you have asked about the study have been answered and that you understand what you and your child are being asked to do. You may contact Ruth Anna if you think of a question later.

I give permission for my child, _____ _, to_
participate in this study.   (print name of student)

_____
Printed Name (of parent or guardian)

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Your student's date of birth: ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Appendix D: Sample Interview Protocols

Initial Student Interview

Begin: Thank you for agreeing to interview with me. As I told you before, I am interested in learning more about what Deaf students' opinions and perspectives are about language and about reading-writing. No one knows yet what the best way is to teach deaf students reading-writing, so I am hoping that if teachers have a better understanding of what Deaf students think and feel about their experiences in the English classroom, then they can work on improving their teaching practices to make English classes more beneficial for Deaf students. We'll start by talking a little bit about your experiences as a Deaf person, and then I'll ask you questions about your experiences with languages and with reading-writing.

1. *Background*
   - Tell me about yourself. [follow-up questions and prompts below]
     …what is your family like, and how did you become deaf?
     …what kind of communication do you have in the home, and what is your communication preference?
     …what kinds of schools did you go to?
2. *Language and Self-Perception*
   - Describe your feelings towards ASL. [follow-up questions and prompts below]
     …why is it useful to know ASL?
     …what has your experience with ASL been like?
     …why should or why shouldn't people study ASL?
     … how would you rate yourself as an ASL signer? (fluent, semi-fluent, etc.)
   - Describe your feelings towards English (spoken, then written).
     … what is English (spoken, written) useful for?
     … what has your experience with English (spoken, written) been like?
     …why should or why shouldn't people study English (spoken, written)
     …how would you rate yourself as an English (spoken, written) user?
   - Describe your experience in learning these languages
     …how did you learn these two languages?
     …can you describe how these two languages are different? Similar?
     …which language was easier for you to learn, and why?
3. *Language and School*
   - Among your circle of D/HH friends at school, are there differences in how well they use ASL? English?
     … Could you describe the differences? In what ways do these differences matter, if at all?
     … Who do you think learns English more easily: hearing or deaf people? Why?
     … Who do you think learns ASL more easily: hearing or deaf people? Why?
     … What do you think hearing people think/do when they see someone using reading-writing English incorrectly?
     … What do you think deaf people think/do when they see someone using ASL incorrectly?
   - Describe your experiences with reading and with writing.
     ...what kinds of reading and writing do you do at home? At school? How often?
     …do you enjoy reading and writing activities? Why or why not?

4. *Language & Community/Culture*
   - How do you think learning ASL helped you (or will help you in the future)?
   - How do you think learning English helped you (or will help you in the future)?
   - Describe your English classes in school.
          [Also, if applicable, describe your ASL class in school]
     …what kinds of things do you do in class?
     …what do you enjoy/dislike about that class?
   - Do you think your D/HH friends believe it is important to learn English?
   - Which language do you think your school believes is more important to learn?
     … your family?
     … your friends?
     … you?
   - Would it be beneficial for deaf students to take classes in reading-writing English (spoken English)? Why or why not?
   - Would it be beneficial for deaf students to take ASL classes? Why or why not?

- Do you think your D/HH friends put different values on knowing ASL well and on knowing English well? Why might they do that?
- Is there anything you would like to add about ASL, about reading-writing English, spoken English, or about your English class that we have not yet discussed?

Initial Teacher Interview

Begin: Thank you for agreeing to interview with me. As you know from our previous conversations, I am interested in exploring deaf students' beliefs and attitudes about English, about ASL, and about print literacy. I will begin by asking you some questions about yourself and your teaching experiences. Then we'll talk about your classroom and your students.

1. *Background*
   - Tell me a little bit about yourself and your teaching experience.
     ...how long have you been a teacher?
     …what drew you to deaf education?
     …how long have you worked at this school?
2. *The English/Language Arts Classroom*
   - How would you describe your teaching philosophy?
     …what do you believe is important for students to learn? Why?
     …how do you structure each class period? Why?
     …how would you characterize yourself as a teacher?
     …how do you position yourself in the language/communication mode debate/spectrum within deaf education?
   - Can you please give me an overview of your curriculum for the year?
     …what kinds of texts do your students read?
     …what kinds of writing assignments do you assign?
     …what kinds of activities/lessons do you do with your students?
     …what areas do you emphasize in your instruction?
   - In your perspective, what value is there in students learning/studying spoken English? Print English?
   - In your perspective, what value is there in students learning/studying ASL?
     … in what ways are English and ASL useful for these students?
     …what place does ASL have in the English classroom (and vice versa)?
   - Can you give an example of an assignment (or an unit) that was particularly successful with your students? Why do you think it worked so well?
   - Can you give an example of an assignment (or an unit) that did not work well with your students? Why do you think it didn't work well?
3. *Students' Attitudes*
   - Tell me about the students in this specific English class.
     …how would you describe these students, in terms of their contribution to your classroom?
     …what have you noticed about their attitudes towards class? Towards reading? Towards writing?
     …how would you describe their motivation levels for various components of your classroom?
     …what kinds of work do they seem to prefer to do? Why do you think that is?
   - Have you ever explicitly talked with your students about their preferences for coursework or in-class activities?
     …do you let them choose books to read?
     …do you invite feedback about classroom texts to read?
     …do you talk with them about why they like/dislike particular assignments?
   - How do you respond to students who are reluctant to read or write? What do you tell them?
   - Do you have students who are motivated to read and/or write? What do you think makes them so motivated, compared to other students?
   - How do you think your students will react to seeing English texts translated into ASL? Why?

