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Address practices of Deaf undergraduate students and faculty:

A study of language, identity, and community

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Abstract

The members of a community have conventionalized linguistic structures to convey both the content of a message and the social status of the interlocutors. Crucial in the codification of interpersonal relations are address terms, which are determined by pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic norms related to the language system, the local communicative event and the broader social context. The study examines the usage of address terms (direct address, reference, introductions) at a bilingual university that uses American Sign Language (ASL) as language of instruction and socialization, and English in teaching/learning materials, email correspondence, written announcements, inter alia. Based on interviews with Deaf undergraduate students and Deaf faculty members, the study investigates the production of address terms in this bilingual academic setting and discusses the factors that shape their usage, including ASL linguistic structure, English address norms, participants' educational background, age and status, sociocultural characteristics of the Deaf community, and assumptions from society-at-large. The results reveal that Deaf students and faculty have expectations about address practices inside and outside university campus and follow a complex set of norms in ASL and written English. The findings also provide insights into how members of the Deaf community experience linguacultural contact between signed and spoken/written languages.

Keywords

Deaf community, American Sign Language, American English, bimodal bilingualism, address terms, social norms

1. Introduction

The use of address terms by a social group, either a temporary community of practice engaged in shared activities and goals (Wenger, 1998) or a longstanding community with established cultural values and norms (Gumperz, 1968), is not a random phenomenon. Rather, the use of address forms has been revealed to be a coherent and dynamic process of social exchange regulated by multiple factors including the internal workings of a language system, the external organization of the local context in which a communicative event takes place, and the broader social context of interaction (Clyne et al., 2009).

This paper explores the use of address terms by Deaf undergraduate students and Deaf faculty members at a university where American Sign Language (ASL) is both the language of instruction and the language of socialization. Gallaudet University in Washington DC is a bilingual campus where students and faculty predominantly use ASL, but also integrate written English via instructional materials, email communication, public announcements, inter alia. Based on reported data from 25 Deaf undergraduate students and 11 Deaf faculty members, the study investigates how address terms are used in this distinct bilingual setting and the factors that underlie their usage, including the solidarity among members of the Deaf community, the influence of written English, and the formality of the academic setting. Specifically, the study examines how the norms of address terms typical to American English (AmE) interface with the linguistic structures and social norms of the Deaf community. The results offer perspectives into the social meanings attributed to forms of address in ASL and AmE by members of a Deaf academic community, as well as provide insights into how the Deaf community experiences bilingualism and linguacultural contact between signed and spoken/written languages.

2. The Deaf community

The Deaf community refers to a diverse population of individuals who have different audiological levels, ethnic identities, socioeconomic status, educational backgrounds, language usage, religious beliefs, and sexual orientations, among other attributes (Leigh, Andrews, and Harris, 2018). The longest-running political and advocacy organization for Deaf citizens in the U.S., the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), describes the heterogeneity of the Deaf community on their website (www.nad.org) as follows:

> The deaf and hard of hearing community is diverse. There are variations in how a person becomes deaf or hard of hearing, level of hearing, age of onset, educational background, communication methods, and cultural identity. How people 'label' or identify themselves is personal and may reflect identification with the deaf and hard of hearing community, the degree to which they can hear, or the relative age of onset. (Community and Culture – Frequently Asked Questions)

Despite its multiplicity, the Deaf community reports having shared cultural values, beliefs, social norms, traits, behaviors, arts, and traditions that have been passed down by generations of Deaf people (Padden and Humphries, 2006; Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan, 1996). A critical unifying aspect of the Deaf community is knowledge of and respect for signed languages. Signed languages are natural, complex, human languages that are produced and perceived in a visual-gestural modality (or a tactile mode for Deaf Blind individuals). Communities that use signed languages are typically embedded within a larger population of spoken language users. However, signed languages have phonological, morphological, and syntactic structures distinct from the surrounding spoken languages (Sandler and Lillo-Martin, 2012). Thus, Deaf individuals often develop a bi- or multilingual repertoire, typically with a signed language as their L1 or dominant language, and a spoken/written language as their L2.

There have been efforts to develop written forms of signed languages. Nonetheless, no systems have been widely used or adopted to date (Mayer, 2017). Fingerspelling (a manual representation of a written language) is found in many, but not all, signed languages and is used to

different degrees across languages (Author; Padden and Clark Gunsauls, 2003). Interestingly, fingerspelled forms can become lexicalized over time, that is, take on phonological parameters of signed languages (Battison, 1978). Despite the common belief that signed languages are universal, in fact, individual countries and regions have their own specific signed languages, for example, Italian Sign Language and Hong Kong Sign Language, among others (see www.ethnologue.com). Further, users of signed languages also demonstrate dialects and idiolects based on the region and individual (Lucas, Bayley, and Valli, 2003). A precise number of signed language users worldwide is not known. In the U.S., a recent estimate of Deaf ASL signers places the number at between 360,000 to 512,000 individuals (Leigh, Andrews and Harris, 2018).

