UNDERSTANDING THE KENYA SIGN LANGUAGE AS A MOTHER TONGUE: THE CASE OF THE DEAF IN UASIN GISHU

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Catherine Ndungo²
and
Mary Runo³

Abstract

This paper argues that to the deaf, the Kenya Sign Language (KSL) is the first language (L1) or mother tongue. It also argues that KSL interferes with subsequent languages which the hearing-impaired learn. The paper is based on a study that was conducted in Uasin Gishu County and which looked at spaces available for the deaf to access mainstream development. One of the objectives was to examine the ability of the translators to faithfully translate from KSL to other languages. The paper therefore argues that, just as in other languages, those who are translators of KSL should be aware of the culture of the deaf to be able to effectively translate to the deaf. The study found that there was only one school that caters for the deaf at primary school level. This school now accommodates 80 deaf students. The deaf in Uasin Gishu have therefore limited space for mastering KSL. This therefore impinges on their ability to articulate well their ‘mother’ tongue. The study also found that children born into homes with hearing parents have problems with signage and more so with KSL. Uasin Gishu County has no interpreters in place to help in translation of KSL. The paper will conclude that translation to a deaf person does not just include the translation or the ability to sign, but that KSL grammar structure is different from Swahili or English, and there are elements other than the signs themselves that are required for accurate sign language interpreting. This includes an understanding of the Deaf Culture and the use of facial expressions. Deaf and hard-of-hearing people deserve to have interpreters who know what they are doing and who do it well. A qualified interpreter is one who can, both receptively and expressively, interpret accurately, effectively, and impartially, using any necessary specialized vocabulary. In addition the interpreter must have knowledge of the Deaf Culture.

Key Words: Kenya Sign Language, Deaf Culture, mother tongue, translation, education

Introduction

This paper is based on a study that was conducted to find out spaces that create inclusivity for the Deaf in Uasin Gishu County. The study was meant to examine and evaluate spaces
available for the deaf to reach their full potential. This paper explores one of the objectives which was to examine the effectiveness of translators in translating the Kenya Sign Language (KSL) to the deaf. To the deaf, their first language (L1) is sign language, and in Kenya, the Kenya Sign Language. The deaf whose only language is KSL can only communicate in KSL whether the other conversation partner is deaf or hearing. In order to do this, an interpreter is required. Ricœur’s theory of interpretation, as expounded by Ghasemi et al. (2011), states that in order for the translator to be faithful in translation, a deep understanding of the culture, structure and grammar of the two languages is required. Those who are deaf should also endeavor to learn Kenya Sign Language in school to enhance their knowledge in the language. This paper is therefore questioning whether interpreters in the county of Uasin Gishu are competent and whether there are spaces for the deaf to get an education.

Education

In a study conducted in 2002, two methods were discussed of enabling the deaf to benefit from education. The first method is the oral method, where the pupils are taught through lip-reading. This method assumes that to enable the deaf to communicate, the best method is to teach them lip-reading. The speaker in this case would exaggerate the pronunciation to enable the deaf to read what is being pronounced. The problem with this method is that whereas the deaf might learn to lip-read, to some hearing persons, understanding the deaf speaking is difficult as it translates to sounds that cannot be discerned. The second method is the use of a sign language. Each country has its own sign language. It was found that those who depended on an oral method became totally dependent on those who hear while those who used sign language were
able to study even the physical sciences easily. In the study it was found that school experiences shape to a large extent the social status of the deaf (Lang, 2002).

**Methodology**

The design used is phenomenological survey. Creswell (2009) argues that this type of research is a means by which an understanding of individuals and/or groups can be made. This was adopted because it is the most frequently used method in data collection on people’s attitudes, opinions, habits or feelings. The independent variable being investigated is translation. The dependent variables were the ability for the deaf to be able to gain from the education opportunities. The study site was Uasin Gishu County, which is situated in the mid-west of the Rift Valley covering an area of 3,345.2 square kilometers and lies between longitude 34 degrees 50’ east and 35 degrees 37’ west and latitude 0 degrees 03’ south and 0 degrees 55’ north. The choice of county stems from the fact that it is a cosmopolitan county, having been the choice of colonial settlers who employed people from all over Kenya. Uasin Gishu county has a population of 894,179 as reported by the census of 2009 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Out of these, 3000 are deaf. Eldoret, the county headquarters, is the fifth largest town in Kenya and has a population of over 250,000 (KNBS, 2009). It has elected representatives from different ethnic communities including an Asian. This county is therefore ideal as it represents a microcosm of Kenya. This will also make the findings applicable to other areas in the republic.