Appendix E: Sample Interview Transcription

Excerpt from Snooki's Initial Interview

Q: So you are completely deaf now?

Snooki: Yes, yes, I'm fully deaf.   Um…so…my, my family adopted me. At that time, they had not, yet. Back when I was three years old, I started learning to sign at the, um, Riverside School for the Deaf in California. My adoptive mother told me that I learned it really fast and really well.   I didn't know that; I don't remember learning it at all. Um, I stayed there until I was seven—

Q: At that deaf school?

Snooki: Yeah, at that school, until I was seven, and then I moved there to this state, and I've been here ever since. Now I'm 18.

Q: Have you attended this deaf school the whole time you've been here?

Snooki: Yes, this school, yeah. And now I'll graduate this spring—next month, actually.

Q: That's exciting!

Snooki: Yeah.

Q: So, in your home, with your family, do they sign? How do you communicate?

Snooki: They sort of sign a little bit. We will write back and forth sometimes, but not often. I don't talk with them that much, really. I'm usually by myself, alone in my room. If they need me, then… but it's really hard to communicate. It makes me so frustrated, and my mom just—she's getting slower. Not slower in the mind, but just, um, her health has gone downhill recently because she has been sick. Cancer. So that doesn't help with the communication. I get frustrated when I try to engage with them, so it feels pointless, so I just leave her alone, leave them alone. Instead of bothering them, I decided to stay in my room as often as I could, texting with my friends and whatever. I don't talk much with my mom.

Q: What about your siblings?

Snooki: Sort of, sometimes. But my brother is always gone for work, so it's just me. It's a little lonely, staying by myself and sitting around. I have a few friends, but we can't hang out a lot.* Yeah, oh well.

[INTERVIEWER NOTE: Most of Snooki's friends also board at the residential deaf school, so they are scattered all over the state when they go home on the weekends, so she can't hang out with them on the weekends due to physical distance between them]

Appendix F: Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) Forms

[*The instructions and assessment forms provided to the external third-party who assessed the students' ASL Proficiency and Overall Communication Proficiency*]

Ratings & Guidelines for Evaluator

(1)

Sign Language Proficiency: The rater will determine whether the student uses ASL, PSE, or signed English, and based on that, the rater will go on to assess the student's sign language proficiency in that specific mode of sign language (including vocabulary knowledge, production & fluency, and use of grammatical features) using this modification of the SLPI rating scale (refer to SLPI pdf in M-Box).

5 - Superior
4 - Advanced
3 - Intermediate
2 - Survival
1 - Novice

Note 1: Half-point scores can be used (e.g. 4.5 = advanced plus on the SLPI scale).
Note 2: If the rater feels that a student code-switches between two different modes of sign language (eg. PSE and ASL), then the rater can assign two scores, one for each mode (e.g. 3 for ASL, 4.5 for PSE).

(2)

Overall Verbal Communication Proficiency: Because many deaf students use various combinations of techniques (not just signing) to get their message across, this score aims to convey how strong a communicator the student is *overall*, regardless of *how* the student may communicate. During the conversation, students may use various combinations of the following: signing, voicing, "mouthing" English words, ASL non-manual markers, gestures, facial expressions, clarification techniques, awareness of the listener's comprehension, backchanneling, fingerspelling, elaboration, and/or adjusting the speed of signing/ voicing. Even though different students may use various combinations of the above techniques, the rater's job is to assess how *clear* a communicator the student is *overall*, regardless of which combination(s) of techniques the student uses to get the message across

5 = Very clear, effective communicator; is easy to understand
4 = Clear communicator most of the time; is usually easy to understand
3 = Somewhat clear communicator; can be difficult to understand at times
2 = Not a clear communicator; is often difficult to understand the message
1 = Weak communicator; difficult to understand message most of the time

For example, Student A could be identified as an ASL signer, receive a sign language proficiency score of 4, and a communication proficiency score of 3, whereas Student B could be identified as

a PSE signer with a sign language proficiency score of 3 and an communication proficiency score of 5.   Even though Student B is not as proficient in sign language as Student A is, s/he is still an effective communicator because s/he relies on other techniques to convey the message clearly. See sample score sheet on page 3 for an example of how to fill out the score sheet on the next page.

