Philemon Akach & Johan Lubbe

The giving of personal names in spoken languages and signed languages — a comparison

This study utilises data from two Deaf communities to investigate the principles operant in the giving of personal names and to demonstrate similarities and differences as compared with those operant in spoken-language communities. Descriptive principles which operate are the physical features of the person to be named, his or her behaviour and mannerisms, associations evoked by him or her, translation of the meaning of the written name, and naming after someone else. In addition to the descriptive principles, the incorporation of the handshape of alphabetical signs is a second important principle in the giving of personal names.

Naamgewing van eiename in gesproke taal en gebaretaal — 'n vergelyking

Aan die hand van data van twee Dowe gemeenskappe word die beginsels wat 'n rol speel by die toekenning van eiename ondersoek en ooreenkomste en verskille wat betref die toekenning van eiename in gesproke taal word aangetoon. Beskrywende beginsels wat 'n rol speel, is die fisiese kenmerke of gedrag en bepaalde maniërismes van die benoemde, assosiasies wat deur die benoemde opgeroep word, vertaling van die betekenis van 'n geskrewe naam en naamoordrag. Behalwe die beskrywende beginsels is die inkorporering van die handvorm van die alfabetiese letters 'n tweede belangrike beginsel wat 'n rol speel by naamgewing.

Mekgwa ya theho ya mabitso puong tse buuwang ka molomo le Puo ya Matshwao — papiso

Ho nkilwe se fumanweng dihlopheng tse pedi tsa botsebe tutu, melao e sebediswang ho reha batho mabitso e ya hlahlojwa mme diphapang le ho tshwana ha yona thehong ya mabitso puong e buuwang ka molomo di ya bontshwa. Melao ya tlhaloso e sebetsang ke tjhebahalo ya sefahleho le mmele tsa motho ya rehwang lebitso, boitshwaro kapa tlwaelo tsa hae, menahano e tliswang ke ha ho buuwa ka yena, phetolelo ya lebitso le ngotsweng, le phetisetso ya lebitso. Hape kantle ho melao ya tlhaloso, ho kenyeletswa ha sebopeho sa matshwao a alfabete ke mokgwa wa bobedi wa bohlokwa o laolang ho rehwa mabitso.

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How we name the world around us is, to a large extent, a reflection of the society or community that we are born into and live in. Over the last four decades of the previous century, the Deaf have been claiming to be a community, complete with its own language and culture.[1] Before a comparison can be made between spoken languages and signed languages in terms of the giving of personal names, it is therefore pertinent to shed some light on who the Deaf are; the meaning of the term Deaf itself; where they live, and whether they constitute a cultural entity. Most importantly, we must also consider what signed languages are amd trace their origin, evolution and development.

The principles and rules governing the giving of personal names in signed languages will then be discussed. Since the Deaf co-exist with hearing (speaking) people, the similarities and dissimilarities with regard to naming in the speaking and the Deaf communities will be explained.

1. The Deaf community

According to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (Pearsall 1998), "community" means a social group living together and/or united by shared interests as well as by a common language, religion, race, and so forth. The term community, therefore, to an extent, identifies a separateness of existence and mode of operation which people have found difficult to apply accurately in describing deaf people (Kyle & Woll 1985: 5). Adequate statements of the essential elements that comprise a Deaf community are therefore notably elusive.

In the attempt to define a "Deaf community", various definitions were proposed in the early 1970s. These were categorized into two main general types: pathological or clinical, and socio-cultural. The former type of definition takes the behaviour and values of the hearing majority as the "standard" or "norm" and then focuses on how deaf people deviate from that norm (in terms of hearing and

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1   In accordance with convention in the field of Deaf Studies, we use the uppercase *D* when referring to people who identify with the Deaf community and use signed language, and the lowercase *d* to refer to the audiological condition of deafness.

speaking). The latter type focuses on the language, experiences and values of a particular group of people who happen to be deaf (Baker-Shenk & Cokely 1980: 54). The socio-cultural view comes with the recognition of Sign Language as a distinct language with its own structure and as the language that bonds the Deaf into a community (Schlesinger & Meadow 1972).

2. Membership of the Deaf community

A Deaf community is not like an ethnic community or a religious community, where it is generally clear whether a person is a member or not. In other words, there is no single distinctive feature or trait that the Deaf share. There is, however, a complex set of factors to be considered in order to understand who the members of the Deaf community are.

The most basic and fundamental of these factors is attitudinal deafness. This occurs when someone identifies him/herself as a member of the community and the members accept him or her as part of it. Research findings show that this factor is far more important than the actual degree of hearing loss or audiometric deafness (Baker-Shenk & Cokely 1980: 5). Audiometric deafness does not seem to be very important in determining how one relates to the Deaf community. The term "deaf" itself is a contentious issue among experts subscribing to either the pathological or the socio-cultural view of deafness. Freeman *et al* (1981: 7) encapsulate this controversy when they note:

> The term 'deaf' is often confusing and inconsistent. Some experts (some deaf people) deplore the use of the word. The argument is based on the fact that no one is really deaf for there is always some residual hearing left.

