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American Sign Language as a Heritage Language

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As long as we have deaf people on earth, we will have sign language.
George W. Veditz (1913)

Introduction

This chapter considers how American Sign Language (ASL)—a visual-manual language—is a heritage language of deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing people in the United States. Traditionally, heritage language education and maintenance efforts have centered on spoken languages. This chapter aims to broaden the scope to include signed languages. It begins with a historical overview of ASL, explicates for whom ASL is a heritage language, and examines the influence of current policy trends and technological advancements on language shift and language maintenance. Particular attention is drawn to the role of deaf communities in fostering language maintenance despite concerted efforts to restrict or prohibit the use of ASL in education.

American Sign Language in the United States: A Historical Overview

Within each country or region, wherever deaf communities exist, signed languages have emerged spontaneously and evolved naturally (Padden, 2011). American Sign Language has been a language of deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing people in the United States for more than 370 years. In addition to ASL, there are countless additional sign languages used in the United States, both Indigenous languages like Plains Indian Sign Language and immigrant languages like Brazilian Sign Language and Korean Sign Language. This overview, however, focuses on the maintenance of ASL, which has occurred through three primary channels: deaf families, deaf communities, and schools for the deaf (Meadow, 1972; Schein, 1989).

Deaf Families and Deaf Communities

The earliest historical account describing the use of signed language in the United States was recorded in *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* in 1684 by Increase Mather, a respected scholar

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who served as president of Harvard University (cited in Carty, Marcready, & Sayer, 2009). He wrote about a deaf couple's use of signed language with each other and their nine hearing children as well as their participation in church and community life through the use of written English. Mather remarked positively on the deaf parents' use of and proficiency in signed language and written English as well as their involvement in both the signing and speaking communities. Furthermore, he noted that the couple's nine hearing children acquired signed language before spoken English (Carty et al., 2009).

Half a century earlier, Martha's Vineyard was founded on an island off the coast of Massachusetts. Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL) emerged within a mainstream community of deaf and hard-of-hearing people, children of deaf adults (codas), and hearing individuals. MVSL was passed down through 12 generations beginning in the 1620s and ending with the passing of Katie West, the last deaf person born into this community, in 1952 (Groce, 1985). One Vineyarder described the bilingual community in this way: "everyone here spoke sign language" (Groce, 1985, p. 2). During the 1700s, several deaf families migrated from Martha's Vineyard and settled in Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire. Deaf enclaves grew and flourished in these New England states (Lane, Pillard, & Hedberg, 2011). Deaf families were successful in maintaining signed language in communities like Martha's Vineyard, where deafness was prevalent and viewed as normal and where community residents were bilingual in MVSL and English, irrespective of their hearing loss (Groce, 1985). Taken together, these historical accounts illustrate that signed languages were heritage languages for deaf people and codas as they were passed down within deaf families and communities from one generation to the next.

Schools for the Deaf

Since the establishment of the American School for the Deaf in 1817, residential schools for the deaf have served as a primary pathway to accessing ASL. While the presence of signed language in education has waxed and waned with the educational philosophies of the times, schools for the deaf have nevertheless provided a space for children to maintain and develop ASL inside and outside of the classroom. Padden and Humphries (1988, p. 6) describe schools for the deaf in this manner:

> In many of these schools, deaf children spend years of their lives among Deaf people—children from Deaf families and Deaf adults who work at the school. . . . In the informal dormitory environment children learn not only sign language but the content of the culture. In this way, the schools become hubs of the communities that surround them, preserving for the next generation the culture of earlier generations.

Prior to the early 1800s, no schools for the deaf existed in the United States. Reluctant to send his daughter overseas to a school for the deaf in Europe, Mason Cogswell, a prominent physician in Virginia, secured political and financial support to establish a school in New England. The American School for the Deaf opened its doors in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817 with two multilingual teachers: Laurent Clerc, a teacher of the deaf from France who was deaf, and Thomas Gallaudet, a teacher and pastor who was hearing (Crouch & Greenwald, 2007). From the beginning, the American School for the Deaf (ASD) implemented an ASL/written English approach to bilingual education (Nover, 2000). Over the course of the next five decades, dozens of schools for the deaf were established throughout New England and in other parts of the country, modeling their instructional approaches after ASD's ASL/written English approach. Many of the teachers were ASD alumni, having studied under Clerc. Until the turn of the 20th century, schools for the deaf maintained this ASL-written English approach (86% of deaf students were educated bilingually) while also incorporating spoken language development for hard-of-hearing students (Nover, 2000).

