Application of South African Sign Language (SASL) in a bilingual-bicultural approach in education of the deaf

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Author
Akach, Philemon Abiud Okinyi

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Abstract
After contextualising the challenges of deaf education in the twenty-first century in the global context, this study focused on sign language in the environment of bilingual-bicultural education for the deaf in South Africa. Each of the five essays pinpointed particular challenges and as a result the study ventures to use empirical research to demonstrate conclusively that the issue of sign language in a bilingual-bicultural education for the deaf in South Africa, as is the case elsewhere, is a complex matter in which a motley intersection of dynamics is to be taken into consideration. Fundamentally, the study indicates that sign languages in many polities in general, and in South Africa in particular, despite positive constitutional, legislative and policy developments, are subject to a particular challenges coined as “double linguistic imperialism”: sign languages are not only marginalised by the former colonial languages that have been adopted as official languages in many states in the developing world; they are also marginalised by the dominant indigenous languages in these societies. Language policy in general and educational policy and concomitant systems in particular are some of the mechanisms that can be deployed to redress this state of affairs. In addressing the issue of sign languages acquisition and deaf education, the discussion establishes that the deaf child, in order to fully integrate into a predominantly hearing world, is faced with a particular challenge of adapting to an education system that provides for bilingual education. In such circumstances, sign language should ideally feature as first language, or mother tongue, as well as language of instruction. However, for purposes of reading and writing, the deaf child should also be exposed to a second, spoken language. This approach, the thesis argues, should lend emphasis on the so-called “critical period” in the child’s development. This relatively obvious solution to the challenges that bedevil deaf education poses a particular challenge, given the ill-informed preconceptions of parents and society at large regarding the Deaf, Deaf culture and sign language, as well as its status as a natural language, and thus whether it is found “appropriate” as alternative medium of instruction. The study thus also challenges one of the fundamental issues in educational linguistics, namely language attitudes with particular reference to parents’ and teachers’ attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction for deaf learners. Empirical research conducted and published here for the first time reveals that parents’ attitudes towards sign language as medium of instruction are as a rule at variance with particular situations, conditions and circumstances prevalent at any given time. However, the parents surveyed tend to agree that signed language should be used in instructing the Deaf child at school. They further agree that signed language holds the key to a deaf learner achieving higher levels of education. Overall, from an attitudinal perspective, parents of deaf learners would prefer signed languages to be the languages of instruction for their children. By contrast, educators seemed to find themselves unable to distinguish between the use of SASL and alternatives in the classroom, calling all methods of communication “SASL”. The abundance of experience the teachers have plus the fact that they believe they have acquired SASL without any structured training is detrimental to the learners not only as it is detrimental to their communicative abilities in the classroom, but also as it devalues the need for formal training in SASL in the minds of the teachers, and this is transferred to their learners. The conclusion is that teachers are in dire need of formal training in order to appreciate the true complexity of signed language and by extension therefore realise the current limitations in the education of the learners. Despite current attitudes it was found that most of the teachers (60.5%) indicated a desire and intention to study further and such study should inter alia include the study of SASL. With regard to policy, the study establishes that Deaf education is a victim of the same fate that has been visited upon MTE in the developing world. There is an apparent non-recognition of the primacy of sign language as the mother tongue of the Deaf and therefore the failure to use sign language in education. This is a glaring failure which the principles, policies and legislation on Deaf education have certainly not remedied. Further, it can be postulated that some of the failures in Deaf education are attributable to the same principles, policies and legislation that have guided Deaf education over time, Policies setting out the requirement that the Deaf are taught through the medium of signed language have certainly not been heeded nor implemented on the continent of Africa. The last paper in the study also establishes that sign languages, caught between negative societal perceptions, lethargic educational policies and an outdated pedagogy, suffer from a paucity of the development of instructional/learning materials. It is therefore important to recognise that there is need for materials development for sign languages so that they can become entrenched in the curriculum as taught subjects and in educational policy and practice as a media of instruction for Deaf learners. Admittedly, a lot of work remains to be done in the area of Deaf education. The issues addressed in the various papers in this study could serve as pointers to the critical issues that need redress if there is to be any hope of...
The Department of American Sign Language and Deaf Studies offers a M.A. degree in Sign Language Education. This program is designed to prepare future sign language teachers, who will provide exemplary leadership in the sign language teaching field. All courses require quality bilingual Sign Language/English submissions. During the summers (on-campus classes), the department provides a state-of-the-art 24/7 access to lab and filming studios with iMacs, loaner Canon EOS 60D cameras, tripods and professional light kits. This course focuses on principled approaches to developing and implementing classroom methods and strategies for language teaching. Section 2: introducing South African sign language. Language is a tool for thought and communication. It is also a cultural and aesthetic means commonly shared among a people to make better sense of the world they live in. Learning to use language effectively enables learners to acquire knowledge, to express their identity, feelings and ideas, to interact with others, and to manage their world. It also provides learners with a rich, powerful and deeply rooted set of images and ideas that can be used to make their world other than it is; better and clearer than it is. However, many South African schools do not offer the home languages of some or all of the enrolled learners but rather have one or two languages offered at Home Language level. Language is related to Japanese Sign Language and Korean Sign Language. These Asian sign languages are not related to the sign languages of Europe or their offshoots in America such as ASL. After the International Congress of Educators of the Deaf in Milan in 1880, sign was officially banned from schools for the deaf, first in Europe and then in the United States. The shift from sign to speech in American schools for the deaf brought a shift from Deaf to hearing teachers, many of whom did not know ASL. Advocates of the linguistic-cultural view of deafness maintain that sign languages are as effective as oral languages, providing the deaf a means of communication, full membership in a community, and participation as equals in its life and culture. Section 2: introducing South African sign language Home Language. The Deaf Community has a distinct identity and their experience of the world is particularly shaped by the fact that their communication is expressed by their bodies and perceived visually. This group may include hearing children of Deaf parents and other hearing people who are users of SASL and immerse themselves in the Deaf Community e.g. SASL interpreters. Bilingual bicultural education of Deaf students recognizes both the native sign language of the Deaf community and the majority language of the country in which the students reside. It also fosters... Mahshie, S.: 1995, Educating Deaf Children Bilingually: With Insights and Applications From Sweden and Denmark, Pre-College Programs Gallaudet University, Washington, DC. Google Scholar. Mason, D.: 1995, ‘What do teacher of the deaf preparation programs offer North America?’, The ACEHI Journal 21(2/3). Google Scholar.