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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DEAF AND HEARING STUDENTS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the way hearing and Deaf students communicate and develop working and social relationships at the University of the Free State. Centred on the cultural identities of the Deaf subculture and the hearing culture, the authors explore how these two groups interact and how they perceive each other in the context of intercultural communication. The study was able to reach saturation with a total number of eleven participants from the Deaf (n=3) and hearing (n=9) culture. The findings revealed that Deaf students at the University interact with hearing students mostly in class and on-campus residences. Beyond those limited spaces, Deaf students remain isolated from the rest of the university population. The findings also suggest that language is one of the biggest barriers to achieving effective intercultural communication.

Keywords: intercultural communication; Deaf culture; cultural identities; South African Sign Language; subculture

INTRODUCTION

Ours is a shrinking world where people from different countries or regions share products, world views and ideas, and frequently cross international borders to work, study or travel (Dong *et al*. 2008: 29). In a multicultural society such as South Africa, people are often exposed to various cultures from within the country itself as well as from around Africa, Europe, Asia and beyond. Moreover, communication technologies have also made it easier for individuals to socialise with people from other countries and cultures. For these reasons, intercultural communication skills play an important role in our society.

Intercultural communication "involves interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbols' system differ enough to influence the communication event" (Samovar *et al*. 2013). As this definition suggests, culture influences the rules we use to communicate and the way we

interpret words, gestures and situations (Zhijing 2009: 6). Therefore, we can conclude that each cultural group perceives reality differently.

A person usually belongs to more than one cultural group (Scollen & Scollen 2001: 170). For example, the participants of this study are from different religions, races and ethnicities; they also speak different languages and have different cultural and geographical backgrounds. Each of those differences creates a potential cultural grouping that can bring people together or separate them.

Where there is a dominant culture there will likely be subcultures. Corte (2012: 56) says, "A subculture is an aggregate of individuals who have a similar style, values and taste". Typically, when we think of people from different cultures, we think of people from different races, ideologies, affiliations, regions or countries. This is not accurate. For instance, this study's participants included hearing and Deaf students. From an intercultural communication perspective, the hearing students would be considered members of a dominant culture while the Deaf students would be considered as members of a subculture (Sun 2013: 75).

The significant difference between the hearing and the Deaf culture is that the hearing culture uses spoken language, which is auditory and linear in nature (McGuire 1992: 34). People belonging to this culture are considered as having hearing-centred identities (Overstreet 1999: 6). On the other hand, the Deaf culture in South Africa uses South African Sign Language, which involves facial gestures, and various body and hand movements. The speakers involved in the interaction also use the area around them to express meaning (University of the Witwatersrand 2018). Grushkin (2017: 508) also says that signing "may appear to be occurring in time and space, with multiple syntactic and semantic elements embedded within the movements and facial/body grammar". These differences in language highlight some of the key differences between the hearing culture and the Deaf subculture.

This study set out to investigate the way hearing and Deaf students communicate and develop working and social relationships at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Centred on the cultural identities of the Deaf subculture and the hearing culture, the study specifically explored how these two groups interact and how they perceive each other in the context of intercultural communication. The ultimate goal of the study was to suggest strategies that might assist in improving the quality of intercultural communication between these two communities. For the purpose of this study, the use of the word "Deaf" refers to hearing loss that prevents the receiver of a message from hearing or understanding speech or sounds (Farmer *et al*. 2006: 119-122).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretically, the study was guided by the identity negotiation theory, which explains how one's identity is negotiated, co-created, reinforced and challenged in an intercultural communication context (Tu 2005: 36). According to Ting-Toomey (2015: 1), "The term negotiation in the identity negotiation theory refers to the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between the two or more communicators in maintaining,

threatening, or uplifting the various socio-cultural group-based or unique personal-based identity images of the other".

When people are involved in intercultural communication, they find themselves in an unfamiliar space. It may be that the language is unfamiliar or the social norms and the value systems are foreign. Ting-Toomey (2015: 5) emphasises how individuals experience "identity emotional security in a culturally familiar environment and identity emotional vulnerability in a culturally unfamiliar environment".