2.1. Education and the Deaf community

Since linguistic and cultural norms are transmitted in educational settings, the instruction of Deaf children is a critical issue in the Deaf community. In the U.S., federal legislation has shaped the scholastic options that are available for Deaf children. Prior to the 1970s, Deaf children typically attended private or public schools that were designed specifically for Deaf students. However, in 1975, the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 94-142, which guaranteed a "free appropriate public education to each child with a disability" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The law allowed for the inclusion of Deaf students into neighboring public schools that received federal funding. Today, approximately 85% of Deaf children are enrolled in mainstreamed public school programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Fifty-four percent of mainstreamed educational programs use only spoken English in the instruction of Deaf children, 27% use American Sign Language, and 12% use simultaneous communication (spoken and signed language simultaneously) (Gallaudet Research Institute, April 2011).

In addition to public school programs, 108 Deaf schools operate in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Sixty-one of these Deaf schools offer a residential option for its students and typically ASL is used by Deaf and hearing signers (administrators, teachers, teacher aides, dormitory supervisors, and staff members). A second type of Deaf school is the day school program, that is, schools that teach Deaf students but do not offer a residential component. Of the 108 Deaf schools, 55 are believed to use ASL both in classroom and social environments. Some Deaf schools adhere to an oral approach to education, in which only spoken English is used with students. A survey of 78 residential and day schools found that 24% of the schools identified as having a bilingual, bicultural approach to education, but no more than half of these schools' instructional staff was identified as being fluent in ASL (LaSasso and Loilis, 2003).

Since educational placement heavily influences the development of linguistic skills and cultural identity, Deaf students who are enrolled in public schools may not initially acquire the sociopragmatic norms of the Deaf community; specifically, these students may adopt address practices that represent spoken language norms. Because of shifts in Deaf education over the past 35 years, it is not uncommon for mainstreamed Deaf students to become exposed to the Deaf community only when they attend postsecondary institutions that use ASL on campus. As a result of these diverse educational options, Deaf students like the ones involved in this study bring a variety of academic backgrounds, linguistic skills, cultural competencies, and communication preferences, which influence their bilingual linguistic repertoire.

3. Creating, building, and maintaining social relations through address terms

Terms of address are linguistic devices that go beyond the identification of the interlocutors by projecting the content of the message onto the interpersonal level of communication. The use of names (John, Mary Smith), personal and professional titles (Mrs. Johnson, Professor Williams), and honorific expressions (Sir, Madam) serve to single out the intended recipient of an utterance and summon his or her attention (Zwicky, 1974). Simultaneously, address terms establish and mark social relationships by positioning the interlocutors vis-à-vis one another (Leech, 1999). By using familiar or polite forms of address the speaker exploits social deixis to express interpersonal stance, that is, to

convey interpersonal meanings and attitudes towards the interlocutor with reference to the sociocultural categories and the contextual components of a situation (Author).

The use of address terms in ASL is probably influenced by several factors including an individual's educational background, bilingual capabilities, and understanding of norms in both hearing society and the Deaf community. Some naming conventions do exist in ASL. For example, the name of a person in the Deaf community can be fingerspelled, but this is typically supplanted by a 'name sign', a shortened, identifying sign that marks a person by family norms, a physical characteristic, or personality trait (Supalla, 1992). Many of the address terms used in English (Mr., Mrs., Sir, Madam) do not have equivalent lexical forms in ASL. As a consequence, creating, building and maintaining social relations within the Deaf community may be expressed in other ways than through specific lexical terms for address typical of American English.

3.1. Address, personal reference, introductions

Address is the general term employed to denote "a speaker's linguistic reference to his/her collocutor(s)" (Braun, 1988:7) and implies that the interlocutor be present in the exchange, either physically as in face-to-face conversations, or virtually in the case of synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication such as video chats or email correspondence. Pronouns and nouns of address thus identify the designated interlocutor that is being spoken (or written) to, as in *Professor Williams, could you please repeat the last point?* when asking for clarifications in class, or *Dear Ms. Johnson* when opening an email.

Related to address is the notion of personal reference. In this case address terms are again used to identify a person, but personal reference differs in that the referred individual is not directly spoken to (Murphy, 1988:318) and is not the intended recipient of the utterance, as in the following potential utterance by a student to his/her peer: *How was your class with Professor Smith yesterday?* Personal reference generates a series of implicatures related not only to the existing social relationship between the speaker and the addressee, but also between the speaker and the referent, and the addressee and the referent (Murphy, 1988; Dickey, 1997). For this reason, address terms and reference terms used to identify the same person do not necessarily coincide. As a matter of fact, in the example above *Professor Smith* could have been replaced with *John* to refer the same teacher, hinting at a closer relationship between the interlocutors and the referent (Dickey, 1997).

