

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN THE ACADEMIC ENGLISH LITERACY ACQUISITION EXPERIENCES OF DEAF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe deaf college students' perceptions of their experiences learning academic English literacy vis à vis their teachers. The study examined the narrated academic English literacy acquisition experiences and practices of 11 deaf and hard-of-hearing students at a hearing university with a large deaf student population. Through paradigmatic analysis of narrative data, the study located common themes, which revealed students' perceptions of academic English literacy acquisition, particularly with regard to their teachers.

Methods employed in the study were phenomenological interviewing and recursive analysis. The primary data sources were participant interviews and a focus group. Analysis was conducted through recursive interaction with the data, in which repeated reviews served to first elicit themes and meanings and then confirm interpretation of same.

The study resulted in the following findings: Participants' experiences resulted in a preference for instructors who are highly competent communicators, and these tended to be deaf instructors. Participants encountered communication challenges, including the inability of instructors to sign clearly or to understand what their students were saying to them, that restricted their learning. They also perceived instructors to hold expectations that were either too low, unclear, or rigid, which created internal contradictions between challenge and remediation.

The study concluded by showing how understanding deaf college students' perceptions of academic English literacy acquisition may inform and improve teaching practices with this population.

Keywords: phenomenology, paradigmatic analysis, academic English, literacy, deaf college students, college instructors

Chinese

[Translation Shek Kam Tse]

此項現象學研究的目的是描述聾啞大學生對學習學術英語讀寫的經驗以及他們的老師的看法。這項研究通過敘述調查了一所有較多聾啞學生的正常聽力大學中的11位聾啞和聽力障礙學生的學術英語讀寫的學習經歷和實踐。通過對敘述資料的範式分析，此項研究確定了研究主題，那就是揭示了學生對於學術英語學習的看法，特別是關於他們的老師。本項研究主要採用現象學訪談和遞迴分析，主要的資料來源是參與者的訪問和分組討論。分析是採用對資料的遞迴交互處理，即首先進行重複檢驗引導出主題和含義，之後確定解釋的方法。此項研究有以下發現：參與者的經歷顯示他們更喜歡溝通能力強的教師，特別是聾啞教師。參與者通常會遇到溝通方面的挑戰，包括教師不能清楚地指示或者理解學生想對他們說什麼，而這些阻礙了學生的學習；而且他們還感覺到教師對他們的期望通常很低、很模糊而且僵化，而這些也在挑戰和補救之間產生了內部的矛盾。文章結尾提出如何理解聾啞大學生對學術英語學習的看法，這些也許可以指導和提高對這個群體的教學實踐。

Dutch

[Translation Tanja Janssen]

TITEL. De rol van docenten in de ervaringen van dove studenten bij het verwerven van academisch Engels.

SAMENVATTING. Het doel van dit fenomenologische onderzoek was het beschrijven van de ervaringen die dove college studenten hebben met het leren van academisch Engels vis à vis hun docenten. Het onderzoek was gericht op verhalen van 11 dove en slecht-horende studenten over hun verwerving van academisch Engels op een universiteit met een grote populatie dove studenten. Door een paradigmatische analyse van narratieve data werden gemeenschappelijke thema's gevonden, die laten zien hoe studenten het verwerven van academisch Engels zien, in het bijzonder met betrekking tot hun docenten.

Methoden die in het onderzoek werden toegepast waren fenomenologische interviews en analyse. Databronnen bestonden voornamelijk uit interviews met betrokkenen en met een focusgroep. Analyse geschiedde door herhaalde interactie met de data, waarin door herhaalde beschouwingen eerst thema's en betekenis werden achterhaald die vervolgens geïnterpreteerd werden.

Het onderzoek leidde tot de volgende bevindingen. Ervaringen van de deelnemers gaven een voorkeur te zien voor docenten die zeer goed zijn in communicatie, en deze docenten waren toch vooral dove docenten. Deelnemers hadden te maken met communicatieproblemen, waaronder het onvermogen van docenten om dingen duidelijk aan te geven of om te begrijpen wat hun studenten wilden zeggen, en dit beperkte hun leren. Ze vonden ook dat docenten verwachtingen erop na hielden die of te laag waren, of onduidelijk, of te rigide. Dit veroorzaakte interne tegenstellingen tussen uitdaging en remediëring.

Ten slotte laat het onderzoek zien hoe een beter begrip van de percepties van dove studenten van het verwerven van academisch Engels de onderwijspraktijk voor deze populatie kan verbeteren.

TREFWOORDEN: fenomenologie, paradigmatische analyse, academisch Engels, geletterdheid, dove college studenten, college docenten.