In the mid to late 1860s, as a result of sociopolitical currents leading up to and following the Civil War, the role of ASL in deaf education came under intense scrutiny. Deaf communities, which used "the foreign language of signs" (Rider, 1899; cited in Baynton, 1996, p. 27), were viewed like other minority language communities at the time: "they must be made people of our language" (Davidson, 1899; cited in Baynton, 1996, p. 27). In 1867, a special joint committee commissioned by the governor of Massachusetts undertook a review of the educational opportunities provided to deaf children from their state and found that more than 100 deaf students were attending the ASD in Connecticut. The outcome of the committee's work was the establishment of the Clarke School for the Deaf in Northampton, Massachusetts, which prohibited the use of ASL. This marked the beginning of what would become a shift away from the ASL/written English bilingual tradition toward an English-only spoken-language one. By 1911, for example, the Nebraska legislature passed a bill that banned use of ASL at the Nebraska School for the Deaf. The superintendent of the school in a letter to the president of the National Association of the Deaf wrote that ASL was no longer used in the classroom, and, he wrote, "I hope to do away with its use outside of the school-room" (Cahill Park, 1912; cited in Baynton, 1996, p. 25). Despite concerted efforts to do precisely that, students continued to use ASL in residential dormitories at schools and at deaf clubs throughout the 20th century.

Current Demographics

Number of ASL Signers in the United States

Determining the number of speakers or signers of any language is difficult for two principal reasons: One must decide where to draw boundaries between language varieties in addition to determining who counts as a legitimate user of the language (Moore, Pietikäinen, & Bloomaert, 2010). In the case of ASL, there are several varieties, which include Black ASL and a variety used in English-speaking parts of Canada (Padden, 2011). In addition to varieties of ASL, signed systems such as Signing Exact English, Cued Speech, and the Rochester Method were developed to represent English in a signed modality (Reagan, 2010). These systems are highly controversial and are taught and used primarily within the education system (Nover, 1995; Ramsey, 1989). The question then becomes, which of these varieties and systems "count" as ASL?

Paucity of survey data further complicates determining how many people use ASL. National surveys such as the U.S. Census, the Current Population Survey, and the American Community Survey count the number of *speakers* of languages. Write-in responses reporting ASL as a language used at home are coded as English, "apparently on the curious grounds that signed languages are not written and therefore cannot be included in ballot materials" (Mitchell, Young, Bachleda, & Karchmer, 2006, p. 309). A grassroots effort is underway to add ASL as a language on the 2020 Census (http://www.doncullen.net/blog/the-fight-to-get-asl-recognized-on-us-census/ accessed January 11, 2013). Disability-related surveys such as the National Health Survey report on the number of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. However, deafness is often conflated with signed language, skewing estimates of the number of individuals who sign (ranging from 15,000–15,000,000; Mitchell et al., 2006). Not all deaf individuals use ASL; many people with no hearing loss do.

Two national surveys, one carried out by Gallaudet University and the other commissioned by the National Association of the Deaf, provide the best estimates of the number of signers in the United States. Since 1967, Gallaudet Research Institute has conducted the Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children and Youth. The survey is distributed to school districts nationwide; responses account for approximately 60 to 65% of students who receive special education services (Schildroth & Hotto, 1994). In 2010, responses for 37,828 students were received. Among the reported data is language use at school and at home. The survey "represents the largest ongoing

database of information on deaf and hard-of-hearing children in the United States" (Holden-Pitt & Diaz, 1998, p. 72).

