



Anthropology: Language and Activism

Deaf Community, ASL

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About Me:

I graduated from Teachers College, Columbia University with a Master in Educational Anthropology.

I was first interested in anthropology when I took Intro to Cultural Anthropology in College (undergrad). My interests are in educational/cross-cultural/special education/ LD and Deaf education.

My career: Madison county schools in Kentucky and Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD). I work from undergrad is what we are going to be talking about today.



What is Anthropology?



Anthropology is the study of what makes us humans. It takes a broad approach to understanding the many different aspect of the human experience.

Anthropology helps us see things in a different light. Anthropology has helped me understand how societies and culture are fluid things that move and grow with people in everyday life.

You have noticed that the students or teachers in your school may look or act differently from you. Everyone has their own ideas and values that are connected to their own culture and way of life. You may have not noticed but each family has their own culture.

- What are some of your family's stories?



4 fields of study

Cultural anthropology: study of human societies, cultures, and their development.

Archaeology: studies human societies by uncovering the past and analyzing the objects people have made. (I.e. pottery and tools, ancient societies and their objects)

Physical anthropology: study of human biological and physiological characteristics and their development. (how humans have developed, adapted, and evolved)

Linguistic: studies how people communicate across the globe. Linguistic anthropology is interested in how language links people to each other.



Deaf Studies through the Eyes of Anthropology

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232634571.pdf>

Is Sign Language a real language, what is deaf culture, and how do individuals whom are deaf view their identity?

This Literature analysis identified the efforts previous studies have done in ways of deaf studies and addressed questions that need to be answered.

I began my research with how it all started. Where was Sign Language first used and how has it developed over the years into a community and culture.



History

It was not until the 1500s that we saw the first appearance of a form of sign language. However, societies had the idea that “deaf are dumb”.

- What is deafness vs Deafhood?

In 1760, France established the French Sign Language and with it the first school for the deaf. This started the change society's view on deafness.

More schools started to appear at this time, however, their schools were oral-based and the French wanted the alternative. France was the first to see deaf people as “Deaf and Proud” (*Deafhood*).



Movement



There have been many activist movements in history. For the Deaf, there are two main movements that focus both on their language and culture.

- **Oral movement** (oralism)- the idea that the deaf people need to learn to speak and read lips to coexist in our (*hearing*) society. (ie. 1760s/1800s-1900s) In 1817, the first american school for the deaf was opened. Deaf people were discriminated against which made them have low self-esteem: “deaf” identity.
- **Identity movement** (*empowerment*)- (1960s) Deaf people started to fight for what was right. This movement changed this identity to “Deaf” identity; the identity that one sees themselves as a proud and strong Deaf person.



Gallaudet and ASL: *The fight for equality*



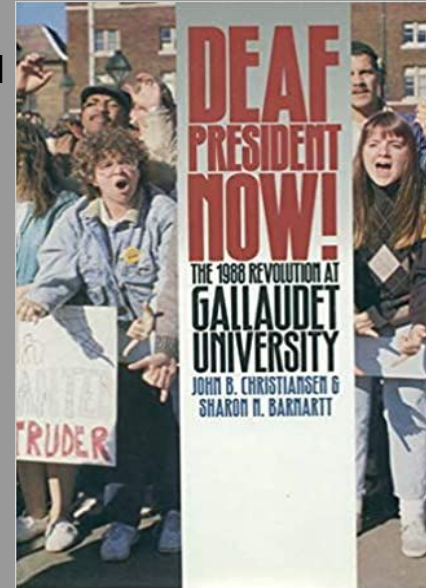
American Sign Language (ASL) consists of signs that combines hand gestures, facial expressions, and postures of the body. The Deaf community had to explain that ASL consists of its own pronunciation, word order, and grammar structure.

Gallaudet University was the powerhouse of the empowerment movement.

Several governmental acts were established that aided in the movement:

1. Rehabilitation act (1973)
2. Education of All handicapped Children Act (1975)
3. Americans of Disabilities Act (1990)

Identity for Deaf people is one of the most important aspects of their character and culture.



Anthropology at work

What has anthropology studied and recorded about Deaf community?

1. Its history: impact of oralism and empowerment/identity
2. School setting: schools of the deaf vs mainstream schooling
3. Language: ASL
4. Community: culture and society



What needs to be researched?

I have found three important areas that need further research:

1. Study across cultures
2. International communities and specifically cultures
3. Adult education of the Deaf

Do you think there are other areas that need to be studied?



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