French

[Translation Laurence Pasa]

TITRE. Le rôle des enseignants dans les expériences d'apprentissage de l'Anglais des étudiants sourds

RÉSUMÉ. Cette étude phénoménologique tente de décrire les perceptions qu'ont les étudiants sourds de leurs expériences d'apprentissage de l'anglais universitaire et de leurs enseignants. L'étude a examiné les discours et les pratiques de literacy de 11 étudiants sourds et malentendants dans une université pour étudiants entendants comportant une grande population d'étudiants sourds. Par une analyse de contenu paradigmatique, l'étude a repéré des thèmes communs, révélant la manière dont les étudiants perçoivent l'apprentissage de l'anglais universitaire, et plus particulièrement leurs enseignants.

Les méthodes utilisées dans cette étude sont l'entretien phénoménologique et l'analyse récursive. Les principales données proviennent d'entretiens individuels et d'interviews de groupe non directives cen-

trées. L'analyse des données a été menée au moyen de l'interaction récursive, des examens répétés ont d'abord servis à mettre à jour des thèmes et des significations, puis à confirmer l'interprétation.

L'étude a abouti aux résultats suivants : par expérience les participants ont une préférence pour les enseignants qui sont compétents en communication et cela tend à être des enseignants sourds. Les participants ont rencontré des défis de communication, y compris l'incapacité d'enseignants à signer clairement ou comprendre ce que leurs étudiants leur disaient, ce qui a limité leur apprentissage. Ils ont aussi perçu chez des enseignants des attentes qui étaient trop faibles, peu claires, ou rigides, ce qui a créé des contradictions internes entre défi et remédiation.

L'étude conclue sur la manière dont la compréhension des perceptions qu'ont les étudiants sourds de l'apprentissage de l'anglais universitaire peut renseigner et permettre d'améliorer les pratiques d'enseignement auprès de cette population.

MOTS-CLÉS : Phénoménologie, analyse paradigmatique, anglais universitaire, literacy, étudiants sourds, enseignants d'université.

German

[Translation Ulrike Bohle]

TITEL. Die Rolle der DozentInnen in den Erfahrungen gehörloser CollegestudentInnen beim Erwerb akademischer Lese- und Schreibfähigkeiten.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Diese phänomenologische Studie zielt darauf zu beschreiben, wie gehörlose Studierende den Erwerb akademischer Schreib- und Lesefähigkeiten im Englischen mit Blick auf ihre DozentInnen wahrnehmen. Die Studie untersucht Erzählungen über Erfahrungen beim Erwerb akademischer Schreib- und Lesefähigkeiten im Englischen von elf gehörlosen und schwerhörigen Studierenden an einer ‚hörenden‘ Universität mit einem hohen Anteil an gehörlosen Studierenden. Durch eine paradigmatische Analyse der narrativen Daten ermittelte die Studie gemeinsame Themen, die die Wahrnehmung gehörloser Studierender von ihrem Erwerb akademischer Schreib- und Lesefähigkeiten aufzeigen, insbesondere mit Blick auf ihre DozentInnen.

Als Methoden wurden phänomenologische Interviews und rekursive Analyse eingesetzt. Die Datengrundlage bilden Teilnehmerinterviews und eine Fokusgruppe. Die Analyse beruht auf rekursiver Interaktion mit den Daten, wobei mehrere Durchläufe dazu dienen, zunächst die Themen und Bedeutungen zu elizitieren und anschließend deren Interpretation zu bestätigen.

Die Studie ergab folgende Befunde: Die Erfahrung der TeilnehmerInnen resultiert in einer Bevorzugung von kompetent kommunizierenden DozentInnen, und diese sind in der Tendenz Gehörlose. TeilnehmerInnen wurden mit kommunikativen Herausforderungen konfrontiert, die ihr Lernen beeinträchtigen, u.a. mit der Unfähigkeit der DozentInnen, deutlich zu gebärden oder das, was die Studierenden ihnen mitteilten, zu verstehen. Außerdem nahmen TeilnehmerInnen die von den DozentInnen an sie gerichteten Erwartungen als zu niedrig, unklar oder rigide wahr, was zu Widersprüchen zwischen Forderung und Förderung führte.

Die Studie zeigt abschließend, wie ein besseres Verständnis davon, wie gehörlose Studierende ihren Erwerb akademischer Schreib- und Lesefähigkeiten im Englischen wahrnehmen, den Umgang der DozentInnen mit dieser Population substantiell verbessern kann.