Moreover, when individuals from different cultures communicate they create a new culture within which both individuals negotiate their identities in order to fit in (Tu 2005: 37). The third culture, according to McGuire (1992: 16), "forms a bridge between the different cultures". Useem and Useem (1967) define the third culture as "cultural patterns created, learned and shared by the members of different societies who are personally involved in relating their societies, or sections to each other". The third culture acts as a bridge that assists individuals to adapt their own culture and enables interaction with the other culture (Lyttle 2009: 60).

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Intercultural communication involves the coming together of people who are culturally different and how they deal with their differences while attempting to communicate (Sun 2013: 75). Although there are many factors that mark cultures as different, scholars such as Oommen (2013), San Antonio and Ofori-Dwumfuo (2015), Stewart and Wright (2015), Chang *et al*. (2016), Mulaudzi (2006) and Ballard (2014) have focused on religion, cross-cultural communication, identity and language.

Religion is a form of social identity. However, for many people it constitutes a culture as it provides its faithful with a set of values, beliefs and guidelines on ways of behaving that are acceptable or unacceptable (Samovar *et al*. 2013: 57). A study by Oommen (2013) found that having a strong religious identity could negatively affect a person involved in intercultural communication. This is because intercultural communication is in essence about the unfamiliarity and dissimilarity between people and how they navigate these differences to communicate (Gudykunst 1995). A message that goes against a person's beliefs affects a person's mental wellbeing and their ability to communicate successfully during an intercultural interaction (Oommen 2013: 119).

In a university setting, being able to communicate with people from different cultures is a key skill. A study by San Antonio and Ofori-Dwumfuo (2015) found that one of the biggest communication challenges affecting domestic and international living-learning students at an American university was a lack of cultural understanding. The findings of the study suggested that the difficulties to communicate among students was a result of cultural differences, cognitive development, cultural maturity and self-perception (San Antonio & Ofori-Dwumfuo 2015: 135-136). Senyshyn and Chamberlin-Quinlisk (2009) and Stewart and Wright (2014) further explored the intercultural communication interactions of tertiary students. In their study, Senyshyn and Chamberlin-Quinlisk (2009) found that students experienced nervousness and anxiety before interacting with students from another culture. Because of their interactions, many of the students

experienced behavioural changes, such as becoming better listeners, gaining in self-confidence and becoming more comfortable in openly expressing their opinions. The findings of the study indicated that because of the intercultural interactions, students gained knowledge about themselves, the communities they belonged to, and the world (Senyshyn & Chamberlin-Quinlisk 2009: 171-175).

In a study involving Japanese and Malaysian students, Stewart and Wright (2015: 67) found that "exchanges between students from the two different cultures improved their knowledge about each other's culture". Another important dimension of this study was whether or not students were knowledgeable about the other culture. The study found that students' lack of cultural knowledge led to miscommunication (Stewart & Wright 2015: 68).

When speaking about culture one cannot ignore identity. Some studies on interracial adoptions highlight identity, culture and communication as themes. In one such study, Chang *et al.* (2016) looked at Chinese adoptees' cross-cultural adaptation and identity formation. While adapting to a new culture, transracial adoptees went through a three-stage process characterised by acceptance of the cultural, racial and historical differences between them and their adoptive parents; prejudice from the society which they lived in because of their physical differences; and the uncertainty of meeting their birth parents and how that could affect their identity (Chang *et al.* 2016: 4). Focusing on the adoptive families, the findings of the study showed that the adoptees' identity was built by their interaction with their birth and adoptive families. Because of their physical differences, adoptees were usually viewed as outsiders in the communities where they lived. This usually motivated them to connect with their birth culture. The study found that upon reuniting with their birth parents, adoptees had trouble with regard to language and cultural norms (Chang *et al.* 2016: 3-7).

Of all the factors impacting intercultural communications, Mulaudzi (2006) and Banytė and Inčiūrienė (2012) highlight language as the most obvious difference between cultures. Grammar can also be a differentiator in language (Banytė & Inčiūrienė 2012: 180-181). The results of a study done in Lithuania indicated that the majority of respondents thought that learning the country's language could improve intercultural communication and contribute to learning more about the country's culture (Banytė & Inčiūrienė 2012: 183).