Using the criterion of attitudinal deafness has significant implications. First of all, it means that not all persons with hearing loss are members of the Deaf community. Some choose (or attempt) to function within the hearing community and do not become involved in matters affecting the Deaf community.

Secondly, although the vast majority of members of the Deaf community do, in fact, have hearing loss, it may be possible for hearing

individuals to be accepted as members if they display appropriate attitudinal deafness.

Thirdly, since attitudes may be expressed in various ways and to differing degrees, there may be several avenues via which someone may gain acceptance by the Deaf community, and varying levels of acceptance into that community in accordance with his or her skill, experience and attitude.

The four avenues to membership in the Deaf community identified by Baker-Shenk & Cokely (1980) are:

- audiological: actual loss of hearing ability;
- political: the potential to exercise an influence on matters directly affecting the Deaf community at local, provincial or national level;
- linguistic: the ability to understand and use Sign Language, and
- social: the ability to participate satisfactorily in the social functions of the Deaf community.

3. The location of the Deaf

The community of Deaf people do not form a geographical nucleus. They do not live in the same street or area of town (Kyle & Woll 1985: 9-10). Most of them are born, and consequently live, among the hearing majority. Statistics from the USA, Britain and other Western countries show that 90% of the Deaf population are born to hearing parents, and a mere 10% to Deaf parents. Furthermore, although a significant 90% of the Deaf in the aforementioned countries marry Deaf spouses, these marriages do not usually produce deaf offspring.

There is no known research from Africa regarding the numbers of deaf children born to Deaf couples and to hearing couples. Research carried out in Kenya among 445 Deaf respondents revealed that 81% were born of hearing parents (Akach 1988: 117). If this is anything to go by, then the percentage of Deaf children born to hearing parents could in fact be higher than 90%. The figures pertaining to the South African Deaf community may be similar to those from Kenya. More research is needed to test this assumption.

The aforementioned facts attest to the presence of the Deaf in every known hearing community. This is in accord with Kyle & Woll's

(1985) postulation that the Deaf do not comprise a geographical nucleus in any given country or on any given continent. The Martha's Vineyard of the eighteenth century may be considered an exception (Groce 1985). On this island everyone used sign language since a large number of deaf people happened to live there, coexisting with the speaking community, which learned and used sign language unquestioningly because half their neighbours were deaf.

Like many linguistic minorities, the Deaf have a keen sense of a shared place. Even if they literally had a place of their own, a purely utopian view, the hearing majority would quickly fill it, since marriages among the Deaf do not usually produce deaf offspring. Deaf people will therefore always remain "foreigners amongst a people whose language they never learn" according to Olof Hanson, president of the National Association of the Deaf from 1910 to 1913 (Lane *et al* 1996: 125).

4. Sign Language

Definitions of language, at least until the 1970s, always included "vocal" symbols, hence speech (Bloch & Trager 1942: 5). Such definitions excluded Sign Language, which does not entail speaking. Sign Language was linked with artificial languages and/or unnatural communication systems used by animals. Lyons (1981) observed that there are many other systems of communication, which are natural rather than artificial, but which are not languages in the strict sense of the term, for instance Sign Language, body language or the language of the bees. This dismissal was written as recently as two decades ago.

In 1960 William Stoke presented the findings of many years of research in the American Deaf community. He proved that Sign Language is a language in its own right and independent of any spoken language (Stoke 1960). From then on linguists began to include chapters in their books, and/or definitions of language, taking cognisance of Sign Language. Chomsky's (1957: 13) definition, which states that "language [is] a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements", is de-

void of the terms "vocal symbols" or "speech", and refers only to "elements", which may be vocal or non-vocal.

For the purposes of this paper the definition of language by Baker-Shenk & Cokely (1980: 31) is taken as inclusive:

> A language is a system of relatively arbitrary symbols and grammatical signals that change across time and that members of a community share and use for several purposes: to interact with each other, to communicate their ideas, emotions and intentions, and to transmit their culture from generation to generation.

Signed languages are therefore natural languages just like any spoken language. They are fully-fledged languages entirely capable of expressing all the nuances of meaning that other natural languages can express, and able to perform cultural functions such as naming. The differences between signed and spoken languages can be said to be modal, ie spoken languages are oral-aural, whereas signed languages are visual-gestural. Spoken languages use sound, whereas signed languages use space.

Signed languages are not universal. Many different signed languages have been documented, for instance American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL), Swedish Sign Language (SSL), Japanese Sign Language, Kenyan Sign Language, Namibian Sign Language and South African Sign Language (SASL). Like other natural signed languages, SASL has phonological, morphological, syntactical and semantic components, all bound by the same linguistic principles as in the case of other (spoken) languages. Signed languages are not based on spoken languages, but have their own independent grammar.

