Sociolinguistic Research on American Sign Language: An Historical Perspective

by James Woodward (1980)

I will start this history with my own beginning in this field: how I met Bill Stokoe. The time was August, 1969. I had just returned from my senior year abroad in Taiwan. I was planning on going to graduate school on a scholarship, but my draft lottery number quickly produced a 1A classification and a notice for a physical exam, so I decided I would look around for a teaching position, which at that time offered the possibility of a deferment. By chance, I talked with my advisor, who suggested that I try Gallaudet College. I had never heard of Gallaudet College, but I called anyway and talked with the Chair of the English Department, William Stokoe. I explained my background and asked about teaching positions. Stokoe said that someone in his department was asking for a leave of ab-

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sence and asked if I would be interested in coming over in a couple of weeks, since he was going on vacation the next day. Since I had my army physical in two days, I told him that I might not be around Washington, D.C. in two weeks. He suggested I come over that day for an interview. So I rode the bus to Gallaudet, interviewed, and got the job. Sometimes, when I look back on that day, I wonder what Stokoe had in his mind when he hired me off the street.

You, the reader, may be thinking, "What luck!" Actually 'timing' and 'chance' are better words, and they clearly describe the development of sociolinguistic research into ASL.

Many people assume that scientific research is the result of someone's carefully planned thought in an 'ivory tower' or that there is always some well-designed plan for research that is being steadily carried toward completion. Sometimes this is true, but in the field of sociolinguistics it is very difficult to do this, since no one can bring a society of language users into a laboratory.

In addition, many people think that professional contacts and relationships occur because of plodding, dilligent effort by researchers to make contact. In the case of sociolinguistic research on ASL in the U.S., this has rarely happened. Chance meetings and contacts are the norm. In this paper, I will try to describe the "interactive" history of sociolinguistic research on ASL by focusing on the personal as well as professional interactions between researchers and consultants that have influenced this research.

Before we start this interactive history, we need to first take a brief look at sociolinguistics.

What is Sociolinguistics?

Sociolinguistics is the study of the form and functions of language in society. What types of language or languages can be used in courts or educational systems? Is the same language used in both formal and everyday conversations, or are there different languages? What are the attitudes of majority and minority cultures towards language variation? What types of language variation actually occur? Often differences in the language used in a society are related to regional, social, ethnic, age, and even sex differences.

These questions and others are important for understanding how people actually use a language in real life situations. This information is important for understanding prejudice and discrimination in society, since very often people are stereotyped by the type of lan-

guage they use. In addition, whenever language skills have to be taught in a classroom, there must be some decisions about which form of the language to teach, and this requires knowing how different forms of a language are used in a society. Interpreters also need to know more than just the appropriate vocabulary and grammar of a language, but also the appropriate situations in which this vocabulary and grammar can be used. For example, it is perfectly acceptable to me and many other people who were raised in the South to say, "He might could go." In fact, if you don't say "might could" people will often look on you as a snob or a Northerner. But all of us who use that form know that "might could" is inappropriate for written English; there we would use "might be able."

Like all other languages, ASL has variation: people from different places often sign differently (Woodward, Erting & Oliver 1976). Sometimes White signers sign differently from Black signers (Woodward 1976) and sometimes males sign differently from females (De Santis 1977). An understanding of this variation is crucial for planning educational and interpreting programs. One of the most important types of variation that occurs in the U.S. Deaf community is *diglossia*.

What is Diglossia?

In 1969, the Linguistics Research Lab at Gallaudet was in existence in the same offices as the English Department. At that time, Stokoe was Chair of the English Department and Director of the Linguistics Research Lab. He was also completing his classic article on "Sign Language Diglossia."