The National Association of the Deaf commissioned and secured funding to carry out the National Census of the Deaf Population (NCDP) in 1971 (Schein, 1989), "the ultimate source for data-based estimates of the number of people who use ASL in the United States" (Mitchell et al., 2006, p. 321). NCDP was designed to create a database of individuals who could not hear and understand speech or who had lost those abilities before the age of 19. The following year, in 1972, surveys were sent to individuals in the register asking respondents to rate their "signing skills" (Schein & Delk, 1974; cited in Mitchell et al., 2006, p. 321). Approximately 1,500 surveys were returned reporting on sign language use *at home*. According to NCDP data, by 1972, approximately 500,000 people signed at home: 277,000 deaf people, 101,000 codas (children of deaf adults), 90,000 hearing parents and siblings, and 30,000 hearing spouses. This estimate does not, however, account for hearing individuals outside of the home who signed (e.g., extended family members, friends, or neighbors). Furthermore, the survey asked about people's *signing* proficiency, not about their proficiency in ASL (or other sign languages).

Today, Mitchell (2005) estimates that approximately 360,000 to 517,000 deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals sign at home. However, this is a very rough estimate based on NCDP data (see Mitchell et al., 2006, for discussion). Drawing on estimates from Mitchell (2005) and Mitchell and colleagues (2006), one could approximate the number of hearing people who sign at home to be as follows: 131,000 to 188,500 codas; 117,000 to 168,000 hearing parents; and 39,000 to 56,000 hearing spouses. Higher concentrations of signers are found in cities with schools for the deaf, higher education institutions (e.g., California State University-Northridge, Gallaudet University, National Technical Institute for the Deaf), and organizations and businesses that serve deaf communities.

Heritage Signers/Learners of American Sign Language

Having considered the number of ASL signers in the United States, I now turn to consider *for whom* ASL is a heritage language (and, by extension, for whom other sign languages are heritage languages). I do so by taking up two primary definitions of "heritage language *speakers*/learners" to consider how heritage language *signers*/learners of ASL fall within and outside of these definitions.

Historically, the terms *heritage languages* and *heritage language learners* have referred to spoken languages and their speakers in multilingual contexts. Within the field of foreign language teaching, Valdés (2001; Chapter 3, this volume) defines a *heritage language learner* as "a language student who is raised in a home where a non–English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language, and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and in English" (p. 38). This definition is helpful for differentiating between traditional foreign language learners, from other learners who have developed some proficiency in the languages at home or in their communities. Turning to language maintenance efforts, a broader definition of *heritage language learner* is often used: learners for whom languages other than English have "a particular family relevance" (Fishman, 2001a, p. 81; Chapter 4). The fulcrum of *heritage* in this light is a familial tie to the language, irrespective of an individual's proficiency in that language. Seen in the light of reversing language shift, a broader definition makes room for the greatest number of potential speakers of a heritage language.

Like heritage language learners of spoken languages, heritage language learners of ASL learn sign language at home, in their communities, and at school. However, the weight that each leg of the family-community-formal schooling triad (Kagan, 2005) bears in shaping learners' access to and development of ASL is in most cases different from that of spoken languages. More than 95% of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004); more than 80% of children born to deaf parents are hearing (Bishop & Hicks, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2006), which means

Table 26.1 Heritage Language Signers: Primary Pathways to Access ASL

Heritage Language Signers	*Deaf Families*	*Early Intervention Services/Community Services*	*Schools for the Deaf and Mainstream Education*
Deaf children of deaf parents (3–4%)	X		
Hearing children of deaf parents	X		
Deaf children of hearing parents (96–97%)		X	X
Hearing parents of deaf children		X	X
Hearing siblings of deaf children		X	X
Hearing spouses of deaf adults and codas		X	X

that intergenerational transmission occurs predominantly from deaf parents to hearing children. Thus, the majority of native signers are not deaf but rather hearing. This gives rise to questions about how ASL (and other sign languages) is a heritage language in similar (or dissimilar) ways as spoken languages (Bishop & Hicks, 2005; Pizer, Walters, & Meier, 2013). Singleton and Tittle (2000, p. 227, 224) refer to this phenomenon as a "double-generation transracial adoption," where a hearing parent raises a deaf child, who grows up to raise hearing children, suggesting that few deaf children have "roots" in a deaf community. As such, providers of early childhood intervention services and educators serve as primary links between families and signed language communities (Baynton, 1996; Meadow, 1972). Parents rely heavily on the recommendations made by medical and educational professionals (Steinberg, Bain, Li, Delgado, & Ruperto, 2003). Table 26.1 illustrates various groups of heritage language learners of ASL and their primary access to ASL.