SCHLAGWORTER: : Phänomenologie, paradigmatische Analyse, akademisches Englisch, Schreib- und Lesefähigkeit, gehörlose CollegestudentInnen, CollegedozentInnen

Italian

[Translation Manuela Delfino, Francesco Caviglia]

TITOLO. Il ruolo degli insegnanti nell'alfabetizzazione dell'inglese scolastico da parte di studenti sordi
SOMMARIO. Lo scopo di questo studio fenomenologico è di descrivere le percezioni da parte di studenti sordi relative alle loro esperienze di apprendimento dell'inglese scolastico a proposito dei loro insegnanti. Lo studio ha esaminato le narrazioni delle esperienze di acquisizione dell'inglese scolastico di 11 studenti non udenti e con difficoltà di udito in un'università per udenti con una vasta popolazione di studenti sordi. Attraverso l'analisi paradigmatica di dati narrativi, lo studio ha rilevato temi comuni, che hanno rivelato le percezioni degli studenti relative all'acquisizione dell'inglese scolastico, con particolare riguardo ai loro insegnanti.

I metodi utilizzati nello studio sono stati quello delle interviste fenomenologiche e dell'analisi ricorsiva. Le fonti primarie di dati sono state le interviste dei partecipanti e un focus group. L'analisi è stata effettuata attraverso l'interazione ricorsiva con i dati, in cui revisioni ripetute hanno contribuito in primo luogo a far emergere i temi e i significati e quindi a confermare l'interpretazione degli stessi.

Lo studio ha portato alle seguenti conclusioni: le esperienze dei partecipanti rivelano una preferenza per gli insegnanti che sono comunicatori molto competenti, e questi tendono ad essere docenti sordi. I partecipanti hanno affrontato problemi di comunicazione, compresa l'incapacità degli insegnanti a usare i gesti in maniera chiara o a capire ciò che i loro studenti stavano dicendo loro, problemi che hanno limitato il loro apprendimento. Gli studenti hanno inoltre percepito che i docenti nutrivano aspettative che erano di volta in volta troppo basse, o poco chiare, o rigide, tutti fattori che hanno creato delle contraddizioni interne tra la difficoltà e il possibile rimedio.

Lo studio si conclude mostrando come comprendere le percezioni degli studenti universitari sordi del loro processo di acquisizione dell'inglese scolastico possa rendere più consapevoli e migliorare le pratiche di insegnamento con questa popolazione di studenti.

PAROLE CHIAVE: fenomenologia, analisi paradigmatica, inglese scolastico, alfabetizzazione, studenti universitari sordi, docenti universitari

Polish

[Translation Elżbieta Awramiuk]

TITUŁ. Rola nauczycieli w przyswajaniu języka angielskiego na poziomie akademickim w doświadczeniach studentów niesłyszących

STRESZCZENIE. Celem podjętych badań fenomenologicznych było opisanie sposobu postrzegania przez głuchych studentów ich własnych doświadczeń w uczeniu się angielskiego na poziomie akademickim w odniesieniu do ich nauczycieli. Artykuł opisuje doświadczenia i zwyczaje dotyczące przyswajania języka angielskiego na poziomie akademickim 11 osób głuchych i z zaburzeniami słuchu, studiujących na zwykłym uniwersytecie z dużą liczbą studentów niesłyszących. Paradigmatyczne analizy danych pochodzących z relacji umożliwiły wydzielenie wspólnych tematów, które ukazują sposób postrzegania przez studentów przyswajania języka angielskiego na poziomie akademickim, szczególnie w odniesieniu do ich nauczycieli.

Do badań wykorzystano metodę wywiadu fenomenologicznego i analizy rekurencyjnej. Pierwotne źródło danych stanowiły wywiady z uczestnikami i grupa będąca przedmiotem zainteresowania. Analizę prowadzono poprzez rekurencyjne interakcje z danymi, w których powtarzane opinie służyły najpierw do uyskiania tematów i znaczeń, a następnie do potwierdzenia tej interpretacji.

Wyniki badań były następujące: Doświadczenia uczestników skutkowały preferowaniem nauczycieli bardzo kompetentnych komunikacyjnie i ci na ogół byli nauczycielami niesłyszącymi. Uczestnicy napotykali trudności komunikacyjne, takie jak niezdolność instruktorów do precyzyjnej gestykulacji lub do zrozumienia, co ich studenci do nich mówią, a to ograniczało ich uczenie się. Uczestnicy dostrzegali także nauczycieli, którzy wymagali zbyt mało bądź ich wymagania były niejasne lub zbyt sztywne, co wytwarzało sprzeczności między zadaniami a dostępną pomocą w ich wykonaniu.

Artykuł kończy refleksja, w jaki sposób zrozumienie spostrzeżeń głuchych studentów na temat przyswajania języka angielskiego na poziomie akademickim może być wykorzystane do doskonalenia standardów nauczania tej grupy studentów.

SŁOWA-KLUCZE: fenomenologia; analiza paradygmatica; język angielski na poziomie akademickim; umiejtność czytania i pisania; studenci niesłyszący; nauczyciele akademicy

Portuguese

[Translation Sara Leite]

TITULO. O papel dos professores nas experiências de aquisição da literacia por parte de alunos surdos do ensino superior.