The term *diglossia* was first coined by Charles Ferguson (1959), who used it to explain the spoken language situation in Arabic countries, Greece, Switzerland, and Haiti. In the classic diglossic situation described by Ferguson, one variety of a language, generally a standard literary variety, has a special relationship to another colloquial variety of the same language. The literary variety is used in more formal situations with more formal topics and participants, while the colloquial variety is used in less formal situations. Native users generally consider the literary variety superior to the colloquial variety, and some people will even claim that the colloquial variety does not exist. The colloquial variety is generally learned at home, whereas the literary variety is learned at school. The literary variety is generally studied in the schools; the colloquial is not.

Many people study the grammar of the literary variety, but "descriptive and normative studies of the . . . colloquial variety are either non-existent or relatively recent and slight in quantity" (Ferguson, 1959, p. 432). Diglossic situations are typically very stable and may continue for several centuries.

Fishman further refined the definition of diglossia to include bilingual communities—communities in which more than one language is used. He pointed out that is is possible to have diglossia with bilingualism, diglossia without bilingualism, bilingualism without diglossia, and neither bilingualism nor diglossia. However, "only very small, isolated and undifferentiated speech communities may be said to reveal neither diglossia nor bilingualism" (Fishman, 1967, p. 37). Thus, the attitudes and patterns of language use that characterize diglossia are fairly common; it is also common to find more than one language used in a community.

What is Diglossia Like in the U.S. Deaf Community?

Since diglossic and bilingual situations are quite normal, it is not surprising to find them in the U.S. Deaf community. Stokoe (1969–1970) first pointed out the bilingual-diglossic situation between ASL and English. Stokoe identified the literary variety as English and the colloquial variety as ASL and showed that these languages shared the characteristics of other languages in diglossic situations. As in other diglossic situations, the literary variety (English) is used in formal conversations in church, in classrooms, for lectures, etc. The colloquial variety (ASL) is used in smaller, less formal, more intimate conversations. English is considered superior to ASL, and ASL is often regarded as ungrammatical or non-existent (Johnston 1977). Signers generally feel that "grammatical" English signing should be used instead of ASL for teaching. Much formal grammatical description has been done on English (in its spoken or written form) but only relatively recently has any research on ASL been done. Some signers feel that standardization is necessary, but Sign Language diglossia appears as stable as other diglossic situations.

There appears to be only one possible point of conflict between bilingual diglossia in the U.S. Deaf community and bilingual diglossia in Hearing communities—how the languages are acquired. In Hearing diglossic situations, the colloquial language is learned first at home and the literary at school. But only 5 to 7 percent of the Deaf population have two Deaf parents (Karchmer & Trybus 1977), so this

can't be true for the Deaf community. However, if we remember that the home is the initial place for learning Hearing culture for Hearing children and that residential schools have served as the initial place for learning Deaf culture for many Deaf children of Hearing parents, this apparent contradiction is overcome. For we can now say that ASL is generally learned early in the initial place for enculturation: the home for Deaf children of Deaf parents and the residential school for Deaf children of Hearing parents. This acquisition of ASL takes place in informal situations. English (signed, spoken, or written) is usually learned in more formal classroom situations.

Why Does Diglossia Exist?

The negative attitudes of Hearing people and the discrimination of Hearing people against Deaf people are probably two of the reasons for the existence of diglossia in the Deaf community. With the seemingly hostile world facing most minority groups in the U.S., there is a feeling among members of the minority group that "outsiders" must be identified and not trusted until they have proved that they do not fit the minority group's stereotype of the majority. There is also a need to identify other members of the minority group so that a feeling of group solidarity can be achieved.

In principle, diglossia ensures that most Hearing people will be easily recognized and sterotyped as Hearing—and thus, excluded from intimate interactions with Deaf people. That is, since the majority of Hearing people do not know or use ASL, their more English-like signing shows that they are Hearing. When a Hearing person enters a conversation where Deaf people are using ASL, the Deaf people will automatically switch from ASL to a more English-like form of signing (Markowicz & Woodward 1975). This "code-switching" prevents the Hearing person from seeing and learning to use ASL and thus, from being able to participate in intimate interactions with Deaf people.