Patterns of Language Use

Fishman (2001b) suggests that language shift can be measured by assessing the degree to which a heritage language is used in various domains and whether the number of language users is rising or falling. Here I consider recent trends in the presence of ASL in families, communities, and schools. Evidence of both language shift and language maintenance within each of these domains can be attributed to technological advancements, changes in national and state policies, and shifting discourses about the status of ASL.

Intergenerational Transmission

There is a strong correlation between parents' hearing status and the use of sign language at home (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2005). Presently, 93.3% of deaf children with at least one deaf parent acquire ASL (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2005) as a heritage language from birth. This trend lends support to Fishman's (2001b) claim that intergenerational transmission is crucial for language maintenance. Hereditary deafness (50–60%) and pregnancy-related illnesses (nearly 30%) are the leading causes of hearing loss at birth (Centers for Disease Control, http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/hearingloss/data.html). The prevalence of deafness as a result of pregnancy-related illnesses has decreased by nearly 50% in the last decade (Gallaudet Research Institute [GRI], 2002, 2011) primarily as a result of the decline in outbreaks of infectious diseases such as measles, mumps, and rubella. The number of deaf and hard-of-hearing children in the United States has decreased overall by 13% in the last decade, from 43,416 in 2001 to 37,828 in 2010. However, the rate of hereditary deafness has risen

consistently from 19 to 24% (GRI 2002, 2011), suggesting that there are more deaf parents with deaf children today, who use ASL at home with their children, than there were a decade ago.

Whereas ASL continues to be maintained by deaf parents (as it has been over the last three centuries), the overall trend in sign language use at home has fallen in the last decade from 28.2% to 23% (GRI 2002, 2011). This is perhaps not surprising, given that (a) 96 to 97% of deaf and hard-of-hearing children are born to hearing parents, and (b) the number of children receiving cochlear implants has increased by 42% over this same time period (GRI, 2002, 2011). More often than not, cochlear implant surgery is coupled with educational plans and programs that emphasize spoken English language development and discourage or prohibit signed language development (Padden & Humphries, 2005). This technology, in addition to genetic testing and advancements in stem cell research, raises ethical concerns about the long-term psychological, sociocultural, and linguistic effects on children (for discussion, see Lane, 2005; Turner, 2009).

An equally striking phenomenon is the significant increase in the number of deaf children from families in which spoken languages other than English are used. In 2001, slightly more than 1 in 10 deaf and hard-of-hearing children's families spoke languages other than English at home (GRI, 2002). In 2010, this figure rose to 47% (Spanish = 21.9%), a more than four-fold increase (GRI, 2011). Thus, nearly *half* of deaf children are heritage language learners—in the way that Fishman (2001a) uses the term—not only of ASL but also of the spoken languages used at home and the signed languages of their home countries.

Deaf Communities

Despite the relatively small number of ASL signers in the United States, deaf communities are highly organized with long-standing histories and traditions (Schein, 1989). More than a dozen national organizations were founded and are directed by deaf people, including the National Association of the Deaf, the National Black Deaf Advocates, and the National Council of Hispano Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Sports associations such as the National Softball Association of the Deaf and USA Deaf Basketball organize regional and national competitions for athletes. Members of organizations such as Children of Deaf Adults and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf are heritage language signers. In addition, there are a multitude of organizations like the American Society for Deaf Children (www.deafchildren.org) and Hands & Voices (http://www.handsandvoices.org/) that provide support to parents as they navigate the various language, education, and medical options available to their children. These organizations are a crucial link between deaf communities and families with deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

Local chapters of these and other national organizations are found nationwide. They organize community events like ASL story time at local libraries and bookstores, deaf awareness events, and other community activities. Theater and performing arts companies like Deaf West Theatre and the National Theater of the Deaf perform in public schools, in schools for the deaf, and on local and national stages. These events are designed to "contribute significantly to the vibrancy of deaf culture and American theater" (Deaf West Theatre website, http://www.deafwest.org/aboutdwt/whatwedo.html).