The target population in the study was the 3000 deaf people who reside in Uasin Gishu. To get a sample size for such a study, 10% of this population would suffice. The main purpose of the sample size calculation is to determine the sufficient number of respondents (units) needed to detect the unknown outcomes and effects or the association after data gathering. For this study, which was mainly a qualitative study, a minimum of 5% was be sampled. This was so because
the respondents were all deaf and saturation point was possible to be reached at 5%.

Convenience sampling at times referred to as availability or snowballing sampling is a non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection from population members who are conveniently available to participate in study. Convenience sampling was used in this study because first, the deaf in Uasin Gishu are not centrally located; and second, the enumerators who were in the field were going from homestead to homestead to seek information as to where they could meet a deaf person. The sampling was also appropriate because the characteristics of all the respondents were the same, and the researcher used the staff of Anglican Development Services (ADS) to aid in data collection.

The ADS is the development wing of the Anglican Church of Kenya. They do not proselyte but work with all the people without discrimination and reach to all regardless of gender, creed or race. The ADS staff are university graduates with degrees in the social sciences and therefore are versed in the process of data collection, including all the ethical considerations. The researcher briefed all those who were to be research assistants. The briefing included a brief introduction to world of the deaf and the Deaf Culture. The research assistants/enumerators located the deaf in their local environment within Uasin Gishu County as they went about their duties. They used their local networks of community animators and extension workers to locate those who are deaf. In addition they have access to local community leaders and who are the ones who identified the respondents. The deaf were found in homes, market places and in community meetings including churches. As mentioned previously, five percent of the population was sampled. In addition, they were told that only those who are residents of Uasin Gishu will qualify. Those who are visiting did not qualify to participate in the study and therefore were not allowed to respond to the questionnaire. To prove that the respondents were
residents, the enumerator explained who a resident was and then asked them to answer with a YES/NO whether they are residents of Uasin Gishu. The method was justified for this study because, as Mugenda points out, the sample frame will have only those whose characteristics are under study (2008).

**Figure 1: Sample Size**

![Sample Size Diagram]

**Source: Writer**

Focus group discussion with the deaf was the main tool that was used to find out the competence of the translators. This tool sought to qualitatively investigate issues under study. In particular it was supposed to investigate opportunities and space available for the deaf on matters pertaining to education. It also investigated the ability of the translators to faithfully translate in addition to understanding of the Deaf Culture. The culture of the deaf supports the solidarity of the deaf. They see themselves as a family and therefore together they will be able to give an in-depth understanding of their reality. Those who participated in the focus group discussion were
those who had filled the individual questionnaires and were willing to take part in group discussions. There were two focus group discussions. One had eighteen people with eleven men and seven women and the second had twenty one people with thirteen men and eight women. This tool was personally facilitated by the researcher.

Key Informant Interview (KII) tool was meant for the actual translators. The instrument had an interview schedule in which the respondent was supposed to introduce himself, explain the objective then proceed with the discussion. The main objective was to get a deeper understanding associated with the issues being investigated (Rubin & Barbie, 2006). This tool enabled the researcher, within a short time, to engage the translators and the challenges they go through.

Main findings

According to the County Commissioner’s office, there is only one school for the hearing-impaired in Eldoret. The school is a primary school. There was no secondary school or any other institution found in the county. This primary school has an enrolment of eighty (80) pupils. The researcher visited this school and found that it had a capacity of two hundred pupils. No other school or institution is available in Uasin Gishu County. This means that the ability of the deaf to learn Kenya Sign Language is diminished. The study through questionnaires sought to find out from individual deaf persons the level of education they had reached. This also determines their understanding of KSL. Table 1 shows the level of education of those in the study.
Table 1: Level of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>91.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>131</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=131

It was found that 7.6% had no formal education, 53.4% had primary education, 30.5% had secondary education and 8.4% had a Diploma. This means that a majority of the deaf have basic education. The researcher had an opportunity to meet two deaf persons who had degrees. It was found that they did this outside the country and that they had supportive parents who were also able in terms of payment of fees. In addition, though parents and those around were not deaf, the support from the family was immense as one respondent was fully accepted. Though the family members were not aware of the term ‘Deaf Culture,’ they tried to minimize voiced communication when he was around and family members strived to learn KSL.