Many Hearing people, including some Hearing linguists, misunderstand the nature and importance of diglossia in the Deaf community. Sometimes Hearing people who are just beginning to learn to sign tell me, "Oh, now I have a class in ASL. It's fascinating." A few months later, they realize that what they are learning is Pidgin Sign English or some form of manually coded English. Then they start complaining that no Deaf person will teach them ASL no matter how much they beg. The Deaf people keep switching to English. I then

suggest that they start taking the time to begin interacting with Deaf people in informal casual situations, and try to imitate the signing that Deaf people use with each other. The Hearing people reply that they don't have time and still ask, "Why can't someone teach an ASL class?" One reason it is so difficult for Deaf people to teach ASL is that it is presently not generally socially acceptable in the Deaf community to use ASL in classroom situations, especially when the class is full of Hearing people.

The point of this whole discussion is that diglossia acts as a "buffer" between Hearing and Deaf communities (Markowicz & Woodward 1975). It allows Hearing people to be identified as outsiders and to be treated carefully before allowing any interaction that could negatively affect the Deaf community. Hearing outsiders are stereotyped negatively until they prove themselves to the community. Any Hearing person who does not have the time to associate with Deaf people will be viewed as only another "hearie." At the same time, diglossia serves important functions in the Deaf community by maintaining the social identity and group solidarity of Deaf people, and thus is a very positive force in the Deaf community (Markowicz & Woodward 1975). The diglossic situation between ASL and English is complex. What is even more complex is the relationship between ASL and English signing in the Deaf community. To understand this relationship, we have to jump ahead in time to 1973 to the first Ph.D. dissertation that attempted to describe ASL in sociolinguistic terms (Woodward 1973a). The dissertation, supported by National Science Foundation and National Institute of Mental Health grants that Stokoe had obtained, was a discussion of the variation from ASL to English signing based on Stokoe's diglossic work, and sociolinguistic theory for analyzing variation along language continuums.

What is the relationship between ASL and English?

Because of the great variety of language backgrounds of Deaf students, the overt pressures of the Hearing community for Deaf students to learn English, the diglossic situation in the Deaf community, and perhaps other factors, we find a large amount of variation in signing. (Again it is important to note that variation is normal and, depending on sociological conditions, may vary in intensity from society to society.) This variation is *not* random but systematic and can be described in terms of modern sociolinguistic theory.

Let's take a look at one example of variation between ASL and English signing

One Example of the Continuum Between ASL and Manual English

(right hand)	FINISH ME	ASL
(left hand)	EAT	⋮
	EAT FINISH ME	⋮
	I FINISH EAT	Pidgin Sign English
	I END EAT	⋮
	I HAVE EAT	⋮
	I HAVE(V) EAT	⋮
	I HAVE(V) EAT FINISH	Manual English

In this example, meaning "I have eaten," "purer" ASL can sign EAT and FINISH simultaneously by using both hands, while no English variety does. Also notice that ASL does not have the same word order as English. English uses a different perfective (completed action) marker than ASL. ASL has one form for the first person singular pronoun, English has two. Certain types of English signing use an initialized handshape on HAVE (V). All of this may appear complex: it is. All of this may also appear random. IT IS NOT RANDOM, BUT SYSTEMATIC. If one uses the initialized sign for the English pronoun "I", they will use English word order. If one uses an initialized perfective marker, they will also use the sign for "I" and English word order. Depending on the social background of the signer and the appropriate language variety to choose, a person will use more ASL-like signing or more English-like signing. Of course, the use of any particular type of signing is dependent upon the signer's knowledge. People can't use a language variety they do not know.

The type of variation that we observe along the continuum between ASL and English is discussed theoretically below. PSE is not a discrete language from ASL or English. Please do not fall into the trap of trying to label each kind of signing you see with a specific

name. A continuum by its very nature does not have discrete internal boundaries.