When discussing naming in the Deaf community, repeated reference will be made to "gestures". Sign Language has been described as a visual-gestural language. But hearing people also use their hands when they speak, and the question arises as to whether this gesturing is the same as gesturing in Sign Language. A gesture in Sign Language can be simply defined as any movement of the body that occurs for the purpose of communication (Baker-Shenk & Cokely 1980: 47). This definition attempts to set aside the notion that the hand and body movements of signed languages are inappropriate and irregular. Such movements are in fact rule-governed, just like the movements made within the oral cavity to produce speech sounds, which com-

bine to produce words, which in turn combine to form sentences in an orderly manner. These rule-governed gestures are called signs. The signs of any signed language are composed of specific movements and shapes made by the hands, arms, eyes, face, and head, as well as body posture. These movements and shapes serve as the "words" and "intonation" of the language.

"Visual" simply means that the eyes perceive the precise, regular movements described above. The "listener", as it were, has to follow movements in space in order to understand the message being conveyed. Sign languages are therefore carefully structured to fit the needs of the eyes.

Having discussed the concept "gesture" (movement), it is appropriate to consider briefly how the "signs" are articulated (produced). This brings us to articulatory parameters.

5. The articulatory parameters of Sign Language

In 1960 Stoke proposed that the "sign" has five parts (parameters), three of which combine simultaneously, ie the handshape (designator), the location (tabular), and the movement (signation). The other two important parts — non-manual signal and palm orientation — were dealt with indirectly in the Stoke system, as it came to be known (Vali & Lucas 1992: 56). Besides the above articulatory features, Liddell & Johnson (1960: 104-7) introduced the movement-hold model which they claim is sequential, as opposed to Stoke's claim that the features are simultaneous. These articulatory features are the basic elements used in producing a "sign" and, by extension, a "name". They include the handform (HF); the place of articulation, or location (PA); the movement (MOV), if any; the orientation (ORI), or palm orientation in relation to the body, and the non-manual marker (NMM). (The non-manual marker is sometimes referred to as facial expression). The HF, PA and ORI are permanent features of a "sign" — one needs them always to produce a "sign". NMM and MOV are optional features. An example of handforms in South African Sign Language (SASL) is given in Figure 1.

Besides the handforms described above, there are 26 hand configurations representing the 26 letters of the alphabet as used in ordi-

nary orthography (see Figure 2). These are used to spell or represent the written words on the hands, an activity known as "Fingerspelling". Literate people use fingerspelling as a code-switching technique. It must be borne in mind that a signed language is independent of any spoken language. Those who use this technique know the written version of the spoken language. It follows therefore that those who are not literate cannot use it. It is usually used to spell the written names of people new to the Deaf community who have not yet been given a "name", or been "named". Knowing the hand configurations used in spelling does not mean that one knows a signed language. It is necessary at this point to add that HFs, as used in the articulatory features, are similar to the hand configurations used in fingerspelling. As may be noted from Figure 1, some of the HFs bear the same names, for instance B, S, F and H. These, however, are used in the articulation of the "sign" without recourse to the written word.

Now that these general introductory remarks on the Deaf and signed languages have clarified the context, naming by the Deaf can be discussed.

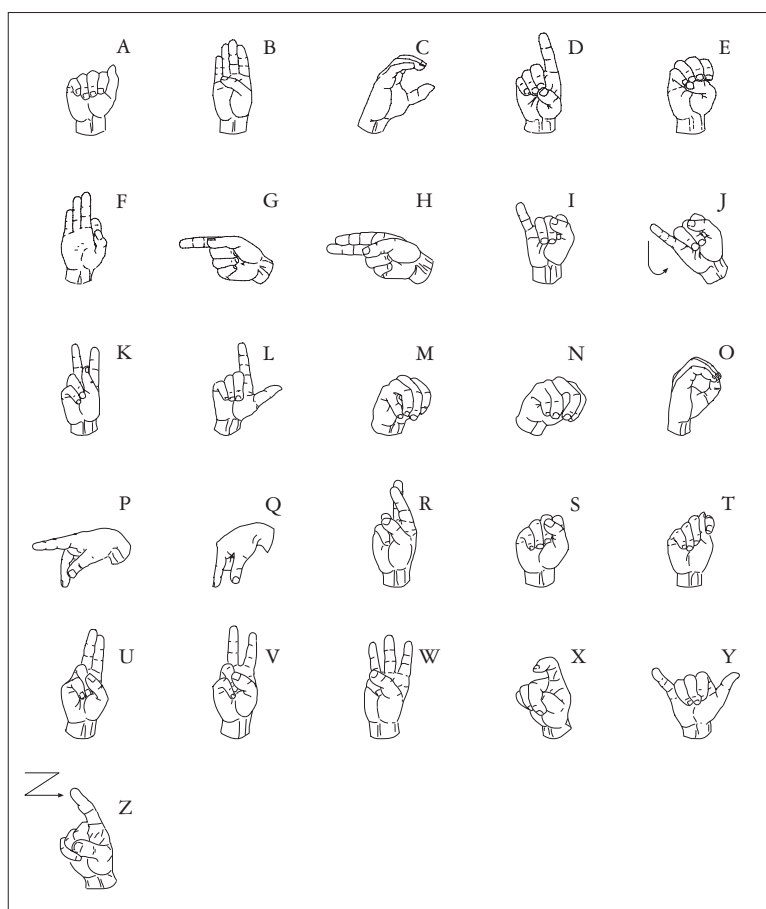## 6. Underlying reasons for naming in the Deaf community