The respondents were asked to state the schools they have been to. Table 2 below shows the schools mentions by frequency.
Table 2 Primary School Attended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Anthony – Bungoma</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>BUNGOMA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Angela – Kakamega</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>KAKAMEGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakuru school for the deaf</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>NAKURU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Joseph’s Siaya</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>SIAYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapsabet deaf school – Nandi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>NANDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oyugis deaf school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>HOMA BAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyangoma - Siaya</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>SIAYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuja School - Migori</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>MIGORI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumias - Kakamega</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>KAKAMEGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitui School for the deaf - Kitui</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>KITUI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev Muhoro deaf school - Nyeri</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>NYERI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasarani school - Nakuru</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>NAKURU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngala School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>NGALA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muranga - Muranga</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>MURANGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebukuya - Vihiga</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>VIHIGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldoret deaf - Uasin Gishu</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>UASIN GISHU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kisumu - Kisumu</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>KISUMU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>NAIROBI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muranga Primary school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>MURANGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilifi - Kilifi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>KILIFI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=131

Table 2 shows the choice of the respondents for primary school they attended. Only 16.8% attended the Eldoret School for the Hearing-impaired, then followed by Bungoma at 13.7% and the third place is Karen with 9.2%. The rest are scattered all over the republic. The
reason for this was that some of the deaf were sent to their relatives and the relatives took them to school. The other reason was that the NGOs and Church organizations took the responsibility. For this reason, it is important that the deaf get early foundational education and interact with good translators who will usher them into the world in which they will compete fairly with their hearing counterparts.

Early education to the deaf is important for the development of the deaf holistically including language. This is so because deaf schools allow newly deaf entering children to become accustomed to deaf norms, traditions and values that will then be able to be passed down to the following generations (Ladd, 2003). The study shows that out of those who were interviewed, 38.9% are of secondary school level and above. The study showed that none of the respondents had attained university education and only 30.5% secondary. The bulk of the respondents (53.4%) had primary education. This is more than half of the respondents. The study through qualitative interviews sought to find out why the deaf are not getting opportunities to further their education. Respondents were of the view that the major obstacle to education was communication. The ‘disability of the deaf’ is hinged on communication. The language used in the Kenya Sign Language (KSL). The children are taught using this language. If the teachers are familiar with KSL but have little or no knowledge of the Deaf Culture, then the teachers will try to make the deaf lip-read. This agrees with Cohen (1995) who avers that in one of the communities she worked in, the sign language was considered a primitive language and was discouraged. Jefwa (2010) also states that sign language is a language which, instead of using acoustically conveyed sound patterns like spoken language does, uses visually transmitted sign patterns to convey meaning.
An interpreter must therefore at least be bilingual in a spoken language and a signed language. An ideal interpreter must not only know sign language but he must also be fluent in it, they must be trained and certified. In addition, the translator must be able to embrace the Deaf Culture and understand the culture of the spoken language. This aspect came out with one key informant with the Kenya Sign Language Project of the University of Nairobi indicating that teachers who are not versed in Deaf Culture always require the deaf to lip-read and pronounce words. Indeed Ladd (2003) is of the opinion that deaf people are more of an ethnic group because of the language they speak.

With only one school for the hearing-impaired in Uasin Gishu with a population of 80 pupils – the researcher sought to find out why this was so. The respondents’ responses can be summarized into three reasons. Firstly, parents are not keen to take their children to school because they see it as a waste of time. They see other deaf children at home without being engaged in any gainful economic activity. Those that have gone to school have difficulties in securing employment. Those who seek to establish their own small businesses have difficulty in getting capital. Secondly, educating a child needs resources and most parents, given the choice of educating a deaf child or educating a hearing child, would choose the hearing child over a deaf one, more so if the child is a girl.

The education department in the country education office stated that despite use of Kenyan Sign Language, the deaf are still among the most poorly educated group compared to people with other forms of disability, averaging 150 marks at KCPE against a pass mark of 250. They add that there are fewer than 30 university graduates who have gone through the Kenyan education system, which is not friendly to the deaf\(^1\). Thirdly, respondents were also of the opinion that deaf

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1 Interview with Monica Taracha 12 November, 2018 County Education Office
people hate going to school because they find learning difficult. This attitude is developed by the deaf when they are forced to lip-read and to verbalize words. It was reported that some teachers do not know Kenya Sign Language and that is why they opt for lip reading method. For this reason, the teachers who are versed in Deaf Culture are preferable to those who not versed in Deaf Culture. Table 3 shows the number of the respondents who said their interpreters used KSL.