RESUMO. O objectivo deste estudo fenomenológico foi descrever as percepções que os alunos surdos do ensino superior têm das suas experiências de aprendizagem da literacia face às dos seus professores. Examinaram-se as experiências e práticas de aquisição da literacia narradas por 11 alunos surdos ou com dificuldades auditivas frequentando uma universidade para ouvintes com uma elevada população de alunos surdos. Através da análise paradigmática de dados narrativos, o estudo permitiu localizar temas comuns, que revelaram as percepções dos alunos relativamente à aquisição da literacia, em particular no que respeitava aos seus professores.

Os métodos utilizados no estudo foram a entrevista fenomenológica e a análise recursiva. As fontes primárias de dados foram as entrevistas as participantes e um grupo de foco. A análise foi efectuada com base na interacção recursiva com os dados, servindo as revisões sucessivas para, em primeiro lugar, extrair temas e significados, e, em segundo lugar, confirmar a sua interpretação.

O estudo resultou nos seguintes achados: as experiências dos participantes levaram à preferência por instrutores que fossem comunicadores altamente competentes, e tendencialmente surdos. Os participantes viram-se em face de dificuldades de comunicação, relacionada com a incapacidade dos instrutores para utilizar a língua gestual de forma clara ou para compreender o que os alunos lhes tentavam dizer, dificuldades estas que comprometeram a aprendizagem. Também sentiam que os instrutores tinham expectativas demasiado baixas, vagas ou rígidas, o que deu origem a contradições internas entre as dificuldades e as soluções.

Na conclusão do estudo demonstra-se como a compreensão das percepções sobre a aquisição da literacia em contexto académico por parte dos alunos surdos pode fornecer informação e contribuir para otimizar as práticas educativas com esta população estudante.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Fenomenologia, análise paradigmática, Inglês académico, literacia, alunos universitários surdos, professores universitários.

Spanish

[Translation Ingrid Marquez]

TÍTULO. El papel de los maestros en la adquisición de las habilidades de lectoescritura: Experiencias con estudiantes universitarios sordos.

RESUMEN. El propósito de este estudio fenomenológico fue describir las percepciones de los estudiantes universitarios sordos de sus propias experiencias al aprender inglés académico a través de sus maestros. El estudio examina las narraciones sobre experiencias y prácticas relacionadas con la adquisición de habilidades de lectoescritura para once estudiantes sordos o con deficiencias auditivas en una universidad para personas sin esta discapacidad, pero que tiene una población sorda significativa. A través del análisis paradigmático de los datos narrados, el estudio encontró temas comunes que revelaron las percepciones estudiantiles acerca de la adquisición de habilidades de lectoescritura, en especial con respecto a sus maestros.

Los métodos empleados en el estudio fueron entrevistas fenomenológicas y análisis inductivo. Las fuentes de datos principales fueron entrevistas con los participantes y un grupo de discusión. El análisis se condujo a través de la interacción inductiva con los datos; repases repetidos sirvieron para obtener temas y significados para después confirmar la interpretación de los mismos.

El estudio arrojó los siguientes resultados: las experiencias de los participantes mostraron una preferencia para los maestros adiestrados en la comunicación efectiva, y éstos solían ser los instructores sordos. Los participantes identificaron retos comunicativos, incluyendo la incapacidad de algunos instructores para hablar con señas de manera clara o de comprender lo que los estudiantes les decían, limitando el aprendizaje. También percibieron que algunos instructores tenían expectativas o demasiado bajas o vagas o demasiado rígidas, creando contradicciones internas en la resolución de los retos.

El estudio concluyó con la demostración de cómo el comprender las percepciones de los estudiantes universitarios sordos puede render información que mejora las prácticas didácticas para esta población.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fenomenología, análisis paradigmático, inglés académico, habilidades de lectoescritura, estudiantes universitarios sordos, instructores universitarios.

1. RESEARCH QUESTION

Research focusing on the experiences, as opposed to the performance, of deaf students within a hearing academic English environment is limited. We really do not know what it is that deaf and hard-of-hearing students experience in academic English contexts in college. We know about the feelings of disenfranchisement in general experienced by such students in mainstream college situations (see, for example, Brown & Foster, 1989; DeCaro & Foster, 1992; DeFilippo, et al., 2000; Foster, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1998; Foster & Brown, 1986; Foster & Elliot, 1986, 1987; Foster & Walter, 1992; Menchel, 1995; Nash, 1992; Stinson & Foster, 2000), but these ethnographies do not explore the actual phenomena of what takes place in this academic English situation network, nor do they permit the student participants to define the meaning of the phenomena. They do not describe the participation of these

students as they negotiate the process of attempting to become literate citizens in school.

This gap raised the primary research question for this phenomenological study: What are the narrated college academic English literacy acquisition experiences and practices of a group of deaf and hard-of-hearing students at a hearing university with a large deaf student population? The corollary research question was: How does this inform us about their perceptions of academic English literacy acquisition?