Deaf clubs served for years as a hub for deaf community activities. The clubs provided physical spaces for community members to gather and were places where older members taught younger ones "explicitly or indirectly, about Deaf values, customs and knowledge, ASL, Deaf stories and jokes, and Deaf history" (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996, p. 134). Opening toward the end of the 19th century, the clubs flourished during the war periods (Burch, 2001), as deaf people moved to larger cities where they worked in factories and on production lines (Buchanan, 1999). Over the last 30 years, as more deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals have entered professional fields, deaf clubs have closed their doors. In their place have emerged DeafChat evenings in local coffee shops (www.happy.deafcoffee.com) and DeafNation Expo trade shows (http://deafnation.com/

dnexpo/). Local faith groups, education and community centers, interpreter training programs, and sports leagues also provide physical spaces for members of deaf communities to gather and socialize.

Schools for the Deaf

Over the last three decades, nearly a third of the schools for the deaf have closed due to the decline in the prevalence of deafness and the ways in which education policy initiatives have been interpreted (Padden & Humphries, 2005). The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and its subsequent reauthorization as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have strengthened the inclusion philosophy in education (Siegel, 2008). In 1975, nearly half (49%) of deaf and hard-of-hearing children attended schools for the deaf; in 2010, less than one in four students do (GRI, 2011). Despite recommendations by the Commission on the Education of the Deaf and Special Education Programs (1988) and policy guidelines from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (1992) cautioning schools against misapplying the inclusion provisions in the case of deafness, the inclusion philosophy continues to drive student placement (Compton, 2013; Siegel, 2008). This has led to a "physical and demographic dislocation" (Fishman, 1999, p. 57) of deaf communities.

Presently, 12 schools for the deaf face closing due to declining enrollment and significant funding cuts. In response, deaf communities have organized rallies to garner media attention and raise funds. The National Association of the Deaf issued a position paper enumerating the linguistic, cultural, and fiscal benefits of schools for the deaf (http://nad.org/issues/education/k-12/position-statement-schools-deaf) and continues to lobby state and national policymakers to allocate needed funding. Despite the political and ideological currents that threaten their vitality, many schools continue to serve as nexuses for signing and speaking communities. The Educational Resource Center on Deafness at the Texas School for the Deaf, for example, established the Family Signs Program, which provides ASL classes via video technology to parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing children from across the state (http://www.familysigns.org/). The center also provides instructional materials and training to public school teachers and staff. Schools host annual retreats for deaf and hard-of-hearing students and their families. In addition, schools partner with organizations like the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf to promote sign language-in-education policy initiatives (e.g., the National Agenda http://www.ceasd.org/advocacy/national-agenda, the Child First campaign http://www.ceasd.org/child-first/).

Recent legislation in Florida (2011) establishes auditory-oral education programs for students in both public and private schools "using faculty certified as listening and spoken language specialists" to "teach children who have obtained an implant or assistive hearing device" (Ch. 2011–175, Section 8, Section 1002.391(1)(a), (b), (c)). Other states, including New Mexico and Colorado, have enacted legislation that strengthens the communication needs provision within IDEA requiring parents, educators, and school administrators to consider the communication needs of the child when determining educational placement and services. These are examples of how states have either pried open or closed down implementational space (Hornberger, 2005) in federal legislation that supports multimodal-multilingual education.

Mainstream Education

Presently, most deaf and hard-of-hearing children are educated in mainstream classrooms. In 2001, slightly more than half of students received instruction in or through signed language (53.2%); in 2010, 39.5% of students did (GRI, 2002, 2011). During this time, however, sign language as the primary language of instruction has risen from 6.3% of students to 27.4%. Sign-supported speech has decreased from 46.9 to 12.1% respectively whereas, spoken (English) language instruction rose from 45.4% to 53% (GRI, 2002; 2011). This shift toward English-only instruction is likely

to continue as long as English-only educational plans continue to accompany cochlear implant surgery.

Another growing trend is the creation of cluster campuses. This practice consists of districts designating particular campuses to serve deaf and hard-of-hearing students from across the school district. In effect, these cluster campuses could be considered mini schools for the deaf. While most students are still mainstreamed in the regular education classroom (57.1% in 2010), these cluster campuses provide opportunities for students to socialize with other deaf and hard-of-hearing peers. Going one step further, school districts in states like New York, Minnesota, and California have capitalized on the number of heritage language signers in their regions to create bilingual programs for deaf and coda children. The American Sign Language and English Lower and Secondary Public Schools in New York City (http://www.47aslhs.org/), commonly referred to as PS-347 and PS-47 respectively, are examples of such programs.