In my dissertation (1973a) and other papers (1973b, c, d, 1976) I have formally described the variation along this continuum and have shown that the variation is non-discrete, but regular, rule-governed, and describable in terms of sociolinguistic theory. This variation also correlates with social variables of whether a person is Deaf or Hearing, has Deaf or Hearing parents, learned signs before or after the age of six, and attended some or no college (Woodward 1973a).

Unfortunately, along with this recognition of variation has come a proliferation of names—American Sign Language, ASL (Stokoe 1960), Ameslan (Fant 1972), Ameslish (Bragg 1973), Signed English (O'Rourke 1970), Siglish (Fant 1972), (Pidgin) Sign English (Woodward 1972, 1973d), Manual English (Stokoe 1970).

What is wrong with having so many names?

This proliferation is unfortunate for two reasons: 1) it confuses people, and 2) it obscures the idea of a continuum and gives the impression that there are many discrete languages.

It should be remembered that there are only two discrete languages on the continuum: ASL and (a manual representation of) English. Intermediate varieties contain various overlaps and are not discrete, but are describable in terms of current variation theory in linguistics (Woodward 1973a, b, c, 1974). As stated earlier, these intermediate varieties along the American Sign Language-to-English diglossic continuum have certain sociological and linguistic characteristics of pidginized language varieties (Woodward 1973d; Woodward and Markowicz 1975).

Pidgin Sign English retains certain grammatical characteristics of both American Sign Language and English and some of the phonological characteristics of American Sign Language. Deaf signers retain more of the characteristics of American Sign Language in their Pidgin Sign English than do Hearing signers who retain more of the characteristics of English. However, because English and signs use different channels, it is impossible to keep as much English as ASL in Pidgin Sign English. Thus, Hearing people's Pidgin Sign English is much more reduced than Deaf people's Pidgin Sign English. Hearing signers are often said to sign without expression or to "mumble" because their use of the signing space is greatly re-

duced. However, Deaf PSE signers tend to use more of the signing space because this is a feature which can be carried over from ASL.

Some people are now saying that PSE is a separate language from ASL and English. While it is true that PSE is different from pure ASL and from pure English, it is not a separate language. There is no way in the world to define where PSE begins and ends. PSE was used specifically to label the situation that exists between ASL and English: there is no clearcut definable division between ASL and English. The term 'Pidgin Sign English' is merely used to describe the fact there is no clearcut division and allows one to talk about "English-y ASL" and "ASL-like English" for deaf people, and "ASL-like English" for a few hearing people and "English-y English" for most hearing people.

Although there is no clearcut division between ASL and English, there are research-based ways to describe the continuum. I have handled the description of this variation by using sociolinguistic variation theory (1973a, b, 1974, 1975). Through these techniques, it is possible to demonstrate statistically that Deaf signers tend to use more ASL-like signing than Hearing people (Woodward 1975), that Deaf people with Deaf parents use more ASL-like signing than Deaf people with Hearing parents (Woodward 1973a), that people who learned signs before the age of six will use more ASL-like signing than people who learned signs after the age of six (Woodward 1975), and that college experience is also an important variable (Woodward 1975). Lloyd Anderson has helped me realize that the original conclusion of the independent variable of college education was misleading. If signers are subdivided into those having Deaf parents and those having Hearing parents and then the variable of college is introduced, Deaf people of Deaf parents who attend college use less ASL than Deaf people of Hearing parents who attend college. The college experience then can be seen as reducing ASL use for Deaf students with Deaf parents and increasing it for Deaf students with Hearing parents.