Finally, address and reference terms used in introducing oneself or another person at a first encounter also give indications on how human relationships are encoded in a language. Introductions are crucial in setting the framework for any future positioning of the interlocutors and are regulated by potentially countervailing factors associated with participants' social identities (Kretzenbacher et al., 2015; Norrby et al., 2019). While the main focus of the study is on address practice in ASL/English academic interactions and given the importance of these interrelated functions of address terms, some observations on the reported use of address terms in personal reference and introductions will also be made.

3.2. Social dimensions of address in academic interactions

Since Brown and Gilman's (1960) seminal work on the power and solidarity semantics of familiar T and polite V pronouns[1] a multi-dimensional approach has been favored in address research. The description of address practices in various languages and varieties of languages has shown a degree of regularity across speakers, derived from a complex interplay of socio-pragmatic norms, contextual factors, and individual preference (Clyne et al., 2009; Norrby and Wide, 2015; Kluge and Moyna, 2019, among others).

In a hierarchical domain and "status-marked setting" (Ervin-Tripp 1972:220) such as academia, the use of titles foregrounds participants' ranks and defines the difference in power

[1] The terms T-form and V-form will be used throughout the paper to refer respectively to informal and formal address strategies.

between the parties. It is the case, for instance, of the non-reciprocal exchange of titles and first names between students and teachers, which marks asymmetry explicitly and is sometimes the only option with undergraduates, as reported in a study on a state university in the American Midwest (Burt, 2015).

At the same time, in Anglophone institutions, promoting the use of academic titles may be a way to maintain a degree of social distance in class, whereas reciprocal first names among students and teachers may favor the development of a closer relationship of familiarity and a more relaxed attitude (Author). The dimension of social distance in these circumstances intersects that of power and stands out as more prominent. In a similar vein, the acknowledgment of status through titles may also be interpreted as the speaker's expression of admiration and respect for the addressee's personal skills and professional attainments, rather than a manifestation of power differential (Author).

Communication mode also plays a role in shaping address practice in student-teacher relations, in particular given the increasing adoption of synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication in education. It has been observed that emails facilitate the use of academic titles especially towards unfamiliar members of the teaching staff, as electronic communication is often perceived as more formal and perhaps institutionalized than face-to-face interaction (Wright, 2009:1083). Conversely, online forums and digital learning platforms such as Moodle promote participation and lead to a reduction of social distance (Fusari and Luporini, 2016).

Finally, participants' linguistic repertoire is another relevant factor, especially in intercultural interactions involving bilingual/multilingual individuals, thus in contexts where language and culture contacts are heightened. A wide variation in address strategies has been especially recorded in English lingua franca (ELF) academic settings, where most participants speak English as a second language alongside their mother tongue. This may result, on the one hand, in pragmatic infelicities due to the selection of the incorrect title or the omission of appropriate deference formulae and address terms, or the use of grammatically unacceptable combinations (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). On the other hand, speakers' linguacultural backgrounds may influence the level of formality of address strategies, with L2 English students/lecturers following more formal or informal patterns typical of their native cultures (Bjørge, 2007; Wei-Hong Ko et al., 2015; Author; see also Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018 on pragmalinguistic transfer in L2 English emails). Individual proficiency levels and the transfer of norms and conventions from speakers' native languages and cultures prove to be crucial factors to be accounted for. Academic interactions involving bilingual participants like the ASL/English postsecondary setting explored in the present study are an area worth of investigation for the several implications the use of different linguistic modalities, codes, and cultural norms in contact may have on social relationships.

4. Methodology

The study was designed to examine how Deaf undergraduate students and Deaf faculty members establish social distance at a bilingual (ASL and English) university. The researchers explore this issue by interviewing students and faculty members regarding their language use in formal academic interactions.

4.1. Participants

Data was collected from two groups of participants, referred to as Group 1 (Deaf students) and Group 2 (Deaf faculty). We note that the student and faculty participants study and teach in a variety of disciplines (e.g. business, history, linguistics).

Group 1 consisted of Deaf undergraduate students between ages 18-29 who were currently enrolled part-time or full-time at Gallaudet University. Students were recruited through signs posted on campus, university websites, and in-person solicitation at a sign-up table. Students were compensated $15 for participation in the study. The students' demographic data is found in Table 1.

Citizenship	U.S.	China	Canada	Palestine	No Response		
	19	2	2	1	1		
Age	18-20	21-23	24-26	>26			
	12	8	4	1			
Ethnic Identity	White	Asian	Indian	Latina/ Latino	Black	Arabic	Two or more
	11	5	1	2	2	1	3
Gender	Female	Male	Non-Binary				
	20	4	1				
Parents' Audiological Status	Hearing	Deaf	Hard of Hearing				
	13	10	2				
Age of ASL Acquisition	Birth-1	2-5	6-10	10-15	16-20		
	13	6	1	3	2		
Reported Dominant Language	ASL	English	Both (ASL & English)	Chinese			
	16	4	4	1			
K-12 Education Setting	Mainstream	Deaf School	Both (Mainstream & Deaf School)				
	11	9	5				
Undergraduate Status	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior			
	7	5	5	8			

*PNTA - Prefer Not to Answer

Table 1 - Demographics of Faculty Participants

Group 2 consisted of Deaf faculty members (instructors, assistant professors, associate professors, full professors) who were currently employed part-time or full-time at Gallaudet University. Faculty members were recruited through direct email requests from the researchers. Participation by faculty members was completely voluntary and was not compensated financially. The faculty's demographic data is found in Table 2.