In the analysis of the underlying reasons for naming in the Deaf community, we will focus on two communities — the South African and the Kenyan Deaf communities. Data for the South African Deaf community is based on the knowledge and experience of one of the authors, who worked with the Deaf Federation of South Africa (DEAFSA) as Director: Sign Language and Interpreter Development from 1996 to 1998, and also on information gathered from interviewing former students of the two schools for the Deaf in the Free State Province, Bartimea and Thibiloha, situated in Thaba Nchu and Qwaqwa respectively. The Kenyan data is taken from a survey carried out in 1993-94 to determine the extent of any changes in Sign Language in Kenya, especially since the opening of the first school in 1958.

Since nine out of ten members of the deaf population are from a hearing household, as pointed out earlier, a child would have been

Figure 1: Handforms (HF)

B HF	A HF S HF
O HF F HF INDEX HF V HF	
I HF C HF H HF L HF	
R HF X HF Middle Finger HF	

The most natural, basic and easy-to-make (unmarked) handshapes are:

The harder to make handshapes called marked handshapes are:

Figure 2: Fingerspelling hand configurations

named in accordance with the tradition of the tribe, language community and/or nation. Normally an infant would not be known to be deaf until the age when it would be expected to start talking. Since no studies have been carried out on the one out of ten deaf offspring of deaf parents, statistically or otherwise, findings from elsewhere will be considered in order to discern how naming takes place. Our presumption is that, in South Africa and Kenya, the Deaf would be part of the larger (hearing) family and would therefore have been named. Since they cannot hear their names being called, it is an open question whether they know that they have names. Some of the Deaf do not even attend school to learn how to read, and by extension, to read their names — if they did, someone would probably explain the meaning of their names to them. It is a silent world. This may be the reason why they "name", or "rename" one another when they congregate in their geographical nucleus, the residential school. They probably do so because when they come to school they do not even know that they have names. When they learn that they have a name, or names, and come to know the meaning thereof, do they then "rename" themselves in due course, so as to reflect the meaning of those hitherto unknown names?

7. Underlying reasons for naming in hearing communities in Africa

In any given linguistic community in Africa, there are underlying reasons for personal names and place names. Koopman (1989) has provided a number of reasons for personal names in the Zulu community, and grouped these into categories:

- names referring to the structure of the family;
- names referring to the role of God in the birth;
- names referring to the perceived relationship between the parent and the child;
- names referring to the circumstances of the parents, and
- names referring to the clan at large.

In the Sesotho and Xhosa contexts, Thipa (1987) has categorised the underlying meaning into two main categories — its role in the

naming of children, and in the naming of adults. In the case of children, names related to a belief in and response to the supernatural, rocking the boat, and great expectations. For adults, names could indicate: the status of parenthood, compliance with circumcision, and a trader's name.

From the meanings categorised above, it is quite clear that personal names have meaning. Raper (1987: 78) talks of "lexical" meaning. He says that a proper name, like any other linguistic sign, consists of a sound sequence, which may be represented graphemically, and a "sense" or "meaning". This may be misleading: meaning is attached only to proper names referring to human beings. Many place-names also have meaning attached to them (Jenkins 1992: 22-32). Sales (1991: 17) has studied the origins of country names in Africa and notes that there are two main aspects in this regard: indigenous and exogenous.