Score Sheet

Student Name:

Sign Language Proficiency Score: Write the score in the blank next to the sign language mode that the student uses. (If more than one applies, give a score for each.)

_____ American Sign Language
_____ Pidgin Signed English
_____ Conceptually Accurate English
_____ Signed Exact English
_____ Other (specify: _____)

Overall Verbal Communication Proficiency Score (write number here): _____

Notes:

SLPI Forms & Definitions Used as Guidelines by Evaluator

Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) Rating Scale[a]

RATINGS	DESCRIPTORS[b]
Superior Plus	**Able to have a fully shared and natural conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics.** All aspects of signing are native-like.
Superior	**Able to have a fully shared conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics.** Very broad sign language vocabulary, near native-like production and fluency, excellent use of sign language grammatical features, and excellent comprehension for normal signing rate.
Advanced Plus	Exhibits some superior level skills, but not all and not consistently.
Advanced	**Able to have a generally shared conversation with good, spontaneous elaboration for both social and work topics.** Broad sign language vocabulary knowledge and clear, accurate production of signs and fingerspelling at a normal/near-normal rate; occasional misproductions do not detract from conversational flow. Good use of many sign language grammatical features and comprehension good for normal signing rate.
Intermediate Plus	Exhibits some advanced level skills, but not all and not consistently.
Intermediate	**Able to discuss with some confidence routine social and work topics within a conversational format with some elaboration; generally 3-to-5 sentences.** Good knowledge and control of everyday/basic sign language vocabulary with some sign vocabulary errors. Fairly clear signing at a moderate signing rate with some sign misproductions. Fair use of some sign language grammatical features and fairly good comprehension for a moderate-to-normal signing rate; a few repetitions and rephrasing of questions may be needed.
Survival Plus	Exhibits some intermediate level skills, but not all and not consistently.
Survival	**Able to discuss basic social and work topics with responses generally 1-to-3 sentences in length.** Some knowledge of basic sign language vocabulary with many sign vocabulary and/or sign production errors. Slow-to-moderate signing rate. Basic use of a few sign language grammatical features. Fair comprehension for signing produced at a slow-to-moderate rate with some repetition and rephrasing.
Novice Plus	Exhibits some survival level skills, but not all and not consistently.
Novice	**Able to provide single sign and some short phrase/sentence responses to basic questions signed at a slow-to-moderate rate with frequent repetition and rephrasing.** Vocabulary primarily related to everyday work and/or social areas such as basic work-related signs, family members, basic objects, colors, numbers, names of weekdays, and time. Production and fluency characterized by many sign production errors and by a slow rate with frequent inappropriate pauses/hesitations.
No Functional Skills	**(May be) Able to provide short single sign and "primarily" fingerspelled responses to some basic questions signed at a slow rate with extensive repetition and rephrasing.**

[a]Adapted from US Foreign Service Institute & ACTFL LPI Rating Scales by William Newell & Frank Caccamise
[b]For all SCPI rating descriptors, first statement (in bold type) always a statement of ASL communicative functioning, with all remaining statements (regular type) descriptors of ASL form (vocabulary, production, fluency, grammar, and comprehension).

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SLPI: ANALYZING FUNCTION

SCPI RATING	ELABORATION/LENGTH OF RESPONSES	SENSE OF SHAREDNESS/ SPONTANEITY
SUPERIOR PLUS/ SUPERIOR	In-depth elaboration, Excellent detail	Fully acceptable, comfortable, shared/spontaneous; crosstalk, back channel feedback
ADVANCED PLUS	Full elaboration, Good to excellent detail	Close to fully acceptable and close to fully comfortable, shared/spontaneous
ADVANCED	Generally complete answer with good detail/elaboration; may have some use of THEN and/or AND	Generally acceptable and generally shared/spontaneous, fairly comfortable
INTERMEDIATE PLUS		
INTERMEDIATE	Sometimes elaborated answer, but generally 3-to-5 sentences, frequent use of THEN and/or AND; surface answer good enough but not much detail	Looks like a conversation; fairly shared with some question/ answer; PLUS sometimes spontaneous with some confidence
SURVIVAL PLUS		
SURVIVAL	Generally 1-to-3 sentences; hands often go to lap after short responses	Does not feel/look-like a conversation; not shared, with many questions by interviewer
NOVICE PLUS		
NOVICE	Generally 1 sentence, phrase, single sign responses; may fingerspell some very basic signs	Many questions, rephrasing, slow, simplified signing
NO FUNCTIONAL SKILLS	(may have) Some short phrase, single sign responses to a few questions; fingerspelling for even very basic signs	Even basic questions signed slowly with repetition and/or rephrasing often misunderstood

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