ID#	Age	Gender	Ethnic Identity	Parent's Hearing Status	Age of ASL Acquisition	K-12 Education Background	Academic Status as Professor
01	44	PNTA*	PNTA	Hearing	18	Mainstream	Full

02	50	F	African American	Hearing	9	No Response	Full
03	42	F	White	Hearing	<1	Mainstream	Full
04	49	F	White	Hearing	5	Both	Full
05	46	F	Asian	Deaf	3	Mainstream	Associate
06	44	F	White	Deaf	<1	Deaf School	Associate
07	60+	F	Jewish	Deaf	<1	Mainstream	Full
08	39	F	White	Hearing	<1	No Response	Assistant
09	37	M	Asian	Hearing	27	Mainstream	Instructor
10	58	F	White	Deaf	<1	Deaf School	Full
11	59	F	African American	Deaf	13	Deaf School	Associate

*PNTA - Prefer Not to Answer

Table 2 – Demographics of Faculty Participants

4.2. Materials and Procedures

Data was gathered via semi-structured participant interviews, which are described here.

4.2.1. Group 1 Interviews – Deaf undergraduate students

The researchers instructed each student participant to complete two consent forms and a demographic background information form. Following this, the researchers (one Deaf, one hearing, both fluent in ASL) conducted individual interviews with the students in ASL and using a prepared interview protocol. The student interview process lasted approximately 20 minutes. The interviews contained questions pertaining to four components of address (see Appendix A for full questionnaire):

a) Using address terms in ASL. Students were asked about their face-to-face interactions with a specific instructor who had taught them during the current semester. Specifically, students were asked to enact two different situations: 1) asking the instructor for clarification about a difficult point during a lesson, and 2) asking the instructor for a week's extension on a deadline for a final paper through a visit at the professor's office.
b) Using reference terms in ASL. Students were asked to enact how they would refer to the instructor when talking with friends (without the instructor present).
c) Making introductions in ASL. Students were asked to enact an introduction between a friend who was visiting campus and the president of Gallaudet University.
d) Using address terms in English. Students were asked to write a mock email request in English to one of their college instructors on a laptop computer provided by the researchers.

4.2.2. Group 2 Interviews – Deaf faculty members

The researchers had each Deaf faculty participant complete two consent forms and a demographic background information form. Following this, three members of the research team (one Deaf, two hearing, all fluent in ASL) conducted individual interviews with the faculty members in ASL and using a prepared interview protocol. The interviews took place either in person or through videoconferencing software. The interview process lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews elicited data about the several components related to address (see Appendix B for full set of interview questions):

a) Preference for how students address faculty members in and out of class.
b) Contextual factors that shape students' use of address terms.
c) The use and meaning of academic titles in the Deaf community.
d) The impact of the faculty members' age and academic position on students' form of address.

e) Students' use of address terms in written English communication to their teachers.

4.3. Data Translation and Coding

A member of the research team translated the interviews from ASL into written English. The data was categorized by address terms, terms of reference, and introductions, and organized into an Excel spreadsheet. The transcribed interviews were carefully read through to identify keywords and relevant observations pertaining address practices and participants' perception of their social values inside and outside the academic setting.

5. Results

5.1. Students' perspectives

Students' responses are presented below combining a quantitative and a qualitative approach to data. The address strategies reported by informants and their distribution in different categories offer a composite picture of how teacher-student interpersonal relations are established and managed within this academic community.

5.1.1. Address

Results show that terms of address are only very rarely reported in ASL face-to-face interactions. Raising a hand or waving are the default strategies to summon the teacher's attention in class (23 out of 25 students), whereas informal greetings such as *Hi* and *Hello* without an accompanying lexical term are preferably used when approaching a lecturer in his or her office to ask for a deadline extension (11 out of 25 students), along with waving (5 students), and a direct request (3 students). In the latter situation, possibly considered more face threatening, the title *Professor* followed by a fingerspelled first name is also reported after a greeting, but only by two informants, while one student mentions the title *teacher*. In general, according to our data, students' approach to the teaching staff in ASL face-to-face exchanges is rather informal and favors the use of summoning gestures and greetings rather than address terms.