Postsecondary Education

The presence of ASL on college and university campuses has increased sharply in the past two decades. Currently, it ranks fourth among the most commonly taught foreign languages in postsecondary institutions (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2010). This is significant, given the resistance of many universities in the 1980s and 1990s to recognize ASL as a foreign language (Reagan, 2011). Since 1990, when ASL was first included in the MLA survey, enrollment in ASL courses has increased by 4,673.9% despite the overall decline in enrollment in foreign language courses as a whole (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2010). Interest at the secondary level has also increased substantially (Rosen, 2008). In addition to studying ASL as a foreign language, courses taught *in* ASL are offered at higher education institutions (e.g., Austin Community College, California State University Northridge, Gallaudet University, Rochester Institute of Technology).

Workplace and the Media

In addition to an increased presence of ASL in public schools and postsecondary institutions, ASL is now common in the workplace due to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. These laws ban discriminatory hiring practices and require employers to provide sign language interpreting services for their employees. These laws also grant deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals the right to sign language interpretation in medical, legal, and social service sectors, among others.

ASL has also been featured prominently in television programs like *Switched at Birth* and *Law and Order.* Deaf and hard-of-hearing actors played leading roles in *Children of a Lesser God, Mr. Holland's Opus,* and most recently, *Listen to Your Heart.* Documentaries and independent films like *Sound and Fury* and *See What I'm Saying: The Deaf Entertainers Documentary* have won national and international acclaim. Video logs created by individuals and organizations alike now dot the digital landscape. The Deaf Professional Arts Network produces ASL music videos and hosts a video gallery that features the work of artists like Signmark. Independent films have garnered widespread attention as well; for example, *Love Language* has been viewed more than 2,100,000 times on YouTube. A Google search of "American Sign Language" generates 533,000,000 results. These Web technologies have created new discursive spaces (Heller, 2010; Milani & Johnson, 2010) for signed languages.

Communication and Video Technologies

Changes in technology often lead to new communication practices. In the late 1960s, the invention of teletypewriters (TTYs) made available telecommunication services by way of typed text to deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals (Keating & Mirus, 2003). Access to telecommunications

meant that being "geographically present" was no longer a requirement to communicate (Shohamy, 2006, p. 9). While telecommunication technology allowed spoken languages to be carried across phone lines, TTY technology limited the use of communication to the written mode of a spoken language. Today, video-enabled technology and the Internet make it possible for signers to connect with each other and with spoken language communities using signed language. Video relay services, in which sign language interpreters relay conversations between signers and speakers via a video connection, allow ASL to be used as a language for conducting personal business (e.g., scheduling doctor appointments, calling babysitters, ordering takeout) and professional activities (e.g., leading conference calls, calling potential customers, and setting up new customer accounts; cf. http://www.fcc.gov/guides/video-relay-services and www.sorensonvrs.com). Video technology has also changed the academic publishing landscape to include ASL and other sign languages as languages of the academy (e.g., *Digital Deaf Studies Journal,* launched in 2009).

Future Prospects for American Sign Language and Deaf Communities

The Nebraska law in 1911 that banned use of ASL spurred the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) to spearhead a film project in the early 1900s that recorded master signers of ASL. The quote at the outset of this chapter (translated from ASL) comes from the NAD president's speech as part of this project: "As long as we have deaf people on earth, we will have sign language" (Veditz, 1913; cited in Padden, 2004, p. 253). His confidence in asserting such a claim was rooted in 300 years of history of sign language development, use, and maintenance in the United States. Today, nearly all children of deaf parents in the United States acquire ASL as a heritage language. With the steady increase in the incidences of hereditary deafness, the future outlook for ASL maintenance for children of deaf parents appears bright.

