American Sign Language
Lesson 2
Deaf Culture

INTRODUCTION

Deaf Culture, shared beliefs, values, and behaviors of deaf or hard of hearing who use sign language as a primary means of communication and who are members of local deaf communities. Historically, communities of deaf people have existed in most countries of the world, each with a unique cultural heritage, and often, a distinct sign language.

In the United States and Canada, culturally deaf people are joined together by a common language (American Sign Language, or ASL), a common history, and many common traditions. Most culturally deaf people are deaf or hard of hearing from birth or a young age. They also grow up using sign language for most of their lives. Millions of people in the United States and Canada are hard of hearing or deaf. However, only a relatively small number of people consider themselves culturally deaf. Most other deaf people either lose their hearing after childhood or grow up without using as their primary language.

Culturally deaf people live throughout the United States and Canada. Particularly large communities of culturally deaf people are found in and around such cities as New York City, Washington, D.C., Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. Although they may not live together in the same neighborhoods, they frequently socialize with one another and meet together at sign language events.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DEAF CULTURE

The term culture refers to a group of people who share common beliefs and practices. Some cultures are marked by language — for example, the Spanish-speaking communities along the border between the United States and Mexico. Other cultures are marked by religion, as in the Amish communities in the Midwestern United States and the communities of Hasidic Jews in the New York City. Culturally deaf people are recognized by the common characteristics of deafness and of the use of a visual language. Although the trait of deafness is central to the culture, not all culturally deaf people are completely or profoundly deaf. Just as there are variations of skin color among African Americans, there are variations in hearing loss among culturally deaf people. People who are hard of hearing tend to be both admired and criticized within deaf culture because they seem more like hearing people.

Culturally deaf people are sometimes born into the culture, as in the case of deaf children born to deaf parents. These children learn their parents' language and other traditions of deaf people from their families and their deaf communities. But these cases are relatively rare. Nearly 90 percent of deaf children are born to hearing families. They learn sign language and deaf culture outside the family, typically at school.
A. Sign Language

Because of the strong role of sign language in deaf culture, many beliefs and values of culturally deaf people revolve around protection and celebration of their language. Furthermore, because their use of sign language is natural and effective, deafness seems to deaf people to be less of a handicap than other disabilities. As a consequence, culturally deaf people tend to emphasize their linguistic and cultural heritage above their disability, although hearing people may view them as disabled in the same way as they view people with other disabilities. The acceptance of deafness by culturally deaf people distinguishes them from adults who lose their hearing later in life and feel the loss of hearing more acutely and painfully.

Although culturally deaf people use sign language, not all signers are deaf. There are many hearing signers who grow up in or interact with culturally deaf communities. Because deaf people usually have hearing parents, many have relatives who learn sign language and become involved in deaf communities. And like children born to Spanish speaking families in the United States, hearing children of deaf parents learn spoken English from relatives, friends, and other English-speaking adults in their neighborhood. They grow up bilingual in ASL and English and move between the two cultures.

B. Education

Because most culturally deaf people are not born into the culture, schools play an especially important role in their lives. At school, deaf children first learn sign language and first learn about other deaf children and adults. The majority of culturally deaf adults aged 30 and older were educated in separate schools for deaf children, called residential schools. Many states built one residential school for deaf children throughout the state and hired specially trained teachers to work with them. Because deaf children often had to travel long distances to attend these schools, they boarded at these schools for weeks at a time.

The schools became a home away from home for many young deaf children, a place where they could interact with other children like themselves and learn a history that their hearing families did not know. Students at these schools developed literacy associations and small theater groups that created traditions of sign poetry and storytelling. Some of these traditions survive in national and regional theatres, such as the National Theatre of the Deaf.

Deaf children no longer attend residential schools in the same numbers as they did in the 1950s and 1960s. They are more likely to attend local public schools and come home to their families each night. In 1970s the federal government passed laws that require public schools to accommodate children with disabilities, including deaf children. This integration or "mainstreaming" of deaf children into regular classrooms has provided them new opportunities. However, integration has had other consequences as well. As a result of more deaf children attending public school, many of the oldest schools for the deaf in the United States and Canada have closed. In contrast with the regional residential school programs that once had as many as 700 students, most local public-school programs have only five or ten deaf students. Some critics of mainstreaming argue that integration has isolated deaf students from each other, depriving them of social and emotional comforts that peer groups can provide.
C. Cultural Institutions

Integration has also resulted in the disappearance of literacy and social associations for culturally deaf people. During World War II (1939-1945), many large cities had clubs where culturally deaf people could come and socialize with deaf friends after work and on weekends. At the clubs, hundreds of people would meet to play card games or watch signed entertainment. With new job opportunities and new technology, culturally deaf people no longer need to visit clubs in order to meet and talk with each other. Instead, deaf people can call each other using a special telephone device known as a teletypewriter (TTY), and many deaf people communicate by computer through the Internet. Closed captioning — that is, subtitling of words being spoken or descriptions of music or sound effects — of television shows and videotapes makes it possible for deaf people to enjoy the same forms of home entertainment that hearing people do.