Fairly different are students' address practices in email communication in English. The writing task performed by all informants but one during the interviews shows a frequent use of address terms in email openings with a wide variation in the combination of greeting formulae, titles, honorifics, last names and first names which can be ordered along a formality-informality cline (Danet, 2001:77). Almost half of the students (11 out of 24) opt for a V-form using a title (*Dear/Hello/Greetings Professor/Dr./Ms.* + last name, *Good afternoon Professor*, *Professor* + first name), while the rest of informants begin the email using a T-form (*Dear/Hello/Hi* + first name; 5 out of 24) or simply a salutation without address forms (mostly *Hello*, but also *Good morning*; 7 out of 24). Finally, one student goes straight into the body of the message without an opening sequence. Email communication in English is thus characterized by a more frequent use of address terms and a higher degree of formality and interpersonal distance than ASL face-to-face interactions, with students divided into two polarized groups.

5.1.2. Introductions

When it comes to report on the address strategies used in introducing a friend to a teacher met on campus, informants are divided into three distinct groups. The majority of students (11 out of 25) would introduce the teacher by fingerspelling his or her full name, while two smaller groups of students would either make an explicit use of the title *Professor* or *Dr.* (fingerspelled) followed by full name/last name/first name (6 out of 25), or choose the teacher's first name/sign name (6 out of 25). Results thus show a limited use of both V-forms (titles) and T-forms (first name and sign name) in introductions and a preference for full names, which are probably considered intermediate, more neutral strategies of identification.

The picture changes slightly when the participant was asked to introduce someone to the president of Gallaudet University, Roberta Cordano, who holds the highest position in the academic

hierarchy. The use of the title *President* is reported as the most frequent option (9 out of 25) to acknowledge the prestigious role of the interlocutor. The title may be used alone (especially if the student does not remember the name of the president) or, more frequently, it is followed by the shortened name *Bobbi* (from Roberta). We note that President Cordano often refers to herself as Bobbi when communicating to Gallaudet faculty, staff, and students. The shortened first name is also reported without the title (7 out of 25) or in combination with the President's last name (*Bobbi Cordano*). The use of the T-form *Bobbi*, a custom within the institution according to some informants, indicates assumed familiarity and solidarity with the president, which is not due to close acquaintance but to people's identification with a successful woman, the first Deaf female president of Gallaudet University. Moreover, Roberta Cordano's friendly and charismatic personality, along with the smiling picture of her shown to the informants in the interview, might have fostered the sense of closeness.

5.1.3. Reference

Students report a variety of lexical strategies used to refer to their teachers in peer-to-peer conversation. There is an increase in T-forms such as fingerspelled first names and sign names (10 out of 25) compared to introductions, and a consistent reduction of V-forms (only 2 out of 25 report using title + full name). Teachers' full names are also frequently mentioned (10 out of 25) as a strategy of identification in reference. An additional, distinctive aspect of reference emerging across different informants is the common practice of describing the physical appearance of the referred person (*the teacher with curly hair*; *the guy with a distinct nose*) or even showing their pictures from the social networks on their phone or computer, with or without the use of names (12 out of 25). In reference, additional emphasis is thus given to the visual communication mode, which is intrinsic to sign languages.

A summary of the main strategies reported by students in address, introductions and reference is offered in Figure 1.