The situation for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing heritage language learners of ASL outside of deaf families is considerably more tenuous. Here one can see the strong influence of early intervention service providers' and educators' recommendations on families' decisions about sociolinguistic, educational, and medical choices for their deaf and hard-of-hearing children (Li, Bain, & Steinberg, 2003; Ramsey, 1997). If cochlear implant surgery continues to be coupled with educational plans that restrict or prohibit the use of signed language, this will contribute significantly to an overall decline in the use of signed language among deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. This shift away from ASL toward English-only approaches is not new, however. Discourses framing deafness as a disability are pervasive and construct deaf people and sign languages as "products or outcomes of a condition of deficiency" (Reagan, 2011, p. 627). They are rooted in long-standing ideological debates between (and within) deaf and hearing communities about deafness; the role of signed and spoken/written language(s) in the family, community, school, and mainstream society; and language ownership, AMONG OTHERS.

Historically, the language debate in deaf education in the United States has focused on ASL and English to the exclusion of other spoken and signed languages. However, today there are almost as many deaf and hard-of-hearing students from homes in which minority spoken languages are used (47%) as from monolingual English-speaking ones. This gives rise to the following questions for families, schools, communities, and professionals:

- What role do spoken or signed languages used at home play in a child's linguistic and educational development?
- In which, if any, spoken language(s) are speech therapy services provided?
- What role do English as a second language (ESL) services in a school or district play in deaf and hard-of-hearing children's educational plans?

- In what ways are the educational, medical, and professional sectors responding to the language and education needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing children and their families from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds?

The ways in which these questions are considered and answered by parents, communities, and schools will, as they have historically, influence the future prospects of ASL maintenance, use, and development among heritage language signers in the United States.

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Preface

The inspiration for this volume can be traced to the publication of Joshua Fishman's foundational study of *Language Loyalty in the United States* (1966). Since its release more than half a century ago, interest in the maintenance, development, and revitalization of heritage, community, and Native American languages in the United States has grown despite decades of debate over the merits of bilingual education for language minority populations (Wiley, 2013). Although many language communities have long devoted energy to educating their children and finding ways to maintain their rich linguistic and cultural traditions (e.g., Fishman, Chapter 4, this volume; see also the language-focused chapters in this volume), institutional recognition of and support for the promotion of heritage and community languages has for the most part been lacking. There have been major advances in the recognition and promotion of Native American languages such as Hawaiian (see Wilson, Chapter 21) through local and state efforts to promote the language, with federal recognition of Native American languages growing since the passage of the Native American Languages Preservation Act in 1990 (see Wiley, Chapter 5; McCarty, Introduction to Section IV; Sims, Chapter 19; Wilson, Chapter 21; Switzler & Haynes, Chapter 22). The contributors to this volume document the promising support of policy makers, educators, and community members in promoting the vitality of heritage, community, and Native American languages in the United States, but they also reveal the many challenges that remain.

In the late 1990s, considerable interest in heritage and community languages in the United States began to reemerge among scholars. In 1998, for example, Stephen Krashen, Lucy Tse, and Jeff McQuillan published *Heritage Language Development*. In the following year, 1999, the First National Heritage Language Conference was hosted by California State University, Long Beach, in collaboration with the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC); participants included James Alatis, Russell Campbell, Lily Wong Fillmore, Joshua Fishman, Ana Roca, and Guadalupe Valdés, among others. Several of the editors of this volume (Christian, Peyton, and Wiley) also participated. Among its concrete outcomes, the 1999 conference was instrumental in bringing together a working group focused on research under the leadership of Russell Campbell. The group gathered the following year at UCLA for a working symposium, leading to the production of a research agenda for the field (University of California, Los Angeles, 2001). Shortly thereafter, the Center for Applied Linguistics published *Heritage Languages in America: Preserving a National Resource* (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001), which featured contributions from many who had attended the 1999 conference in Long Beach. Other volumes appeared at about the same time (e.g., Webb & Miller, 2000; Wiley & Valdés, 2001), and beginning in 2003, the online *Heritage Language Research Journal* was launched, which has provided a major outlet for scholarship in the field.

A Second National Conference on Heritage Languages in America, again organized and sponsored by CAL and NFLC, was held in 2002 in Reston, Virginia. The participants agreed that an organization was needed to promote the sharing of information and efforts to promote heritage