Deaf people have developed many social and professional organizations to replace the functions that deaf clubs formerly served. The Canadian Association of the Deaf (CAD) and the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD) hold a conference every two years. CAD represents the interests of the national deaf community in Canada.
Vocabulary:

MAN
WOMAN
CHILD (children, short)
FAMILY
BOY
GIRL
MOTHER (mom, grandma)
FATHER (dad, grandpa)
DAUGHTER
SON
HOW-MANY (many)
WIFE
HUSBAND
MARRIAGE (marry, married)
BABY
BROTHER
SISTER
PREGNANT
SINGLE (alone, something, someone, only)
SEPARATED
DIVORCED
DECEASED
BOYFRIEND
GIRLFRIEND
WORK
BORN
RAISED-UP
STILL LIVING
FRIEND
YES
NO
SPELL (fingerspell)

SIGN NUMBERS 11 - 20

POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS:
(have, own, her, his, its, mine, my, our, their, your, yours)
1. “YOUR NAME B-O-B?”
   (Is Bob your name?)

2. “YOU MARRIED YOU?”
   (Are you married?)

3. “BROTHER YOU HOW-MANY?”
   (How many brothers do you have?)

4. “YOUR BROTHER / SISTER SINGLE?”
   (Is your brother / sister single?)

5. “SPELL YOUR DAD NAME SLOW.”
   (Spell your dad's name slowly.)

6. “YOUR DAD DEAF HE?”
   (Is your dad deaf?)

7. “YOU WORK WHERE?”
   (Where do you work?)

8. “YOU LIVE WHERE?”
   (Where do you live?)

9. “THIS HIS?”
   [point at any object] (Is this his?)

10. “YOU SIGN "W-E" WHAT?” [spell “we”]
    (How do you sign “we?”)
GRAMMAR NOTES

Personal and Possessive Pronouns

Personal pronouns (I, you, s/he) are signed with the index finger. Possessive pronouns (my, your, his/her) are signed with the B-handshape (with thumb extended).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal:</td>
<td>I/me</td>
<td>Index finger points to yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You</td>
<td>Index finger points to the person you are talking to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He/She/It/Him/Her</td>
<td>Index finger points to the person (if present) or to space designating that person*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessive:</td>
<td>My/Mine</td>
<td>Pat your chest with B-hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your/Yours</td>
<td>B-hand faces the person(s) you are talking to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>His/Her/Its</td>
<td>B-hand faces the third person (if present) or to space designating that person*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age Numbers

Forming Age Numbers. The sign form for age numbers is a combination of the sign indicating age and the number itself. To indicate age, the index finger contacts the chin (the contraction of the sign for "old") and is followed by the number. There is a variation where the sign for "old" in its original form is used in conjunction with the number.

Ranking by Age. When talking about three or more children or siblings in a family, you would usually rank each child by age on your non-dominant hand. The oldest is represented by the thumb or index finger, depending on the number. You can continue to give additional information by simply pointing to the finger representing that family member.
IDENTIFYING PEOPLE

MAN

WOMAN

BOY

GIRL

ASK IF MARRIED

RESPOND (NOT MARRIED)
ASK HOW MANY BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Tell how many (2 brothers and 1 sister)

HUSBAND

WIFE

BOYFRIEND

GIRLFRIEND

FRIEND
1. "HEY,' NAME YOU WHAT?"
   (What is your name?)

2. "YOU DIVORCED YOU?"
   (Are you divorced?)

3. "CHILDREN YOU?"
   (Do you have children?)

4. "SISTER YOU HOW-MANY?"
   (How many sisters do you have?)

5. "YOUR MOM NAME WHAT?"
   (What is your mom's name.)

6. "You-MEET MY BROTHER FINISH?"
   (Did you / Have you met my brother?)

7. "SHE LIVE WHERE?"
   (Where does she live?)

8. "HE WORK WHERE?"
   (Where does he work?)

9. "THIS YOUR?"
   [point at any object] (Is this yours?)

10. "YOU SIGN T-H-E-Y WHAT?"
    (How do you sign "they?")
ASL 101: Lesson 2

Checklist:

☐ I am able to recognize and use the “yes/no” non-manual marker.
☐ I am able to recognize and use the “wh” non-manual marker.
☐ I am able to recognize and produce each letter of the fingerspelled alphabet.
☐ I am able to use Indexing to sign Personal Pronouns.
☐ I am able to show Possessive Pronouns and I know the sign for “have”.
☐ I am able to recognize and use head-nod for affirmation.
☐ I am able to recognize and use head-shake for negation.
☐ I am able to recognize and sign numbers 11-20.
☐ I am able to recognize and sign the vocabulary for this lesson.
☐ I am able to recognize and sign the practice sentences for this lesson.
☐ I have taken ASL 1 Lesson 2 Quiz.
☐ I am done with Lesson 2.