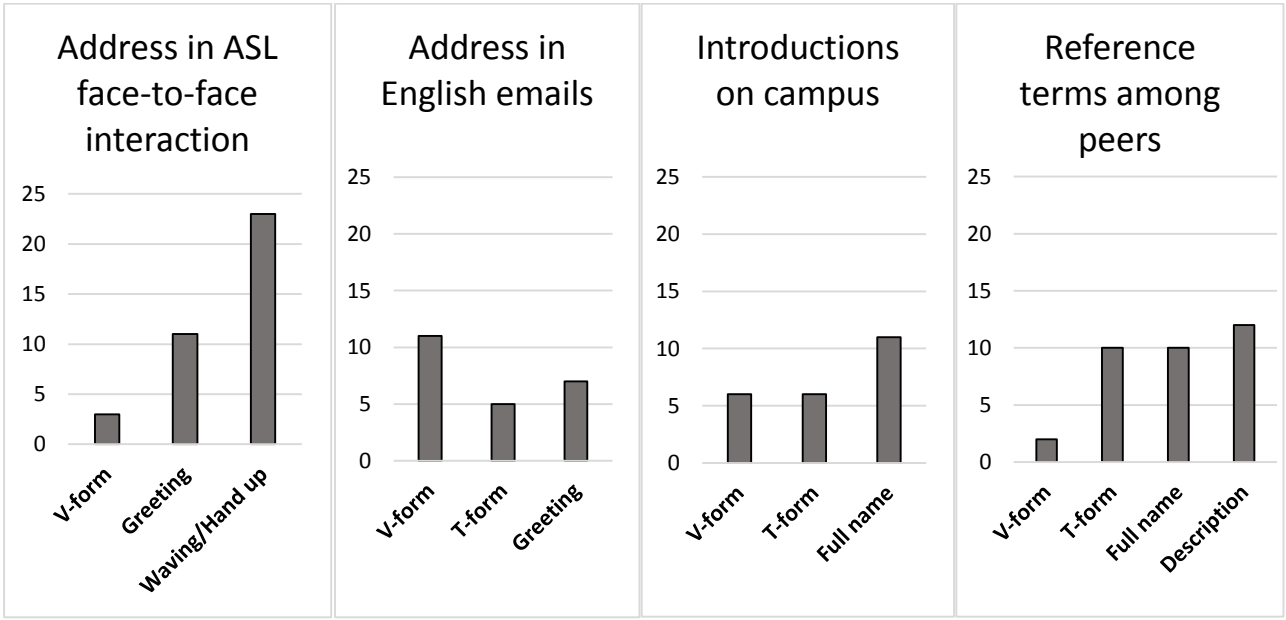

Figure 1 – Students' reported strategies in address, introductions and reference.

5.1.4. Social meanings of address terms in the Deaf (academic) community

From the numerous comments on the relevance of titles in addressing teachers a general agreement emerges that terms such as *Dr.* and *Professor* are considered appropriate and polite in a professional setting like the academia. Titles express respect for the interlocutor by acknowledging their personal and professional attainments and showing that Deaf people can succeed in both education and career. Nonetheless, many students clarify that they would adjust their addressing practice according to the

teachers' preference and attitude, and would use titles if asked to do so, for instance in class at the beginning of the course or through the syllabus.

Conversely, a smaller group of informants specify that academic titles like *Dr.* sound unnatural in ASL, as they are not codified with a sign in the standard vocabulary and need to be fingerspelled, causing additional effort and disrupting the flow of conversation. Moreover, titles create unnecessary asymmetry within the Deaf community, in which interpersonal relations are generally characterized by a high degree of solidarity and familiarity expressed through the use of first names and sign names. Titles intrinsically encode hierarchy in academic relations and foreground authority and power differences, which are regarded as more typical of interactions among hearing people. This is also reflected in the address practices informants experienced in previous education, with mainstream secondary schools promoting the use of honorific titles such as *Mr.*, *Mrs.* and *Ms.*, and Deaf schools favoring first names and sign names. In academic interactions in ASL, fingerspelled full names as opposed to first names and sign names are perceived as more effective strategies to show respect to teachers, while titles are felt to be more suitable to email correspondence, where Deaf and hearing people find themselves in contact in a shared third space and use English as language of communication.

5.2. Faculty perspectives

The results are organized in three subsections that aim to describe the reported use of address forms and teachers' preferences in ASL classroom interactions and English email correspondence, and the relevance of the parameters of age and status in teacher-student relationships.

5.2.1. Reported address practices in ASL

General agreement is shown among faculty that the strategies used to address students in ASL primarily involve sign names and fingerspelled first names, depending on students' preferences. Names are useful to memorize students' identities and help to build rapport especially in small groups. Some informants report that attention-getting strategies such as hand waving and pointing are also frequent and effective ways to establish a connection with the interlocutor, as sign language entails visual communication; one interviewee specifies that first names are particularly common in classrooms with hearing students.

As for the address practices towards the faculty, the comments offer a more composite picture. The majority of faculty give explicit indications to students on how they prefer to be addressed both in ASL face-to-face interactions and in English email correspondence. In ASL, titles followed by a last name (e.g. *Professor Smith*, *Miss Johnson*) or an initial (e.g. *Dr. K.*) are reported as the preferred option by faculty members, with a wide range of combinations. Some informants find *Professor* the most suitable title and state that *Dr.* is a more appropriate title for the medical profession, and a potential source of misunderstanding; other lecturers introduce themselves as *Dr.* + last name to indicate their doctoral degree and ask students to use the appropriate title. Only very few teachers opt for a full name without any title when meeting students at the beginning of the course or encourage the use of their first names and sign names in class.

More often than not, explicit indications from the faculty do not match students' address behavior in ASL face-to-face interactions. Informants report a very frequent use of attention getting strategies in class (hand raising, waving, eye contact), deemed more practical and convenient in a visual environment than titles or names. A certain amount of first names and sign names are also reported in the ASL classroom, especially when students refer to the teacher as in "as FIRST NAME explained ..." or "SIGN NAME just said ...", and to a lesser extent in direct address. Such practices are generally not perceived as disrespectful and are not censured by teachers, as long as the address terms used are not too intimate, such as nicknames (extract 1 below).

(1) My name is [full name], but my friends also call me [nickname]. Sometimes students know that they've seen me called [nickname], and then they use that. I then explain that they

should call me Dr. [last name] or Professor [last name], I have to make that distinction. It's not like they're purposely trying to disrespect me. It's more of the just don't know. From that point on after it's corrected typically it's not an issue. (female faculty member, 50 years old)

Similarly, in ASL exchanges on campus students may opt for informal greetings (*Hi/Hello*) or may resort to titles in introductions (e.g. "This is my professor/teacher + (FULL) NAME"; "(FULL) NAME the professor ..."), but very rarely using formal vocatives. These results are consistent with the strategies reported by students in 5.1 above.