2. DESIGN

The design of this study is a phenomenological one. This study collected the narrated college academic English literacy acquisition experiences and practices of a group of deaf and hard-of-hearing students at a hearing university with a large deaf student population for the purpose of understanding their perceptions of academic English literacy acquisition with the goal of helping their teachers improve this experience for future students.

In addressing the above-mentioned research questions from students' own perspectives, a phenomenological study is an appropriate approach. In the phenomenological paradigm, the study is conducted in a natural setting with the entity in context, and the researcher becomes the instrument in the study, providing experiences and perspectives that are valuable to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also must "have personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon under study," and the participants should share a similar intensity of interest (Patton, 1985, p. 71). The phenomenological research study employs inductive data analysis to provide more understanding of the interaction of "mutually shaping influences" and to explicate the interacting realities and experiences of researcher and participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40).

3. DATA COLLECTION

Eleven students who had hearing loss of 70 dB or greater in the better ear (required for admission to this college) and whose first language was either American Sign Language or English agreed to participate in this study. Each student was interviewed two times about his or her academic English literacy acquisition experiences within both the English Department and the Liberal Arts Support Department. After completion of all of these interviews, a focus group with five students from this cohort was conducted.

All of the interviews and the focus group were videotaped in a television studio, a high-ceilinged room with backdrop draperies for optimal visibility of subjects during filming. Several floodlights with diffusers were used for even illumination, and a single Sony video camera was used for recording these interviews and focus group. The interviews were recorded on premium grade VHS videocassettes, two copies per interview and focus group.

For the one-on-one interviews, two upholstered chairs were positioned at 45-degree angles facing each other so that the single video camera could capture both

the interviewer and the informant seated, from the knees up. For the focus group, six regular chairs were positioned in a semi-circle so that all participants, including the interviewer in the third seat, somewhat in the middle, could see one another. The interviews and focus group were guided by open-ended topical questions designed to elicit information and perceptions from the students about their academic English learning experiences.

The participants used a variety of communication modes, including American Sign Language and English. In addition, some participants simply signed and used no voice, whereas others mixed spoken English with sign language. During the individual interviews, the interviewer wore a microphone to capture her voice because she signed and spoke during the interviews. During the focus group, two certified sign language interpreters were present to voice what the participants signed, and again the interviewer wore a microphone as she spoke for herself.

The interviews and the focus group discussion were carefully transcribed. Each participant selected his or her own pseudonym for this study.

4. ANALYSIS

A feature of qualitative research is that data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously (Merriam, 1988). Analysis of the data was a recursive process in that as the data was being collected, it was also being analyzed, and upon later review, it was reanalyzed. The following procedures were employed in the data analysis.

The interview transcripts and focus group transcripts were reviewed several times (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59) with a data-driven approach to thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) of the data.

After review of the transcripts, the raw information was reduced by paraphrasing and summarizing each comment, observation, and point that arose in the interviews and focus group, creating basically a long list of statements for each interview and the focus group.

Using these long lists, significant statements (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59) were then extracted from each participant's interview and from the focus group discussion that show how the participants each had experienced English language learning, the investigated phenomenon.

Next, these statements were input into a spreadsheet that also included each participant's pseudonym. Using this spreadsheet, statements were compared across all participants, finding subsamples in which certain statements were prominent (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 87).

Then, from these statements, themes were identified that revealed themselves by their existence across participant experiences (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 86). Colaizzi refers to this part of the process as "formulating meanings," in which "the phenomenological researcher ... must leap from what his subjects say to what they mean" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). These themes emerged within subsamples of the narratives; not all themes appeared in all narratives, but many narratives shared similar themes. An exhaustive list was compiled of themes, and then the statements were regrouped under the themes in which they fit.

Textural descriptions were written of the experience (what happened) within each thematic unit, providing verbatim examples from the participants. A list of meanings formulated from the participants' significant statements was also developed. Then the possible meanings and divergent perspectives offered by participants' descriptions in contrast or comparison with one another's were described.

Finally, an overall exhaustive description of the meaning of the English language learning experience for each participant was constructed, providing the essence (epoche) of that experience for each participant, ultimately providing a composite description at the end of the study.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Perceptions

Participants had a great deal to say about their teachers, who played significant roles in their academic English literacy acquisition experiences. Participants discussed their experiences with teachers and revealed perceptions related to teacher attitude, communication, and faith in students. Many of these perceptions were negative, very likely because teachers are considered to have the upper hand, the control or power in the academic English system and therefore are sometimes thought of as oppressors. Instructors were not interviewed for this study as the research questions focused on student perceptions only.

