

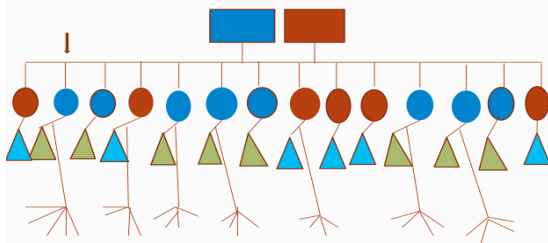


Deaf and hearing children growing up in a big bilingual family of hearing parents

Background

- Most of the times one deaf child is growing up among the hearing parents and hearing siblings
- Even if the hearing members of the family are signing (besides a spoken language), the deaf member is in the minority in relation to language use at home.
- This paper presents a bilingual language environment in a big nuclear family with 16 members: two hearing parents, seven hearing and seven deaf children.

Hearing parents: hearing ch., deaf children + hearing spouses



Research question

1. How a small signing community in a big family of hearing parents affects the language and social development of deaf children?
 2. How the hearing children acquire the sign language from their siblings?
- Sign language skills of all children surpassed clearly parents' signing skill, but there were always hearing siblings around who conveyed more complex messages from the parents to deaf children and vice versa.

Data & Methods

- The data was gathered using ethnographic interviews
- The data analysed by content analysis.
- The method is based on a long relation with the family in their living environments and common get-togethers.

Results

- When the second child - deaf – was born, the family was recommended to start to learn to sign
- Although a demanding task, the parents still decided to strive to learn to sign in order to help the deaf child to acquire a language
- When the next hearing and deaf children were born, the sign language was already in the family, and it became stronger and stronger along with the new users. Even the hearing children acquired sign language first and then the spoken language, and they used fluently both languages.

Conclusion

The family life has been bilingual, and the deaf children have not been in the minority in relation to language. They have had a rich signing environment from the beginning and a strong ground to develop a good self-esteem as a deaf sign language person. The hearing children (except the oldest) feel themselves even as adults bilingual and fairly much bicultural.