In more intimate relationships the question of language and how it affects communication is even more critical. Ballard (2014) found that Deaf-hearing couples needed to be aware of their communication issues because a high percentage of these marriages failed (Ballard 2014: 7-8). However, another scholar who also studied the dynamics of Deaf-hearing and Deaf-Deaf couples had a different take on intercultural couples. Measuring subjective levels of marital adjustment, Renalds' (2011) study on intercultural marriages found that one of the major challenges in these relationships was language fluency. The participants of the study were in agreement that understanding their partner's language was very important for the survival of the marriage (Renalds 2011: 74-75).

Ultimately, language is a product of a specific culture and for that reason it can be the cause of miscommunication between people from different cultures

(Mulaudzi 2006: 220-221) regardless of the relationship that binds them. This is why language plays an important role during intercultural communication. As little research has been done on the dynamics of Deaf-hearing non-romantic relationships, this study focused on the social and work-oriented interactions between Deaf and hearing students in a tertiary education setting in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study and it made use of in-depth interviews for data collection. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used to select the participants. The sample population of the study was made up of three Deaf students, from a total number of nine Deaf students, who attended the University of the Free State.

For each Deaf student, three hearing students were purposively identified and interviewed. This number was chosen to ensure that the researcher could reach saturation point and because in real terms, hearing students vastly outnumbered Deaf ones at the University.

The researchers obtained clearance from the University's Ethics Committee to interview the participants (ethics clearance number UFS-HSD2017/0581). A thematic analysis was the method chosen to analyse the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the daily intercultural interactions between Deaf and hearing students and how they perceived each other. The ultimate goal was to find strategies that could assist students during these interactions.

Ten of the participants were from the Faculty of Humanities, one was from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences and the final student was from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Science. Seven hearing students were in their final year of study, two hearing and one Deaf student were completing their postgraduate studies, and two of the Deaf students were in their first year. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 24, and of the eleven participants two were male and nine were female. Seven of the nine hearing participants have some ability to sign. All nine Deaf students registered at the University were approached to participate in the study, but six declined. In this study, the hearing students are referred to as HS, hearing students who have a basic understanding of sign language are referred to as HSS, and Deaf students are referred to as DS.

The researchers were able to identify five themes arising from the interviews. They were learning and understanding language as an important element in sustaining social and working relationships; the use of technology when communicating with the Deaf; perception as a barrier between Deaf and hearing students; the isolation of the Deaf community on campus; and culture as the underlying factor during Deaf-hearing interaction on campus.

Learning and understanding language as an important element in sustaining social and working relationships

South African Sign Language (SASL) is one of South Africa's official languages. Being a multicultural society, one can assume that most South Africans understand the importance of language in the South African context. For instance, some of the participants were keenly aware that most hearing people are ignorant about SASL. In this study, participants from both communities felt that exposing hearing students to sign language was a means to bridge the gap between hearing and Deaf students.

> "We need to spend more time together, socialise more, learn more signs, 'cause [sic] if I were to teach them signs and we are not together a lot, then they will forget. But if we are together more then it will be easier." – DS1

> "It's possible to start with just meeting and writing and realising that a person is Deaf and then [they] realis[e] that they might want to learn sign language. [Because] we have many sign language classes, they can be involved in any of those…" – DS2

Hearing student nine (HS9) felt that it was the responsibility of the hearing students to learn SASL because the hearing culture is the dominant culture.

> "[Learning sign language] actually accommodates the Deaf more and in a sense you get to understand or you get to gain much more insight into their perception and how one communicates in terms of the Deaf culture." – HSS9

Six of the hearing students who had taken SASL classes felt that learning the dialects of sign language was important in improving communication with their Deaf friends and classmates.

> "I think the main thing is getting to learn the different dialects of sign language because there are dialects that we use in Bloemfontein that's [sic] different from what we would use in Johannesburg or Durban. So it's really important to know your different dialects… And also new signs; you need to be in touch with the Deaf community. For example, three years ago selfie was not a sign; now it's a sign. So as technology improves… new signs are invented…" – HSS2

Hearing students suggested that nonverbal communication could also be perceived as noise in the Deaf culture. The quotes below illustrate how the body, clothing and attention to physical and spatial attributes in the environment can be a source of interference when conversing with a Deaf student.