5.2.2. Reported address practices in English email correspondence

With few exceptions, Gallaudet faculty members agree that the address strategy used by Deaf students in English email correspondence should be the title of the faculty member combined with the last name or initials, primarily *Professor* or *Dr.*, and much more rarely *Mr.* or *Miss*. Not only are titles regarded as a way to show respect, but they are also considered suitable to written academic interactions and professional relations in general. To be able to use the appropriate style in emails written in English is part of the academic training offered in higher education and faculty want to ensure students will be prepared to interact correctly with Deaf and hearing people in hierarchical job situations outside Gallaudet University. Some faculty members are particularly rigorous on the level of formality to be used in written exchanges and provide students with explicit instructions in the syllabus of the course, as in extract (2) below:

(2) Electronic Communication:
There are two policies I expect you to follow when sending me any form of communication: 1) My name is Dr. [full name]. You may use Dr. [initials], Dr. [last name's initial], or Dr. [shortened last name] when addressing me in an email address. I will not respond to any emails that use my first name and 2) I will not respond to any emails that use "Hey" or any variation thereof. (female faculty member, 42 years old)

The use of familiar address terms and casual salutations by students in emails is occasionally disapproved of through explicit corrections. Extract (3) below shows a response to a simulated informal request for an appointment that triggered the informant's negative reaction.

(3) Student mock email:
Hey!
I need to meet with you on Tuesday at 4:00 pm.
Student

Faculty response:
Hello (name of student), please check my syllabus regarding etiquette in addressing your colleagues and your teachers. You want to use appropriate, formal, academic language. Please review and revise your email to me, send it again, and I'll consider your request. If you aren't sure how to improve the language in your email, let me know, and I'll work with you. (female faculty member, 44 years old)

As explicit reprimands may sound too severe and face threatening, most faculty members report favoring a more indirect approach to students' faux pas by modelling in their responses the correct structure of an academic email and the appropriate address form to be used, for instance typing their full name or initials preceded by a title as a signature at the end of the message (extract 4).

(4) Faculty response:

Dear Student,
My office hour is from 2pm to 3pm. You may stop by during this time.
Best,
Dr. [last name]
(female faculty member, 46 years old)

5.2.3. Age and status

When asked about the relevance of the social parameters of age and status in the management of interpersonal relations, informants report that age difference plays a significant role, even though address practices are not specifically mentioned. Being closer in age with students may lead to a more relaxed and familiar relationship. This apply to both younger faculty members, who are perceived as more approachable by undergraduates, and older professors in relation to mature students. One young lecturer in her forties stresses the importance of making students aware of the different roles in class to avoid overfamiliarity. Another informant notes that growing older has had an impact on the way students respond to her compared to the beginning of her career. Conversely, faculty rank is not considered to be relevant to undergraduates, who are said to address instructors, associate professors, and full professor in the same way, regardless of their academic position. Titles seem to matter more to faculty members, especially those who have earned a PhD in their field, who insist on students using the title *Dr.* to acknowledge the important personal and professional achievement. Some variation is reported in the address practices expected from students as they progress to postgraduate courses. When students complete their undergraduate studies and enroll in a master's or a doctor's degree, it seems more natural to reduce the social distance and favor the reciprocal use of informal address terms like first names and sign names. This is nicely described by one of the informants in extract 5 below.

(5) I started to feel okay if students called me [first name] only after they graduated, it was kind of my gift to them. I teach the senior thesis course I've been teaching that for 15 out of 22 years that I've been teaching. I always tell the students right before graduation that my gift is that they don't have to say Dr. with my name and we've become friends. I consider my relationship to be friendly with my students and that's where I stand with the use of address terms. (female faculty member, 60+ years old)

6. Discussion

Students' and faculty's responses delineate a rich profile of the Deaf community at Gallaudet University characterized by a strong and distinct identity, which goes beyond the hierarchical separation of roles described in previous studies on address in American academic settings (e.g. Burt, 2015). The address practices reported in ASL interactions on campus point to relaxed and informal relationships that echo the values of solidarity and familiarity of the Deaf community at large. Terms of address are often regarded as redundant or even non-functional in the visual communication mode of sign languages. Informal greetings, attention getting gestures and eye contact are instead the prominent strategies to establish and maintain interpersonal connections in the ASL classroom, and only rarely are they complemented with T-forms like first names and sign names or more neutral full names, the latter mainly in introductions and reference. Little impact of V-forms is reported in ASL face-to-face exchanges, in spite of teachers' preferences and indications in class. Titles like *Professor* and *Dr.* are considered to be appropriate in formal and professional relationships, which explains why faculty members promote their use in the academic institution. Nonetheless, students and faculty alike regard them as a practice more specific of the hearing culture and linked to the emphasis on individualism and the hierarchical organization of social roles. This is felt to be in partial contrast with the horizontal, close-knit and collective configuration of the Deaf community, and therefore may lead to a resistance to title usage.