Table 3: Is the KSL Translator Trained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=131

Table 3 indicates that 84% of the respondents stated that their translator is trained in KSL. By this they meant those who can translate. This did not mean that the translators are necessarily versed in Deaf Culture. This was confirmed during focus group discussions. The respondents stated that at times they do not understand the translation fully. In FGD 2, the respondents stated that even TV station translators at times sign that which they cannot understand and interpret.
Translators for KSL, those who can understand the culture are few and charge more than some can afford. For this reason, those who have basic KSL are at times called upon to translate. This is what the respondents meant when they said that their translators are versed in KSL. Though sign language has been accepted as one of Kenya’s official languages, it has not taken root in Uasin Gishu County. In the latest policy on learners with disability, the Ministry of Education states that the primary or first language of deaf children in Kenya is the Kenyan Sign Language, and which they state is to be used for instruction and communication within and outside the environment of institution of learning (GOK, 2018).

A closer look at the aforementioned policy reveals that this policy is for those who have disabilities and that the deaf are part of that group. Therefore the implementation is meant for all people with disability. This paper posits that the deaf are a special group with a specific disability and culture. Deaf Culture describes the social beliefs, behaviors, values, and shared institutions of communities that are affected by deafness and which use sign languages as the main means of communication. The community of the deaf therefore is composed of the deaf and those connected with the deaf (Samploy, 1990, p.27). The policy on the deaf should therefore be distinct in order to address the special characteristics of the deaf. Okombo (1992) avers:

The education of the deaf must be on a realistic view of the linguistic possibilities of the deaf world…. It must be an education that is aimed at giving the deaf knowledge and skills which will make them equal partners to their hearing brothers and sisters in a competitive business of life. (1992, p. 21)

It is for this reason that improving access to education and vocational rehabilitation services, and raising awareness especially among people and prospective employers about the needs of people with hearing loss, will decrease unemployment rates for people with hearing loss.
The Ability of the Interpreters

The study also sought to find out the effectiveness of the interpreters’ ability to interpret language and culture. According to Jefwa (2010), a sign language interpreter should be viewed as any hearing person who has learnt a sign language and acts as a mediator or a go-between in the language barrier that exists between the deaf and the hearing. The information between the hearing and the non-hearing should be faithfully transmitted either way. Translating without bias and in context is crucial for the message to be understood. The study therefore sought to investigate whether this was the case in Uasin Gishu County. This information was from individual questionnaires and from focus group discussions. The study also sought to find out the effectiveness of the interpreters’ ability in government and country offices.

The County Commissioner’s Office and all other departments were found not to have a single interpreter. When asked why this was so, it was indicated that they do not need the services of any translator as they do not receive many deaf clientele. In addition, not even one deaf person is in employment within the whole of the complex. The reason given for this was that to date they have not found anyone qualified for employment. This confirms that the institutions that are there for the deaf have not produced the deaf for the job markets. This finding is in line with Jefwa (ibid.) who, as a key informant in this study, stated that the main problem the deaf face is communication. In one of his write-ups he avers that in order for interpretation to be effective, it must be governed by social and linguistic knowledge of the entire communicative situation. This process involves both linguistic and cultural competences. This is not an easy task given that each language is a way of seeing and reflecting the delicate nuances of cultural perceptions, and it is the translator who not only reconstructs the equivalences of the
words across linguistic boundaries but also reflects and transplants the emotional vibration of another culture (ibid.).

It was found that the county government has contracted the services of a deaf group to be cleaning the offices at a fee. This group of deaf men and women are not on the payroll. In order for the county to empower the marginalized, this group was, through affirmative action, given the opportunity to clean the county offices. The amount of money they get from the county is then shared among the members. They contribute part of their share for banking. They have no insurance coverage for health nor do they have any pension schemes. The contract as stated before has no security of tenure and they serve at the goodwill of the county authorities. The council has put two officers to supervise their work. These supervisors stated that they do not have any knowledge of sign language, but they have learnt to sign on the job. The researcher was able to observe how they communicate and found that most of the times they communicate with the deaf using lip-reading. The supervisors who are also the official translators of the county have not been trained in any KSL. They therefore speak with accented lips in order for the deaf to understand and follow this by making exaggerated motions with their hands. They have also learnt basic signs. In this way they manage to communicate with the deaf to a certain extent. They also use Short Messaging Services (SMS) using their phones. The supervisor told the researcher that at times the SMS they receive from the deaf show they were not educated. On further probing and after seeing the SMS, the researcher also found that the supervisors were not versed in Deaf Culture. The following are some of the SMSs the supervisors showed the researcher.