> "It's very important when you are signing with a person, you should not have… jewellery, hand bands, rings, chains. Your makeup should be subtle, neutral makeup… [be]cause it's very distracting. So like instead of the Deaf person watching you they [are] gonna [sic] be watching your hair colour, your patterns… [That] mixes with your signs…" – HSS2

> "It's very important; it's actually the core of sign language. When you [are] talking to them [Deaf students] you have to maintain eye contact, 'cause [sic] if you look away it means you are angry … or something offended you…" – HSS3

The use of technology when communicating with the Deaf

Technological innovations such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger have contributed to facilitating communication among people around the world. The researchers found that some of the hearing participants made use of technology to communicate more effectively with their Deaf friends and classmates. Deaf students felt that technology could offer better communication opportunities. Deaf and hearing participants recognised this.

> "It actually helps; I think… it's important. It works for me because I don't know how I would do it… if WhatsApp was not there. They respond immediately. Thus far I have not encountered any problems when it comes to my messages with them like they are able to get what I am saying, respond back…" – HS1

> "At times you know, I don't have any basic way of really illustrating it, or for example she cannot read my lips, or I don't really know how to illustrate with my hands so WhatsApp does give me that option to… communicate." – HS8

> "There are many ways for us to communicate with the hearing world, there is [sic] videos, tablets, there is technology, there is [sic] lots of ways. We live in a technological world [and] there is [sic] lots of ways to communicate with the hearing world." – DS2

Perception as a barrier between Deaf and hearing

When people from two different cultures interact there are bound to be some communication difficulties. Often these difficulties arise because of our history and experiences. When dealing with communication you cannot ignore the influence of perception. This was evident from the participants' responses, which suggested that they had pre-existing assumptions about the other culture and their interest in connecting and interacting.

> "Most hearing people are not involved in the Deaf community and Deaf things, our socialisation. They don't even try to say hello, they just see she is Deaf [they don't bother it is just] bye. We will teach them signs, how to day hello, and then tomorrow they just forget." – DS2

> "I feel like they are an exclusive group and you have to really be part of, I don't know. It's an exclusive group and if they don't include you, you can't really say you are part of the Deaf community … But I don't feel like they accept me as part of their community since I dropped out [of the sign language class]." – HSS3

> "I think that people should move away from this notion that Deaf people are not intelligent. Deaf people are the same as you and me, it's just that they … use their hands to talk." – HSS6

> "Well because we as hearing people we will never understand their way of living, because you have to remember back in the olden days they were not as much [sic] job opportunities for them… there was oppression against them, they were separated from the normal hearing people." – HSS6

The isolation of the Deaf community on campus

Besides being culturally different, Deaf and hearing students occupy two distinct spaces on campus. Hearing students have access to a multitude of facilities across the University, while Deaf students have spaces specifically designated for their use, where they receive additional support so that they can succeed academically. The hearing participants discussed how laboratories that were meant to support Deaf students are actually a barrier to interacting with hearing students.

> "The majority of campus is hearing so they [Deaf students] don't have enough friends that they can participate [in regular activities] with… I don't feel there are enough people of their own on this campus… because we are hearing people and we do our own stuff." – HSS6

> "I want to make the Deaf people feel like they still part of the South African demographic, because not everything accommodates them…" – HSS3

> "Because now in our University they have their own unit; they either spend time at the unit or at the sign lab because that is where they are. But if a hearing student could just go to the sign lab that would be better… That in my opinion may not be helping in uniting students 'cause [sic] hearing students don't actually interact with Deaf students unless in class or at residences." – HSS5

Culture as the underlying factor during Deaf-hearing interactions on campus

The participants in the study were aware of their cultural differences. Hearing students understood that Deaf students belonged to a different culture and that the Deaf culture had its own language and ways of living. This is illustrated by the quotes below.