More than half of the participants preferred their deaf teachers. These participants noted that their deaf instructors clearly communicated, provided effective instruction, had shared experiences, and shared cultural affinity. Sami Bradley said, "I think that it was a cultural difference because when I worked with a deaf teacher, things went great. And then with hearing teachers in the English classes, there were a bunch of conflicts."

Sami felt that her deaf teachers taught in a way that was more effective for her as a student. She explained, "Because I felt more comfortable with the deaf teachers because we had shared background. Yeah! And I felt that they respected my level of English, and they helped me better.... They helped me better related to their method of instruction, which was influenced by their deafness. They taught by example. They did more expansion. It was visually accessible."

Sami comes from a family with deaf parents and a deaf sister, and she describes ASL as her first language. She began her college career in one of the lower remedial classes and struggled to get through the system over a period of years. Her remark, "I felt that they respected my level of English," indicates an underlying message that she perceived herself as primarily an ASL user whose English skills were not at the level expected by her instructors, and she seems sensitive about this.

The issue of communication with teachers came up during various interviews with different participants. Some participants addressed the issue from the language standpoint, and others discussed it from the listening standpoint.

Communication breakdowns or misunderstandings from the language standpoint resulted from what several participants considered to be poor receptive skills on the part of teachers, reflecting their inability to understand their students, or teachers'

poor expressive skills, resulting in students' inability to understand what their teachers were signing. Zara Vitch said, "When I came in, I was shocked. The teachers would be there signing, but it wasn't very intelligible. It was like misarticulated, and I asked them how long have you worked here? The teacher said that they have worked here 25 years. And I went what? Twenty five years, and you still can't sign fluently!" At this college, some tenured veteran faculty possess sign skills that would not be sufficient for being awarded tenure today, and even though they may have continued attending sign language courses, their skills have fossilized.

Other comments addressed whether teachers truly listened to what their students were trying to tell them. Kofu Brown explained, "I think the teachers fail many students because of the teachers' communication with the students. They don't really listen to us. For example, I noticed one student would keep raising their hand [to challenge the teacher about assignments]. And the teacher said well, you are right, but you still have to do that anyway. And I felt that the student was looking for a challenge."

Here, Kofu explained that the students specifically asked for more challenging materials, but the teacher would not comply, and in the end, most of the students failed the course, which reflected a communication breakdown in Kofu's mind.

This issue, for some participants, went beyond simple language comprehension and touched on personal boundaries, reflecting cultural conflicts between hearing teachers and deaf students. Sami narrated an experience with a hearing teacher that revealed a huge cultural conflict and misunderstanding centering around the use of language, "About two weeks later I got into this confrontation with this teacher over an 'F.' Her choice of words on what she wrote on my paper was 'too bad that you wouldn't go for tutoring help.' Well, I read that, and I said you mean too bad that you wouldn't go for help? You got an 'F.' And in ASL, that sign 'too bad' means like 'too bad for you. You refused to get any help so it is your fault, and you are getting an 'F,' and I have no empathy for you.' So I confronted her on it, and I said, 'Too bad. That is not a proper way to express that.' And the teacher said, 'Oh, no, no, no. I didn't mean too bad the way that you are explaining it. I mean like oh, shoot, isn't that a shame.' And so I told her that was like being tricky or devious with English. And the teacher responded in a way that I found very patronizing or demoralizing saying, 'oh, you are always misunderstanding.' And I was wondering, did I really misunderstand, or I didn't understand English? And it was devastating. I had no motivation to stay involved in that course. Things spun out of control, and I ended up failing that last course.... So, I went on doing the best that I could, but that comment 'too bad,' I mean really had an impact on me."

This miscommunication or cultural conflict that Sami relates corroborates her earlier comments about why she prefers deaf teachers. Sami's narrative describes a discourse conflict (revealed by the different understandings of the phrase "too bad") that was intensified by the teacher's comment, "oh, you are always misunderstanding." In this situation, Sami reveals that she already feels a disconnect with English itself as well as the writing course and instructor, and being confronted with a demoralizing experience like this seems to have intensified that feeling and to have raised further doubts in Sami's mind about her ability to get through the course and the academic English system.

Four participants discussed their perception that instructors generally held deaf students' skills and potential for improvement in low estimation. These participants shared their perceptions that certain teachers were excessively controlling and inconsiderate of students. Kaylee Wallin described how a friend who caught mononucleosis was forced to withdraw from his writing course instead of completing the required essays on his own, "Now, he said that if he was in a regular mainstreamed course, he could have just written four essays, attendance was not mandatory.... But with the NTID section... he had to do rough drafts and papers in the ten classes, and that was all mandatory.... So, he had to withdraw, or he would fail the class, and the teacher wasn't sympathetic." This behavior on the part of the teachers was considered patronizing and obstructive, and the participants were particularly sensitive to this given the difficulties they felt they had to overcome to progress through the academic English system.