For the sake of comparison, the Luo, one of the five (of forty-seven) major language communities (or tribes, as they are called) in Kenya, have numerous reasons for naming people. Although there is no evidence from any studies in this region, one of the authors is a member of this particular tribe. In his personal knowledge, people are named according to the following aspects:

- the time of the day, for instance *Omondi* ("born at dawn"), like the author;

- the place where the person was born, for instance *Oyoo/Ayoo* ("born on the path side");

- a catastrophe, for instance *Okech/Akech* ("born during hunger");

- the season of birth, for instance *Ooro* ("dry season" — there are only two seasons);

- the ancestors — many Luo children are named after dead relatives who are believed to appear in a dream to the couple during pregnancy, or to a living relative, who then delivers the message;

- the death of previous children — if a couple's previous child or children did not survive, a subsequent surviving child receives a special name;

- being twins, for instance *Apiyo/Opiyo* or *Adongo/Odongo* (the first and the last to be born, respectively);
- the weather conditions, for instance *Okoth/Akoth*, *Ochieng/Achieng* ("rainy" or "sunny", respectively), and
- animals, wild or domesticated, for instance *Ondiek* ("hyena"), *Kwach* ("leopard"), *Liech* ("elephant"), *Rombo* ("sheep"), or *Jowi* ("buffalo").

In Luo, most names begin with an *o* or *a*, the former denoting male, and the latter female. There are exceptions to the rule, as may be seen for example in the author's surname, Akach.

As is pointed out by Rosenthal (1965), Combrink (1974), Heese *et al* (1975) and De Stadler (1987), vestiges of the same principle are found in Germanic languages where surnames could refer to:

- the father's name: *-son* in English: *Johnson*; *-zoon* in Dutch: *Janszoon*, *Jansen*; *Mc-* in Scottish: *McDonald*;
- a place: *Van der Merwe*, *Van Rhyn*;
- an occupation: *Tailor*, *Koopman*, and
- characteristics of a person: *Brown*, *De Bruyn*.

In the next section it will be ascertained whether the naming process of hearing communities affects or influences naming in the Deaf community.

8. The process of naming in the Deaf community

Although sign language linguistics and culture have received great attention since 1960, there have been no protracted studies focusing on naming (onomastics) in the Deaf community. According to Sutton-Spence & Woll (1999: 234) there has been no published research on personal name signs in BSL. Available literature focuses on ASL, one of the most studied signed languages of the world. These studies show that there are only two classes of name signs (Supalla 1992, Mindess 1990): a purely descriptive class, which according to Supalla (1992) is less common, and another class including names that incorporate handforms (shapes) from the manual alphabet.

From our observations and survey, it appears that in South Africa and Kenya, unlike Supalla's (1992) conclusion, the descriptive class is more common. Both classes admittedly incorporate the handshape, but not specifically with recourse to the manual alphabet. Supalla, himself born deaf in a Deaf family, tells a story concerning his own name sign. His family adopted the tradition of placing the incorporated handshape on the chin. When he was born his father named him Samuel. Initialising his name, the manual alphabet letter *s* was to be placed on the chin. His brother, Steve, with the same initial, however, had already taken the appropriate place on the chin. The family was in a quandary. His other brother Ted arrived home for the holidays from the Washington School for the Deaf to solve the family's dilemma. He gave his brother an alternative name sign: an *s* that moved from one side of the chin to the other. The name sign encompasses information about him, his family, his language and his culture, and all of this information is encoded (Lane *et al* 1996: 76).

Other examples of name-giving are mentioned by Lane *et al* (1996), such as locker numbers as name signs at the New York School for the Deaf. Similarly, Deaf children in residential schools in France used registration numbers as name signs (Lane *et al* 1996). Far from depersonalising Deaf children in residential schools and/or being regarded as pejorative, such name signs identified them as having attended residential schools and as authentic members of the Deaf community.

Unlike Supalla, who was born to a Deaf family and was therefore given a name sign at birth, the majority of Deaf children arrive at a residential school without a "sign name" because they are from hearing families. As their mastery of a signed language increases and their acculturation progresses, they are given a name sign. Receiving a name sign is therefore a rite of passage into the Deaf world. Normally the responsibility for name-giving is left to older classmates, especially when they are from Deaf families.

Hearing people who learn a signed language and interact with the Deaf community are also given sign names. Even teachers who do not sign at all are secretly given (mostly derogatory) name signs for reference. One of the authors had two secret (derogatory) name signs from two different schools for the Deaf in Kenya where he was a teacher

before he learnt to sign. The first name sign, as he found out much later when he could sign, meant policeman, because of his tendency to walk about like a policeman, finding wrongdoers and punishing them. The second name sign was produced by two flat B handshapes coming together, making the clapping (applause) sound. Whenever he walked into the classroom the pupils would "clap". Therefore, he thought he was a wonderful teacher, always applauded for entering the classroom. He only discovered later that the two flat B handshapes represented the upper and lower jaw coming together, imitating speech (hence the clapping sound) — meaning that he talked too much and that the pupils understood next to nothing of what he said!