> "I feel like it's a culture clash… it's like with every different culture they have like their own rules, their own values, their own beliefs and I feel like we clash a lot because they are more direct, they are very direct." – HSS3

> "Because for you to be part of the Deaf culture you have to be Deaf or hard of hearing, but you can be a part of the Deaf community by speaking their language, but that is as far as it goes." – HSS5

> "Because we have a good relationship, it does not matter where we stay, where we live, there is a good relationship between Deaf people, worldwide." – DS2

DS2 further elaborated on how she belonged to more than one cultural group:

> "I have two cultures, I have the Deaf culture and also I have the Xhosa culture. My family is Xhosa so it's a little bit difficult for them to understand, so we use our home sign language. So sometimes it's confusing if both of my cultures mix. And also there is so many different cultures, my culture, [the] Deaf culture has a lot of elements, a lot of rules, a lot of concepts and the hearing people they have a lot of different cultures, their own jokes, their own ways of communicating." – DS2

DS2 was aware of the fact that while Deaf students constitute a strong culture, she still operates in the larger, dominant hearing culture:

> "When I came to the University nobody signed, but I … tried to adjust and to fit into the hearing world, because the world is big; it's not a Deaf world." – DS2

CONCLUSION

This study sought to understand the intercultural communication challenges between students from the Deaf subculture and those from the hearing culture. Specifically, the researchers sought to gain insight into the work and social interactions between members of the two communities and ultimately suggest possible strategies that could assist in improving the quality of their intercultural communication.

The interviews with the participants indicated that Deaf students at the University interacted with hearing students, mostly in class and during on-campus residence activities, but they did not take part in off-campus social or co-curricular activities that involved the rest of the student community. The reason for the Deaf students' lack of participation was that most hearing students do not know how to sign. Therefore, interactions between the two cultures would require an interpreter. The absence of an interpreter would leave Deaf students depending on lip-reading or mobile technologies, such as WhatsApp, or paper to communicate. This would put Deaf students in a vulnerable position in a cultural environment that is foreign to them. The most effective way to improve communication, therefore, would be for more hearing students to take a SASL class.

Interestingly, hearing students felt that it was difficult to become part of the Deaf community unless they were actively taking a SASL class. However, once the class was finished, the activities in which Deaf and hearing students could interact became extremely limited. Deaf students, on the other hand, felt that hearing students were scared of communicating with them because of the unfamiliar language.

As can be ascertained from the previous discussion, language proved to be the biggest barrier between Deaf and hearing students. Six of the hearing students who participated in the study were majoring in South African Sign Language as a subject. However, they also agreed that issues such as vocabulary acquisition and the various dialects often contributed to misunderstandings during communication between hearing and Deaf students.

The majority of the participants felt that hearing students should take the initiative to learn SASL. The University offers a year course for first year students that includes a unit in SASL; however, given the level of dexterity required to master SASL, this initiative is not likely to lead to greater communication effectiveness between hearing and Deaf students. Ultimately, most of the participants (hearing and Deaf) felt that the language barrier could be contributing to the isolation of Deaf students on campus.

Students from both the hearing and the Deaf culture felt that technology could be leveraged more to assist in bridging communication between the two communities. The hearing participants, especially those who could not sign or had limited sign dexterity, noted their appreciation of technologies in contributing to the formation of social relationships with their Deaf classmates.

The findings also revealed the isolation of Deaf students at the University. Hearing students felt that the physical separation of the two communities led to their inability to socialise with Deaf students on a regular basis. The Centre for Universal Access and

Disability Support (CUADS) at the University and the sign language laboratories were seen as facilities that, while important in supporting Deaf students, also hindered the opportunity for the hearing to interact with the Deaf because these facilities are only accessible to Deaf or SASL students.

The participants were aware of their cultural differences and the important role that culture played during their interactions. For example, some students were aware that communication difficulties were often a result of both language and culture differences. One of the Deaf participants (DS2) highlighted the importance of understanding the cultural differences that exist between Deaf and hearing students. The participant highlighted how she belonged to more than one cultural group and how this factor was sometimes challenging during communication because of the different rules that govern each culture.

The findings indicated that during communication between the Deaf and hearing students, identity negotiation did occur. According to Ting-Toomey (2015: 1), "The term negotiation in the identity negotiation theory refers to the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between the two or more communicators in maintaining, threatening, or uplifting the various socio-cultural group-based or unique personal-based identity images of the other". In this study it was evident that participants were aware of their cultural group membership. They understood that they belonged to either the Deaf or the hearing community and when referring to the other group they would often say "they". The participants were also aware of the culture the Deaf belonged to. This is evident in a response by a hearing participant (HS4), "It's like with every different culture, they [Deaf students] have like their own rules, their own values, their own beliefs…".