This brings us to a crucial point. Most of the linguistic studies of ASL generally do not describe the Deaf people who participated as consultants in the research (usually only one or two), nor describe any empirical ways that they attempted to verify that what they were getting was close to "pure" ASL signing. But this kind of information is very important for understanding the results of their research. For example, such contradictory claims as "previous SOV (subject-object-verb sign order) and present predominant SVO sign order

in ASL" (Fischer 1975) versus "free sign order in ASL" (Friedman 1975) versus "preferred SVO with variant sign orders depending on facial adverbials" (Liddell 1978) could be more easily resolved with a large scale study utilizing variation theory. I should point out that there are less than five consultants in each of these studies, that none of the linguistic consultants (informants) in each of these studies are from the Southeast, but all are White, middle class (in the Deaf community), and in at least two of the studies, college-educated. (This same trend for selection of consultants can be found in almost alll studies of ASL.) If one performed the same studies on a larger group of people, especially in the South, and more especially among Black signers, it is very likely that one would find a greater use of the historically older verb-final sign order among Southeastern consultants and within Southeastern consultants. Black signers might very well use more of the historically older verb-final orders than White signers of the same age. This is a reasonable hypothesis, since Southeasterners tend to retain older forms of signs more often than Northerners (Woodward 1976b, Woodward & De Santis 1977b). Also in the South, Black signers use historically older forms more often than White signers of the same age (Woodward & Erting 1975, Woodward 1976b, Woodward & De Santis 1977b).

What can we do to avoid these problems in variation?

The solution to this problem is to test out these studies that have the above problems on a fairly large sample of consultants from varying regional, social, ethnic, and age backgrounds. All of these variables significantly and independently influence ASL use. To give a brief illustration here of how complex the situation can be: regional, social, ethnic, and age and historical variations are often related. For example, Susan De Santis and I (1977b) have shown that French signers used more of the older two-handed signs on the face than American signers. In the same study, it was pointed out that in the U.S., Southerners use the older two-handed signs more often than Northerners. In the South, older White signers use the older two-handed signs more often than younger white signers. Also in the South, younger Black signers paralleled older White signers: that is, they use older two-handed signs on the face more often than younger White signers.

Having seen systematic variation along the diglossic continuum between ASL and English, we can now go back a little in time to

1970 to look at the historical development of sociolinguistic research related to region, sex, etc., within ASL.

Research on Variation in ASL

The year 1970 was primarily a year of development for the Linguistics Research Lab. By 1971, the Linguistics Research Lab was quite active and a number of events helped promote sociolinguistic research in ASL. First, the Linguistics Research Lab became an autonomous unit at Gallaudet College, and received funding from outside grants. This autonomy was necessary for expansion of staff and research. Second, I became involved in the newly established Sociolinguistics Program at Georgetown University, the first of its kind in the U.S. This led me to quite different emphases in my own research. Third, T. J. O'Rourke, then the Director of the Communication Skills Program at the National Association of the Deaf, with assistance from Stokoe, received a grant from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped to establish a workshop at Western Maryland College, entitled "Psycholinguistics and Total Communication: The State of the Art." Stokoe was asked to teach at this institute, but since he had prior commitments, Stokoe asked me if I wanted to teach in his place. The institute at Western Maryland provided me with important contacts which led to specific field research at later dates.

Kay Meadow's paper at the institute, "Sociolinguistics, Sign Language, and the Deaf Sub-Culture" provided a summary of Stokoe's work on diglossia and brought out several other interesting areas for research (Meadow, 1972). Meadow herself refers briefly to Croneberg's work, especially his statement on ethnic variation in ASL (Croneberg 1965). My experience at the institute helped solidify my own thinking about where sociolinguistic research in ASL ought to move. At the December meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) in 1971 in St. Louis, I outlined our needs for future sociolinguistic research on ASL. This was the first paper on American Sign Language presented at a Linguistic Society of America meeting, and it helped other linguists to begin to recognize ASL as a language—a crucial step toward expanding the linguistic study of ASL.

In 1972, a second institute on Psycholinguistics and Total Communication was held at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. In the Linguistic Research and Theory course in the institute, I began to switch the focus towards sociolinguistics. At the institute, I

also made contact with Carol Erting and Harry Markowicz. We later worked together on various aspects of the sociolinguistics of American Sign Language.