The topic of teachers' fixation with English grammar came up frequently in these interviews. Kofu Brown said, "They just keep emphasizing grammar. Because once one person might miss something in class, and then they will just repeat it over and over and over again. I felt things were going so slowly! I mean once we understand something, they should move on to new information. But it seemed like they kept going over and over the same information, maybe for two or three weeks before they would finally move on to a new topic. So, I felt that we were progressing really slowly." Kofu felt that grammar was not an important area for him to focus on improving, and he resented the insistence of the teachers on working with grammar rather than on other areas he felt were more useful and would enable him to progress through the English system.

John Doe mentioned his experience with this phenomenon in the courses he took with hearing teachers of deaf students. When he refers to "Liberal Arts," he is talking about teachers of mainstreamed classes with both deaf and hearing students, "I remember when I took Written Comm II, Writing Literature I & II, the teachers picked on us for grammar errors, the way English rules are. Liberal Arts are a little more flexible. They do pick on grammar, but mostly focused on what we learned in that course."

John explained that in his deaf-only English classes, the same ones Kaylee complained about, the instructors spent a great deal of time trying to correct students' grammar, whereas in subsequent mainstreamed liberal arts courses, instructors seemed interested primarily in the ideas and concepts that students wrote and less in their grammar.

Participants generally expressed negative reactions to this focus that they found in their experiences with many of their English teachers.

5.2 *Expectations for teachers*

The issue of what participants expected from their teachers generated a wide variety of responses. Many of them were fairly straightforward, but a few revealed underlying conflicts that have proven difficult to resolve. For example, opposing viewpoints

emerged regarding the issue of who is responsible for student motivation and therefore student success: students or teachers or both.

A point raised by two participants focused on teachers understanding who their students were and the needs of those students in specific classes. Sami Bradley said, "I expected teachers to understand my strengths and weaknesses and to have some patience with me and to help me improve my writing and my English. I expected that ... they would help me improve my writing plus how to use the structure of English and also the vocabulary that we were going to use. And also something about syntax and word order." Some participants wanted their teachers to be more accessible and available for students who needed help.

Participants also mentioned their expectations related to communication with their teachers, many of them centered around the use of sign language. Several tied sign language skills with teaching skills. Sami Bradley said, "Before I took a course, what I envisioned was the teachers would sign really well, write examples in English, then explain them clearly in ASL, knowing that deaf students mostly are second language users and have weaknesses. So, they would support them with sign language and use that to explain things in-depth. Well, I came into class, and as I was sitting there in the first class, I found that it was exactly the opposite. I remember my first year experience in an NTID course, the teacher would kind of read from a book and just vocalize and not sign. And then they would address the vocabulary, and they would write some of the vocabulary on the blackboard, and then they would use an overhead, and they projected an overhead and just point at what they had written. It was like follow the finger as they pointed at the overhead."

Several participants said that they wanted to feel challenged by their English teachers and their English courses. They wanted to learn, and to learn, they felt they needed to be challenged more than they were. Kofu Brown explained, "Many of the students felt that the course wasn't challenging enough. It was watered down. The teacher was repetitious, but they didn't really prepare and plan. One class had about ten students, and eight students failed. So, either there is something wrong with the students or with the teacher!"

5.3 Expectations of teachers

Participants discussed not only what they expected from their teachers, but they also shared their perceptions of what their teachers expected from them. This theme emerged as part of the thinking and analytical process participants seemed to go through as they sorted out their experiences and perceptions.

Most of the participants seemed to perceive that their teachers expected them to work hard and do well, but a few remarked that they felt the teachers were not optimistic about student success. Kaylee Wallin perceived that teachers demanded a great deal, but were not optimistic, "I think that teachers who teach English don't have high expectations of students. They want a lot from students, yes, as much as they can get, but they don't have high hopes."

Kaylee also shared her perception that teachers teach to the weakest deaf student in class, which created an unchallenging classroom experience for her. She said,

“Oh, I do think that the teachers try their best, but like you obviously know, really each deaf student is different. And I know that there is not really a way to group students so that they are all at the same level. I understand that. So I think that what the teacher does is find the least prepared student and teach to that level, so no one misses anything. That is my perspective, and I understand it, I do. I mean, what else can they do?”

Zara Vitch narrated experiences with teachers giving assignments she felt were too basic and not challenging enough to prepare her for upper level college work, which she inferred to mean that teachers did not expect students to be able to do more challenging work, “Some of the homework they gave us just made me laugh. They would have like hang-man. ... They would assign an essay like, ‘How to teach your cousin to ride a bicycle.’ I don’t think that is equivalent to what they expect at RIT.”