The discussion which follows develops the two classes of name signs proposed by Supalla (1992), namely purely descriptive signs and those with handform incorporation. Under the purely descriptive class, subclasses are added which, on close examination, take on the characteristics of separate classes:

8.1 Descriptive class

This class is broad in scope and includes descriptions of all the physical features one may possess, for instance the length of one's arms, the size of one's stomach, the shape and size of one's nose, eyes, ears, head, legs or fingers. This class also includes behaviour and/or mannerisms, for instance the way one walks or how one habitually touches one's nose, eyes, face, head or hair; the movement of one's jaws, the twitching of one's eyelids, or how one talks. Also included in this class is the aspect of dress, for instance the kind of clothing one habitually wears or any striking apparel worn on the first encounter with the Deaf person, for instance spectacles, earrings, nose studs/rings, or a hat. It is pertinent to mention that the name signs in this category develop to become symbols. Even when one is no longer wearing spectacles, earrings, or nose studs/rings, for instance, the name sign will persist. A hearing person so named might think the name sign was derogatory, but not the Deaf. The more one insists on a change of name, the more the original name persists. It may be ostensibly changed to accommodate the named person, but inherently the name will still portray the features focused on, thereby becoming a secret, humorous name sign. One cultural aspect of the Deaf com-

munity is the frankness of its talk, which normally takes hearing people by surprise when they first interact with the Deaf (Lane *et al* 1996).

Some examples of the various subclasses are supplied in the following paragraphs.

8.1.1 Physical features

Akach (long arms), *Nico* (gap between the lower front teeth), *Emily* (flat forehead), *Francis* (a limp from a physical disability), *Pumizile* (blue eyes), *Ouma* (blue eyes), *Sumi* (small nose), *Fanie* (the beard), *Johan* (long face), *Trevor* (bump on the right side of the forehead), *Washington* (tongue pushing on the cheeks), *Michelle* (smiling face), *Annelie* (tall), *Christie* (protruding upper teeth), *Wango* (drooping head).

8.1.2 Behaviour/mannerisms

This subclass is less common: *Onyango* (always drunk), *Natalie* (sways from side to side when walking), *Robert* (twitching eyelids), *Oguda* (trembling lower jaw), *Nyaki* (pulls the ear lobe downward), *Pamela* (squints eyes), *Theo* (pony tail hairstyle), *Marelize* (curious).

8.1.3 Dress code/style

Thapi (chain of earrings), *René* (nose studs), *Mattie* (spectacles), *Suzette* (necklace with stars), *Hunter* (broad tie), *Makokungu* (narrow tie), *Bonga* (spectacles), *Oscar* (polo neck), *Bro Wekesa* (brother's robe), *Sister* (Roman Catholic, the veil), *Sr Chemba* (spectacles as well as veil), *Komora* (arms akimbo).

8.1.4 Associative

In this sub-class the associations take various forms. In some instances people's names are associated with the names of the places they come from, or *vice versa*. In others a person/child may share certain features with a known person. The most common instance is when a hearing person explains the meaning of his or her name as given at birth and the Deaf person immediately provides the direct translation of the name in sign language. Sometimes when the name of a new person is fingerspelled, it will resemble the name of a known person and the new person will be named after that person.

8.1.5 Name of person given to a place, and vice versa

When the Kenya National Association of the Deaf (KNAD) was established in 1986, its office became known as the Uldis Ozolins — *uldis* — KNAD office. For a while the name was confusing but as time went by people became accustomed to it. Now *uldis* is no longer used, but the KNAD office has retained the name sign. Other examples include *Abdi* ("blinking eyes"), which has the same sign as the sign *Mombasa*, a city in Kenya where Abdi lived, and which was sign-named after him.

8.1.6 Direct translation

Here the meaning of a name in the hearing culture is translated directly, for instance *De Beer*, which is signed as equivalent to BEER; *Okoth*, a Luo name that means "rain", is signed as RAIN. *Manie*, an Afrikaans name, does not mean "money" in English, but if the way it sounds is explained, the sign meaning MONEY is used. *Rhyno* is expressed as RHINO, as in *rhinoceros*. In Luo, *Owinyo* ("bird"), *Kwach* ("leopard"), *Ondiek* ("hyena"), and *Ooro* ("dry") were given equivalents in Kenyan Sign Language.

8.1.7 Name transfer

Names that are the same as other people's names, for instance *Susan*, are transferred directly from a person already known in the Deaf community. The name of a person who has a name sign already meaning "rain" (*okoth*) is spelt in a manner that is concordant with the name sign.

8.1.8 Same physical features

Such features occur, for example, in people with a flat face (which could be a genetic trait), as reflected in the name *Mbambo*, for instance. So, too, with regard to the Waardenburg syndrome (blue eyes, white forelock), people with these features (who are mostly deaf) are often given the same sign names.

8.1.9 Numbers

These include locker, registration and bed numbers in residential schools. Among South African adults and children, mostly pupils or

former pupils of the Bartimea and Thibiloha schools, this naming process did not occur. In Kenya, however, it was common, especially at the first-ever school for the Deaf, Nyang'oma, situated in the west. Some of the name signs incorporating numbers comprised names in themselves, while others did not. In the latter case, the numbers were used to augment, or with, name signs that were similar, in order to differentiate between them, for instance *Okoth* 7 ("rain"), *Ouma* 9 ("blue eyes"), *Juma* 11 ("flat face"), *Ochieng* 100 (associative).