- Sick me – want home go
- Me sick – sorry
- Work hard – no understand
At times, the researcher was told, the deaf person has to be called to explain. The finding shows that the translators have no knowledge on Deaf Culture. Jefwa (2015) gives the following KSL statements and compares it with the ordinary language to demonstrate that knowledge in Deaf Culture is important in understanding and communicating with the deaf.

1. NOW ME HOME GO – meaning “I am going home now.”
2. SCHOOL BOSS HIMSELF - meaning “The Headmaster”
3. PROPOSE NOW PARENTS ALL meaning “proposed that all parents”
4. MUST SCHOOL VISIT meaning “must visit School”
5. POSSIBLE ME EXPLAIN FROM meaning “It is possible for me to explain”
6. TIME SCHOOL START HAPPEN meaning “what happened since school”
7. WHAT TILL NOW meaning “started up to now?”

Jefwa (ibid.) also adds that KSL is best understood when the speaker and the translator also use facial expressions which is part of the grammar. Though in the case of Eldoret the lips were exaggerated, the facial expressions were lacking. This aspect is usually absent when SMS is used and therefore the totality of the message is not conveyed and at times lost completely. In the case of the translators at the county offices they had not been made to understand that the deaf language transcribed into English verbatim will not make sense to one who does not understand the deaf language and culture. It was found that county supervisors who also act as the official translators do not have knowledge of these aspects of deaf communication. It was also found that the county has no immediate plans to engage on a permanent basis those who are deaf and in the same vein they do not have plans to engage translators who are versed in Deaf
Culture. However, long-term plans are underway to engage on a permanent basis those who are deaf. This is indeed a good development by the county government.

The study found that no training has been conducted for the translators, neither have the translators gone for training on deaf language. There is presently no program within the county for sign language teaching or for translators, but there are plans to train the translators in the future. The researcher visited Kenya Sign Language class in Nairobi and sat with the learners of sign language. The training is held each Saturday from 8.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. After attending ten such sessions, it was found that the training is in two parts. The basic Kenya Sign Language, which takes three months, and an advanced Kenya Sign Language which also lasts three months. The advanced training enables one to be a translator who is able to translate holistically to the deaf. This is the training that was found to be lacking in the two translators in Uasin Gishu County. It was found that this training was not budgeted for and that funds could not be released to train the two supervisors. This training is substantially done in the capital Nairobi and therefore is beyond reach to those who are working and would benefit from organized training on Kenya sign language.

Without interpreters, deaf people are at a disadvantage. For example, if a deaf person has been charged in a court of law, the person must have access to an interpreter. If an interpreter is not provided, he must immediately object to proposal that he had been given. Likewise, deaf people at the unemployment office might be introduced to better jobs. After all, in encounters with other people it is normal to be able to offer one's opinions and objections right away. By means of an interpreter, deaf people are able to understand the contents of a conversation immediately and fully. Thus, they are able to speak up instantly. A key respondent said that “if a deaf person is arrested by police and is handcuffed it will be equivalent to arresting a person and
then gagging him.” Many deaf people have been jailed, not because they are guilty, but because they could not get a competent interpreter or at the time of arrest the police did not know that they were deaf and that this fact was hidden from them. Interpreters are needed by deaf people during lectures, speeches, lessons, meetings, workshops and conversations—in short, any time there is spoken communication (Lane, 1999). And interpreters should be good at sign language as well as writing and finger-spelling and should also be able to do the following: grasp accurately what the speaker thinks, and be able to express in sign language that which has been expressed in spoken language as Lane (ibid.) argues. In addition, interpreters should be availed in hospitals, public institutions and other parastatal offices. The private sector should be compelled by law to provide an interpreter when the situation calls. This is so during disaster situations.

Lane (1999) further argues that an interpreter may encounter any number of difficult situations. For example, an interpreter will need to adjust his or her sign language technique to the interest, way of thinking, and linguistic level of the individual or group for whom he or she is interpreting. It is also up to the interpreter to encourage deaf people to offer their opinions and participate in the meeting or discussion. Furthermore, interpreters must refrain from expressing their own opinions, and, of course, they are unable to take written notes. All trained translators should be aware of the following as enunciated by the translator to the researcher.

