

Motivation for L2 ASL learning by hearing parents with deaf children

Deborah Chen Pichler¹ & Diane Lillo-Martin²

¹ Gallaudet University; ² University of Connecticut

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Background

- Motivation has a powerful influence on L2 learning (Gardner and Tremblay 1994)
- L2 signers with *integrative motivations* for learning ASL, expressing positive views of the Deaf community and a desire to integrate into it, scored higher in signing proficiency than learners expressing *instrumental motivations*, such as practical or career-related reasons (Lang et al. 1996).
- This study examines motivations of a neglected subtype of hearing adult L2 signers: hearing parents who learn ASL in response to an urgent instrumental need to communicate with and provide accessible language to their newly-diagnosed deaf child.

Methods

- Semi-structured interviews and written survey collected from 27 hearing parents using ASL with their deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) children (ages 0;7-9;11, median 48 months). The current analysis focuses mainly on parents' survey responses.
- Survey questions focused on parents' reasons for choosing to adopt ASL, its role in their family life, and their experiences as ASL L2 learners.

Results

Parents demonstrated long-term commitment for both themselves and their DHH children to become an "ASL-English bilingual person, actively using both languages" [Figs. 1 & 2]

Fig. 1: Parents' goals for own ASL development

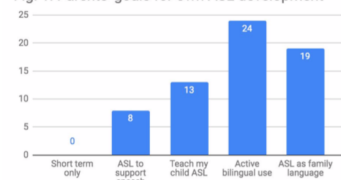
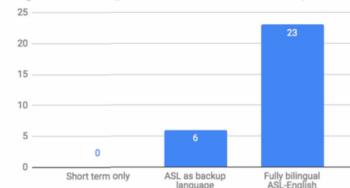


Fig. 2 Parents' goals for child's ASL development



Discussion

Hearing parents of DHH children exhibit strong instrumental motivation to learn ASL. Examination of their perceptions of ASL also reveals a strong motivation for integration into the Deaf community, but with a twist: they seek integration not for themselves, but for the sake of their deaf children, whom they anticipate will need ASL and the Deaf community. Such long-term commitment to L2 learning for the benefit of another is a novel case in L2 motivation studies, and remarkable given the prevailing public perception of signing as both a cause and result of failure to develop listening and speaking skills (Mauldin 2019).

Acknowledgments

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Parents' most common motivations for learning ASL are **for bonding and communication** (instrumental) and to **provide their DHH child with rich language input** (instrumental). [Fig. 3]

Fig 3: Parental motivation for learning ASL

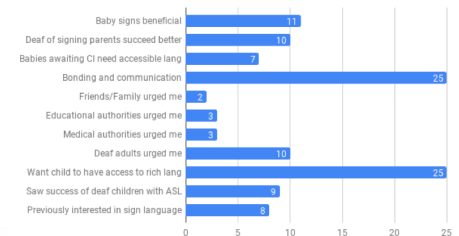


Fig. 4: Parental perceptions of ASL



However, parents cite perceptions of ASL that are consistent with integrative motivations, e.g. ASL is "fascinating" and "more expressive than English," and especially "becoming a good signer requires being involved in the Deaf community". [Fig 4].

Selected references

- Gardner & Tremblay (1994). On Motivation, Research Agendas, and Theoretical Frameworks 1. *The Modern Lang. Journal*, 78(3), 359-368. Lang et al. (1996). Motivational factors in learning American sign language. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 1(3), 202-212. Mauldin, L. (2019). Don't look at it as a miracle cure: Contested notions of success and failure in family narratives of pediatric cochlear implantation. *Social Science & Medicine*, 228, 117-125.

Contact information: Deborah.Chen.Pichler@Gallaudet.edu
Diane.Lillo-Martin@uconn.edu



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