8.1.10 Humour

Lane *et al* (1966) cite the naming of Richard Nixon as an example of humour in sign language. Because of his involvement in the Watergate scandal which was based on lies, Nixon's sign name was coined from LIE — produced by a curved *B* hand form sliding from the right to the left below the lower lips. The handform was changed to *N* (initialising *Nixon*) and the rest remained the same. This then meant "Nixon the liar".

In a recent sign language class at the University of the Free State, the lecturer and the students were talking about the residential areas of Bloemfontein. One student was asked (in sign language): "Where does Mr Akach live?" The student, in a thinking posture, placed her "fist" (*S* hand form) on her nose, facing outward, and the lecturer shouted: "He lives in a pig?!" She had just unwittingly produced the PIG "sign". Bayswater, the suburb where the lecturer resides, is now known as PIG as a result of that humorous episode.

8.1.11 Occupation/trade

Being named after one's occupation is not common in South Africa or Kenya. If this method is used, however, it works similarly to the numbering. Thus, occupation helps to differentiate between two persons sharing the same sign name for reasons as described above. In South Africa and Kenya, few Deaf learners graduate to high school. This is attributed to the fact that Deaf learners are forced both to speak and lip-read at the expense of the acquisition of knowledge. In most cases they end up taking manual vocational courses after primary school, not out of choice, but due to their lack of the knowledge required to proceed to high school and beyond. These courses include tailoring,

knitting, typing and farming. One therefore finds names such as *Ouma* (blue eyes, the tailor), *Okoth* (rain, typist), *Nyaki* (associative, the barber). As has been indicated, this is not very common.

The survey conducted in Kenya (Akach 1993) showed that 93% of the names identified were descriptive, while the origins of the rest were unknown, either because they were foreign or because they had been given for reasons which the respondents did not wish to disclose. Some names were initialised, *ie* based on the first letter of the oral name. These were mostly name signs belonging to people who had been abroad, mostly to the USA, and who had attended Gallaudet University. The practice of initialization will be discussed below.

8.2 The handshape incorporation class

According to Supalla (1992), this is the most common naming process in ASL. Its designation should be modified to refer to "alphabet" handshapes, since all sign names incorporate or need a handshape in their production. The twenty-six handshapes/handforms used to configurate the alphabet are part and parcel of the encompassing body of the acceptable handforms of any given sign language community. All of them assume their alphabetical name, for instance the *B*, *S*, *G*, *T* handshape. This reference is used irrespective of whether the sign produced has the letter used in its written form initially, medially or finally. For instance *Susan* (associative) is produced with a *B* handform placed on the neck just below the ear. There is no letter *B* in the sound sequence *s-u-s-a-n*. Our hypothesis is that the Deaf community, as long as they are congregated at a place, will name each other without recourse to the written name. They do not have to have the knowledge of the written word or of the alphabet.

The evidence presented here suggests that the descriptive class of naming is the most widely used. More research is required in this area, especially with regard to Deaf families. In one case, the Deaf parents of a Deaf child were interviewed and all three had different descriptive name signs. The father had blue eyes (which his sign reflected); the mother's sign reflected her high forehead, while the daughter's described her longish chin: a *C* handform on the chin. In another family the father is hearing but the mother is deaf, as are the

three daughters and a granddaughter. All of them possess descriptive sign names.

It should be borne in mind that the Deaf in Africa who were fortunate enough to make it to school were subjected to oralism, while those who did not were forbidden to sign. Most families hid their deaf members to avoid being ostracised by the community, or because of a sense of shame at having a handicapped child. In the last forty years, global awareness has been created for Sign Language, but in Africa this awareness has only been fostered in the last ten to fifteen years. At this moment there are still schools in Africa, more especially in South Africa and Kenya, which forbid children to sign; such schools have the support of parents in this regard. So, too, marriage between deaf people was forbidden in order to avoid more deaf children being born. Ironically, however, 90% of deaf children are born into the hearing community.

By contrast, in the USA, where sign language has been used for the last two hundred years, such inhibitions are not common. There are Deaf families of many generations' standing, like Supalla's family. Although there was an attempt to ban Sign Language from the face of the earth by the Milan Declaration of 1880, the Deaf community in the USA was not deterred from using ASL. Some schools still advocate oralism, but the general support for ASL outweighs the support for oralism. The recent motion in favour of a "Deaf president" at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, the only liberal university for the Deaf in the world, is an indicator of this fact. "Deaf Power" there is so strong that it is slowly but surely influencing other countries.