During the Fall of 1972, Stokoe, Gil Eastman, Will Madsen, and I developed a course, "The Study of Sign Language," offered by the Audiology and Speech Department at Gallaudet. In the process of developing this course, I suggested that the course include ASL "dialects" and the other three people told me I should teach that part of the course. Since I didn't know anything about Sign Language varieties other than what was reported in Croneberg (1965), I decided that I would have to go and find out for myself. I contacted Carol Erting in Atlanta, since that was an area that might have significant variation. She set up an appointment for me at an Adult Basic Education class in Atlanta, and I went, with the trip partially paid by Stokoe from our meager budget.

That was the coldest winter Atlanta had had in years. I was in a motel that obviously had forgotten the insulation. I had turned the heat on as high as possible, pulled all the covers off both beds, and was sleeping in my clothes and still freezing. But the people I met were fantastic—signers from Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, and Georgia. Most of them used "Gallaudet" signs among each other, but when Erting and I started filming, they switched to their own regional signs. There were times when everyone was laughing so hard from the differences in signs that we had to stop the videorecorder.

What kinds of regional variation occur in ASL?

Regional variation occurs in American Sign Language phonology (formation), grammar, and vocabulary. One example of regional variation that has been researched is face-to-hand variation (Woodward, Erting & Oliver 1976). Certain signs that are made on the face in the Washington, D.C. area are instead made on the hands in some regions of the South. Some of these signs (that can be made on the face or on the hands) are MOVIE, RABBIT, LEMON, COLOR, SILLY, PEACH, PEANUT. Using 45 Southern consultants, we found that New Orleans signers made these signs on the face more often than Atlanta signers who made these signs more often on the hands.

Another example of regional variation concerns verbs that put the negative ('not') inside the verb sign by an outward-twisting movement of the moving hand(s) from the place where the sign is made. Verbs that do this "Negative Incorporation" include GOOD, KNOW,

WANT, LIKE, and HAVE. With 144 consultants, Susan De Santis and I (1978) found that Northwestern signers (in Montana and Washington state) used significantly more of this Negative Incorporation than Northeastern signers (Washington, D.C., New York, and Maryland).

There are also numerous variations in ASL vocabulary according to region. Very common signs such as BIRTHDAY, SHOES, GOAT, HALLOWEEN have a number of very distinct regional variants that are not formationally related.

Erting and I were both excited at the prospects for research in the future. I went back to D.C. and continued work on my dissertation. After the dissertation, I decided to go back to look at ethnic variation among Black Southern signers. Croneberg (1965) had said that variation existed between Black and White signers in the South. I wanted a larger scale study to find out: (1) if there was variation, (2) if so, what types of variation occurred, and (3) if this variation was purely conditioned by ASL or if there was some influence from Black English.

What kinds of ethnic variation occur in ASL?

With further support from the grants Stokoe had obtained, Harry Markowicz and I left for Atlanta in 1973. There Carol Erting, Harry, and I visited the Georgia School for the Deaf campus that had the largest percentage of Black students. We tried getting data at the school but the teacher who was assigned to help us interview students kept encouraging them to switch to White signs. Ultimately we got about 5 minutes of usable data out of a day and a half of work. But we had obtained the name of the leader of the Black Deaf community in Atlanta. Unfortunately we didn't have his address and he had no phone. We thought we perhaps could do something on the next trip. To salvage something from the trip, we decided to go to the Atlanta Club for the Deaf. We arrived but had little luck in getting data. It was the day before a holiday and everyone was more interested in partying than working. By 12:30 in the morning, we had decided to call it quits. Just as we were packing up the equipment, in walked about four Black people—all of the people in the club had been White. We watched the interaction and it seemed like one of the Black men was well known. Thinking maybe this person could use Black signs in addition to the White signs he was using, I decided to go up and introduce myself. He was the man we had been hoping to

find. He said he hadn't been to the club in over three months, but had just decided to come because it was a holiday. We filmed from 1:00 A.M. to 3:00 A.M. and went home exhausted but excited. We had made contact with the Georgia Black Deaf community and we were welcome to come back.

