Contextual issues of deaf Hispanic immigrant adults learning American Sign Language as a new language
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Abstract

In this study, the researcher explored the ASL language-learning of Deaf Hispanic immigrant adults and how this learning tied in with their assimilation into American Deaf culture. Eleven (N=11) individuals from six different Hispanic countries constituted a unique group of multilingual and multicultural language learners who participated in a qualitative research design study in a mid-western city. Observing how these Deaf Hispanic immigrant adults were able to learn the visually based sign language of ASL in the United States was of singular interest to the researcher, because he had observed in his earlier work that after this group learned ASL, their lives appeared to improve rapidly--a change that appeared to pivot around their burgeoning language development skills.

The researcher interviewed this selected group of participants to answer three key interrelated research questions: 1) What are some of the key historical language-learning antecedents outside the United States that shaped the language-learning in the United States of Deaf Hispanic immigrant adults?, 2) What does it mean to be a Deaf Hispanic immigrant adult to learn the ASL language and culture in the United States today?, and 3) What are some examples of language and cultural choices made by ASL using Deaf Hispanic immigrant adults in the United States today? The interview findings were then related to the professional literature of first and second language acquisition, including theories of home language, critical period, multilingualism and bilingual/biculturalism. Finally, suggestions were made for additional research to confirm these findings of this research especially about what are believed to be the key cultural contextual elements of language acquisition.