- KSL uses hands and other parts of the body
- Space of signing is defined and keep eye contact with the listeners
- Signs are ‘read’ by eyes therefore there is need for eye contact by the deaf
- Facial expression is important
- Mouthing is important as it helps in distinguishing signs that are similar
- Sign language like any other language carries a culture in it
- Avoid noise, translators are advised to avoid bangles or wearing watches that might distract the ‘listeners’
• Inclusion demands communicating to the deaf any visual distractions intruding into your conversation

The duty of interpreters to deaf people is not merely to serve as a neutral communicator between hearing and deaf people, nor to support the status quo. The duty of the translator is to enter the speaker’s mind and to translate emotions into facial and hand movements. Translators should be versatile to be able to perform such movements. It not unusual for translators to be seen exercising their hands as said by one of the translators. The translators should be seen as friends of the deaf and not as their masters. The relationship should not be that of master and servant. It is therefore not accurate to look at hearing people as rulers and deaf people as the oppressed. But hearing people impose their opinions on deaf people so often that sometimes it does seem that deaf people are oppressed. This is brought about if the hearing people do not understand the culture of the deaf. The fundamental duty of interpreters is not just to translate but to ensure that they interpret their aspirations faithfully and to stand by them as they assert their human rights.

Sometimes interpreters have to understand deaf people and facilitate them to know their human rights and fight for them. The translators must therefore go beyond just learning to translate and even at time when translating for an individual person that translation should be personalized to suit the particular deaf person. Interpreters must hone their skills as interpreters in order to properly convey the meaning of spoken words via sign language. And to do this, interpreters may have to learn from the requests and assertions of deaf people. Whether or not the interpreter did his or her job well or not should be determined only by these criteria. The interpreter must therefore be well trained. The researcher was informed that the interpreter, who in most cases is called upon to interpret in church and in meetings, chanced upon the training
because he had no job. He was told that if he trained as an interpreter there are chances that he would get a job. For this reason he learnt the sign language from a friend. Thereafter he went to Nairobi and enrolled for a Kenya Sign Language Class. Upon completion he found himself being engaged with the Church to do a translation. The payment he gets from the translation is not enough but he says it goes a long way in assisting his upkeep. The researcher also interviewed a deaf pastor and who was helped to attend a theological college for a certificate course. An understanding senior pastor noticed his potential and mobilized the church to support him. He had to be in college with the translator. They were paying for two people. After training, he is now in charge of the Deaf Church in Kitale. The salary he gets is now used to support his family. It can therefore be concluded that those who train as translators do so using their own initiatives. There is need to have policies in place that would regulate the training of translators.

The above illustrates the importance of translators in connecting the deaf to the reality of the world around them. In the first instance, the translator through his own initiatives got trained in Kenya Sign Language. He depended on well-wishers to pay for his training. It was found that most of the institutions that offer Sign Language are private and charge fees. It was also found that those who have been facilitated to learn did so through the translators who patiently lived with them and became their alter ego. It can therefore be concluded that the translators play an important role in the education and therefore empowerment of the deaf.

**Conclusion**

Kenya Sign Language to the deaf is a matter of life and death. It is imperative that the deaf learn the official sign language in order to communicate with others through a qualified interpreter. There is hope for the deaf. The concept of the sign language has now spread worldwide leading
to the language being recognized as a distinct language. Eighty percent of the Deaf of the world are in developing countries, according to the World Federation of the Deaf. Whereas the situation of the Deaf in developed countries is backed by good policies and laws, the same cannot be said of the developing countries. As of 2017, only 41 countries in the world, including Kenya, recognized sign language as an official language. There is therefore need to ensure that sign language is taken seriously.

In her inaugural address as professor of Moi University in 2011, Naomi Eshitemi equated language to currency. The stronger the currency in value, the more that currency is used. Currency helps to determine a nation's economic health and hence the well-being of all the people residing in it. Any language backed by economic gains is more likely to be supported than a language which is not. For this reason, this study recommends that the deaf, in addition to being enabled to attain higher education, should be facilitated through loans and grants to break into the world of economy. Affirmative action should be applied in terms of university education. In particular, women who are deaf should be given closer attention. County governments should make it a duty to employ deaf persons. Deaf studies should be offered at lower levels in all stages of education. The study also recommends military and police training colleges and academies offer deaf studies. This will make them aware of the situation of the deaf when they are deployed. Translators should also be made available in major government hospitals in police stations.

REFERENCES


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