The data we had obtained in Atlanta was used in a paper, entitled "Synchronic Variation and Historical Change in ASL" that Carol Erting and I presented in the summer of 1974 at the Linguistic Society of America meeting. In this paper, we hypothesized that Southerners tend to use historically older forms of signs than non-Southerners, and that in the South, Black signers tend to use historically older forms than White signers.

It was at this same LSA meeting where I became acquainted with Susan De Santis, who had interpreted some of the papers at the conference. Soon afterwards, she came to work at the Linguistics Research Lab where we frequently did research together. By this time Carol Erting was working at the Linguistics Research Lab and we planned another trip, this time to Atlanta and New Orleans under a grant from the National Science Foundation. Stokoe was the Principal Investigator and I was the Co-Principal Investigator. We obtained excellent data on this trip and found that of sign variants that could be made on the face or hands (such as LEMON), Black signers tend to use more hand variants as compared with White signers.

The years of 1974 and early 1975 were basically summary years, spent in putting some individual studies into more theoretical frameworks.

What kinds of general studies occurred?

In November, 1974, a number of researchers went to the American Anthropology Association meeting in Mexico City to present papers at a session organized by Bill Stokoe and Carol Erting. At the same conference Carol and I presented a summary of sociolinguistic research to date. A later version of this paper was published in *Discourse Processes* (Erting and Woodward 1979).

In 1975, there was also a good deal of research into the sociolinguistics of ASL. This research included papers on Pidgin Sign English and on language and the maintenance of ethnic boundaries in the Deaf community. All of this research was supported by grants with Bill Stokoe as Principal Investigator. Because of the overlap of regional, ethnic, and historical variation in ASL, I had become inter-

ested in finding out if the same historical processes were occurring in ASL and French Sign Language (FSL). I wrote a small grant to the National Endowment for the Humanities, using Stokoe's earlier grant proposals as a model and obtained a grant to study the "Historical Bases of American Sign Language."

What kinds of historical information resulted?

This grant brought Harry Markowicz, Sue De Santis, who was now majoring in Anthropological Linguistics, and me to France. Harry did historical research in the Library at the St. Jacques School for the Deaf, while Sue and I went to Paris, Toulouse, Albi, and Marseilles. This research resulted in several papers relating FSL and ASL. Three of the most important papers showed the first statistical relationship in ASL for sex and Sign Language variation (De Santis, 1977); showed the historical continuum between FSL and ASL and also demonstrated that FSL tends to preserve older signs more often than ASL (Woodward and De Santis, 1977); and showed a relationship of region and sex with linguistic variation in FSL (Woodward and De Santis, 1978).

Later in 1975, Sue De Santis and I again went to Atlanta to collect data and wrote a paper (1977b) which described the overlap of studies of regional, ethnic, age, and historical variation. We found that French signers tend to use older two-handed signs on the face more than American signers. In America, Southerners use these same forms more than non-Southerners. In the South, older signers used two-handed signs more than younger signers and Black signers tend to use these same older two-handed signs on the face more often than White signers of the same age. Having such information, we can more easily see that much of the variation in ASL has historical roots. In addition, such information makes it easier for us to speculate and hypothesize about older forms of signs that were not recorded earlier. We now can study those places and groups that still use those "older" signs. Thus, we can better reconstruct and understand the history of ASL.

The life of a language is intimately tied to the community that uses it. Sociolinguistics, since it focuses on language use in society, provides a very useful tool for understanding the Deaf community and its language varieties.

William Stokoe has played a major role in sociolinguistic research into ASL. His seminal work in Sign Language diglossia, his support

of sociolinguistic research under grants that he directed, his dissemination of sociolinguistic research into ASL through the journal *Sign Language Studies,* and his writings on the practical applications of sociolinguistic research, all attest to his interest and support for the sociolinguistic analysis of ASL and the U.S. Deaf community.

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