Ting-Toomey (2015: 5) also states, "Individuals tend to experience identity emotional security in a culturally familiar environment". This was evident as some of the Deaf respondents indicated that they preferred the company of people from their own culture. DS2 stated, "[b]ecause we have a good relationship, it does not matter where we stay, where we live, there is a good relationship between Deaf people, worldwide". HS3, on the other hand, opined that the cultural differences were too much for her, that "I feel like it's a culture clash. We… it's like with every different culture they have like their own rules, their own values, their own beliefs and I feel like we clash a lot because they are more direct, they are very direct. I don't know if there is a term for what they are, it's overly direct…". This response showed the student's discomfort with the uncertainty she faced when communicating with Deaf classmates.

It is important to note that Deaf students on campus preferred to use the facilities at CUADS or the sign language laboratories, which were viewed by many of the hearing participants as a factor that contributed to the Deaf students' isolation. The fact that most of the Deaf students on campus prefer to spend time in these segregated spaces, rather than accessing facilities open to all students, suggests they feel more comfortable with members of their own culture. This is supported by Ting-Toomey's (2015) work, which indicates that people tend to be more comfortable in environments that are culturally familiar and that they may feel vulnerable in unfamiliar cultural spaces (Ting-Toomey 2015: 5). In essence, we communicate with the desire to form meaningful relationships, and these relationships are usually formed with people who

belong to, or understand, our culture (*ibid*.). This was evident in this study, especially from the Deaf participants' perspective. The Deaf students were isolated from the rest of the student population and did not really perceive the hearing students as their friends. This could be because of the unfamiliar cultural space they find themselves in during classes or when working on class projects.

As discussed earlier, when different cultures interact, they form a third culture. This culture acts as a bridge, which enables culturally different individuals to interact (Lyttle 2009: 60). The existence of this third culture was evident in HS6's response, "…to be part of the Deaf culture you have to be Deaf or hard of hearing, but you can be a part of the Deaf community by speaking their language but that is as far as it goes". HS6 was of the opinion that the basis of interaction between the two groups was only dependent on understanding the Deaf culture's language and that deeper social relationships between Deaf and hearing students were not possible.

In terms of identity negotiation, Ting-Toomey (2015: 5) states that a "competent identity negotiation process emphasizes the importance of integrating the necessary intercultural identity-based knowledge, mindfulness, and interaction, skills to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively with culturally dissimilar others". This is an area that needs further exploration. Nonetheless, the authors are of the view that the University could create more opportunities between students from both cultures so that they can more freely and frequently interact with one another and develop a greater level of comfort with each other. This could be achieved through, at least initially, a currently required first-year module that includes SASL and more co-curricular activities that actively involve Deaf students and students who know, or are interested in learning SASL.

The researchers also recommend that the University consider the idea of introducing SASL to the broader university community as both a medium of instruction and a conversational subject. This is important as language was seen as a major barrier between the Deaf and hearing students.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was limited by the small number of Deaf students at the University. Out of a population of nine Deaf students, the researchers were able to recruit only three. The researchers encountered significant resistance from older Deaf students; therefore, the views of the Deaf students presented in this study may be skewed and are probably not representative of the views of Deaf students who, for instance, might be in their final year of study. Moreover, as two of the three Deaf students in the study were in their first year, they might still be trying to adapt to the larger university hearing culture and their views are likely to change as they acculturate to university life. Moreover, as seven of the nine hearing students who participated in the study had taken SASL, it is possible that the findings of this study would have been different had some of the participants not known SASL or had some familiarity with the Deaf culture and language.

It should also be noted that the researchers were limited when directly communicating with the Deaf students as the researchers did not have the ability to sign. Thus, they had to use an interpreter during interviews and this might have led the researchers to miss important nonverbal cues that would have been apparent had they been conversant in SASL. Nonetheless, this study is an important first step to begin interrogating University policies that could impede building a more inclusive environment between hearing and Deaf students. A future study could explore if the findings of this study resonate with the experiences of hearing and Deaf students at other South African universities. Such a study could also include more hearing students, non-conversant in SASL, and explore their perceptions of Deaf students and how these hearing students interact with members of an unfamiliar culture.

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