Examples from Kenya and South Africa of name signs that incorporate the alphabet handshapes are provided by Deaf people who have studied at Gallaudet University. They go there with a descriptive name sign and come back with the same descriptive name sign — but with the difference that it has been initialised. Some change their names altogether. We have *H* on the cheek, *N* on the side of the right eye (formerly the name sign for spectacles), *E* on the shoulder, and so forth. Some of these former students have influenced others, who have never been to the US, but have initialized their descriptive "name signs". This was highly evident at the Machakos school for the Deaf in Kenya. Machakos was the first school officially to practise the

sole use of Sign Language. This was not entirely true in practice, as teachers were trained to speak and sign at the same time. Some of the teachers were Deaf people who themselves had studied at Gallaudet. All teachers and learners had their names initialised. When the school opened its doors in 1986, the first group of learners was selected from the existing thirty-six oral schools on the basis of their inability to cope with the oral system and their need to be instructed in sign language. Thus they were already in possession of sign names when they came to the school, as were the teachers from oral schools. One of the authors of this paper was one of the selected teachers.

Naming by alphabet handshape incorporation may develop as signed languages become more widely used, but at the moment descriptive name signs are more evident. A Deaf person recently employed by the Unit for Language Facilitation and Empowerment at the University of the Free State named all the staff members of the Unit who were not already named. None of these names incorporates the alphabet handshape, except by sheer coincidence. Coming from a Deaf family herself, she may be considered an expert in the naming process.

9. Conclusion

As must be evident from the foregoing discussion, there are similarities and differences between spoken languages and signed languages in terms of the naming process. The most striking difference is that of modality. There are many more differences between the underlying reasons for naming than there are similarities. The co-existence of the Deaf in the wider hearing world makes them by nature bicultural and bilingual. A Deaf member of a hearing family has two underlying reasons for his/her name: one originating from the hearing family and the other from the Deaf community. The reasons for the given name may possibly coincide in terms of being descriptive, but different things would be described in each case. The hearing, or those who become deaf at a later age, are generally likely to be given an associative name sign linked to the meaning of their written given name.

Unlike names used in spoken languages, personal names are not used in signed languages to address a person, but only to refer to him

or her. In the Deaf community one does not attract a person's attention by using his/her name but rather, for instance, by waving at the person, by tapping his/her shoulder, or by means of some other culturally approved action.

In contrast to spoken languages, where every member of a community has a personal name, in signed languages personal names are not essential. Many Deaf people from hearing families who do not mix regularly with other Deaf persons do not have personal name signs. Except for some famous people, for instance politicians and historical figures, few hearing people have personal name signs.

Personal name signs can also change several times during a Deaf person's life, as was shown earlier with regard to the different name signs of Mr Akach. Although hearing people can change their names by deed poll, it is unusual for them to do so, and most hearing people keep their names all their lives.

Furthermore, personal name signs are not used in all situations. This may be due to several factors. It may be that the conversational partner knows only the spoken name, and not the personal name sign.

Surnames are not as important to Deaf communities as they usually are to hearing communities. One can know a person's spoken first name and his/her personal name sign, without knowing the surname.

For official purposes, however, full names are written in documents such as application forms, and used in official introductions at formal functions.

In summary, naming in the Deaf community is a basic fundamental requirement for human functioning, just as it is in any other given community.

Naamgewing van eiename in gesproke taal en gebaretaal — 'n vergelyking

Wat die naamgewing van eiename in gesproke taal betref, is heelwat navorsing gedoen, maar dieselfde tema in gebaretaal is nog relatief min nagevors en oor Suid-Afrikaanse Gebaretaal is hoegenaamd geen navorsing gedoen nie. Aan die hand van taaldata van twee dowe gemeenskappe, een in Suid-Afrika en een in Kenia, word die beginsels wat 'n rol speel by naamgewing van eiename ondersoek en die ooreenkomste en verskille met gebruike by naamgewing van eiename in gesproke taal aangetoon. Uit die voorbeelde blyk dit dat die volgende beskrywende beginsels by naamgewing 'n rol speel: fisiese kenmerke van die benoemde, gedrag en bepaalde mannerismes van die benoemde, assosiasies wat deur die benoemde opgeroep word, nommers, bv. registrasienommer waarmee die benoemde geassosieer word, 'n humoristiese gebeurtenis waarby die benoemde betrokke was, beroep van die benoemde, karakteristieke kleredrag, pleknaam aan die benoemde gegee en vice versa, vertaling van die betekenis van 'n geskrewe naam en naamoordrag. Behalwe die beskrywende beginsels wat 'n rol speel by naamgewing, is die inkorporering van die handvorm van die alfabetiese letters 'n tweede belangrike beginsel. Omdat die kultuur van die dowe en die beginsels van gebaretaal vir die gemiddelde naamkundeleser redelik onbekend is, word ten aanvang 'n oorsig van die dowe gemeenskap en van die artikulatoriese parameters van gebaretaal gegee.

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