A number of participants felt that teachers expected deaf students to attain English skills similar to those of hearing students, but were not accepting of deaf students’ particular challenges and abilities. Zara explained her perception, “Because my experience of their expectations was different from my expectations. When I made improvements, it seemed like it was never good enough, never satisfactory because my English wasn’t as strong as the English skills of hearing students at RIT. That is why they have to remember that deaf and hearing people are equal as human beings.” Essentially, teachers have the authority to assign grades according to their assessment of student performance, and Zara’s point is that they should give credit for deaf students’ progress, not just on whether they have achieved the same standards as hearing students, which she feels is unfair.

6. DISCUSSION

According to Sokolowski, phenomenology enables us to “deal with the problem of the difference between the objective, scientific world and the subjective, lived world (2000, p. 147).” Understanding the subjective experiences of these participants will help teachers reconsider their own perceptions toward these students.

The preference for deaf teachers over hearing teachers was a strong theme among the informants in this study. This preference seemed to be founded on several principles. The primary reason seemed to be the notion that, by virtue of being part of the same minority group as the students, deaf faculty members better understood the students’ experiences, perceptions, and needs and therefore were better positioned to help the students learn academic English in college. In other words, deaf students trusted deaf faculty in a way they did not trust hearing faculty.

A corollary reason for this preference was based on communication: the deaf faculty were perceived to be effective communicators compared with the hearing faculty. The competence in American Sign Language and sign language in general demonstrated by the deaf faculty apparently enabled their students to understand them as well as to feel that the faculty understood them in turn. In other words, the deaf faculty’s expressive and receptive communication skills were judged to be more effective and successful than their hearing counterparts’, according to the in-

formants. Furthermore, the fact that they were English teachers seemed to confer upon them in the students' eyes a sort of certification that they were expert in this field, which the students trusted. Not only were the deaf faculty apparently more effective at explaining concepts, they evidently were able to more fully understand what their students were telling them, both from a language and a shared experiences standpoint.

A third corollary principle behind the informants' preference seems to be related to the perception of the informants that their hearing teachers were more prone to patronizing them. This patronizing behavior was manifested in a variety of ways, including a lack of patience for deaf students' instructional needs, which Zara discussed, and a mismatch in cultural understanding, exemplified by Sami's long narrative about the cultural conflict she experienced with her hearing teacher who used the phrase "too bad," which resulted in an argument and a failing grade.

Cognitive, perceptual, and acquisitional factors constrain deaf learners' acquisition of spoken language knowledge, typically resulting in language delays and considerable struggle to attain sufficiently high English skill levels for educational and career success (Berent, Kelly, Schmitz, & Kenney, 2009; Paul, 2000). This challenge and its consequences are apparent in the comparison of deaf learners' assessed English proficiency levels relative to the English proficiency of their hearing peers (Karchmer & Mitchell, 2003).

However, many of the standards applied to deaf college students are inappropriate on many levels. One significant standard is that of expecting deaf students to achieve perfect English grammar. This is not realistic within the short timeframe available to students in college. Another is the expectation that deaf students will demonstrate the same world views and common knowledge as hearing students. This also is not realistic given the early information input experienced by deaf students, particularly those who do not learn to read well at an early age. Deaf students' life and learning experiences are completely different from hearing students'. A third is expecting deaf students to remediate their skills quickly, also not a realistic expectation given their language delays and limited time in college.

Nonetheless, success is entirely possible if the parameters of academic English literacy are reconsidered and redefined in the spirit of honestly assessing the skills that will be needed by deaf students to succeed in college and at work. Kliever has identified two broad definitions of literacy, "The first regarded reading as conformity to a hierarchy of psychologically-deduced subskills.... The second definition regarded literacy as the construction of shared meaning in specific contexts (1998)." Deaf students experience a deep contradiction in their college English classes as they seek access to the same opportunities as their hearing peers but also need special dispensations in certain circumstances. They seem to be operating under the strictures of Kliever's first definition of literacy, which is the definition used in traditional academic settings, when they might be best supported by an expanded consideration of how students and teachers can construct knowledge together so that both student and system redefine literacy and success in college.

The findings of this study confirm the need to return to educational practices supportive of language learning prior to college, particularly those promoted by Collier (1995) that encourage interactive sociocultural classroom strategies tied to aca-

demic content. According to Collier, the following programmatic strategies based on extensive research can dramatically improve student achievement: 1) second language taught through academic content; 2) conscious focus on teaching learning strategies needed to develop thinking skills and problem-solving abilities, and 3) continuous support for staff development emphasizing activation of students' prior knowledge, respect for students' home language and culture, cooperative, learning, interactive and discovery learning, intense and meaningful cognitive/academic development, and ongoing assessment using multiple measures (Collier, 1995, p. 9).

In an environment designed to promote access and opportunities for deaf people, the standards of achievement and associated definitions should be reconsidered in a manner that supports deaf students' achievement in meaningful ways, constructing a shared understanding of this process and its goals.

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