One of the reasons of this ambivalent attitude towards titles may be found in the intrinsic ambiguity of their social meanings. In formal institutional settings, titles qualify as markers of respect and deference towards the interlocutor and convey the speaker's appreciation for his or her attainments or actions (Goffman, 1967). Respect is generally perceived as a positive feeling that can be expressed in asymmetrical relations as well as among equals. Titles, however, are also a manifestation of power and authority in hierarchical contexts, as they foreground the superiority of the addressee and foster social distance (Author). It is from this duality of meanings that cultural clashes originate in the expectations and perceptions of Deaf faculty and students.

Irrespective of the actual use of address forms, different positions on the import of professional titles emerge from the several comments, in particular regarding the title *Dr.* addressed to faculty members with a doctorate. These views are influenced by the context of communication (institutional vs. non-institutional) and the type of participants in the exchange (Deaf vs. hearing people). In academic interactions on campus, for instance, titles are seen by most informants as an effective way to clarify students' and teachers' different roles and local identities, which may not coincide with the existing relationships among participants outside of the educational context. This mismatch partly explains speakers' uncertainty on the appropriate strategy and the generalized avoidance of address terms on the part of students.

Expanding the scope to social and professional gatherings beyond the university setting, two opposite viewpoints surface. Titles are avoided when Deaf scholars introduce themselves to other members of the Deaf community, especially to those not holding a PhD, as they may foreground social differences creating unnecessary distance. Informants also comment on the risk of sounding pompous and self-important by using titles with other Deaf people, thus losing connection with peers. Conversely, titles acquire a different and more positive value in interactions involving hearing interlocutors, for example in conferences, meetings or other non-professional gatherings. Here titles are sometimes deliberately used to show expertise and authority in the subject matter, to emphasize that also Deaf people can achieve the highest level of education, can work hard and succeed in getting leading positions in hearing-dominated academic environments. This powerful and motivating message reaches also other Deaf individuals, instilling positive feelings and encouraging personal and professional growth. We argue that these multifaceted attitudes towards the use of titles expressed in the interviews can be interpreted as a point of contact between the Deaf and the hearing culture, an area of sociopragmatics in which the meanings attributed to address practices partly overlap across the two communities.

Additional evidence of linguacultural contact is provided by the comments on email correspondence in English, the non-dominant language in the bilingual repertoire of most informants. Emails are described as a hearing-oriented communication mode that is prominent in the professional world outside of Gallaudet University, where the use of titles in job-related contexts is expected as part of the ethos of certain professions. Within their education program, students are therefore encouraged to acquire communication skills in written English and in particular the hearing-oriented sociopragmatic norms underlying address strategies in email correspondence. Hence, teachers' explicit indications to use academic titles and a formal style, which are sometimes codified in the form of instructions in syllabi.

Email address strategies are not transferred untouched into the community of practice at Gallaudet, but are filtered through the lens of Deaf students' and teachers' linguacultural backgrounds, leading to creative combinations, such as *Professor/Dr.* + initial(s), *Professor/Dr.* + shortened last name, *Professor/Dr.* + first name, alongside more traditional English formulae (*Professor/Dr.* + last name or full name). These instances of innovative forms, possibly coined in the attempt to find the right balance between endonormative and exonormative models of address, can also be regarded as genuine manifestations of language contact, fairly common in interactions involving L2 English speakers (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, 2018) or in English lingua franca contexts (Bjørge, 2007; Author).

As far as address practices are concerned, linguacultural contact between the Deaf community and the hearing community is not a novelty emerging at Gallaudet University in current years. According to our data, it is rather the result of a long-term process initiated in the recent past and also attested in stages of education prior to university. In the interviews, students recount their experiences in mainstream programs in public schools or in specific programs in schools for the Deaf. Clear and distinct patterns of address emerge between the two educational paths. Informants report mainstream schools require an extensive use of titles when addressing teachers, such as *Mr.*, *Mrs.* or *Ms.* followed by last names. This is regarded as the "hearing way" (female student, 20 years old) or as the common practice to show respect in the hearing world (female student, 27 years old). Conversely, sign names, (fingerspelled) first names or simply the initial of the first name are the prominent strategies to address teachers in Deaf schools. Once again, explicit labels are attached to these address practices, defined as "a Deaf thing" (female student, 20 years old) or as Deaf culture, in which titles tend not to be used (female student, 21 years old). However mixed situations are also reported, especially whenever both hearing and Deaf teachers are involved. Extracts 6 and 7 describe examples of converging patterns in Deaf schools and mainstream secondary education.

(6) I went to the Tennessee School for the Deaf. We had to use *Mr.* and other titles in front of [teachers'] names. They taught us that it was polite. My English teacher who was hearing taught me to do that. She said Deaf people needed to be polite too. It was the same with Deaf teachers. (female student, 19 years old)

(7) I went to a mainstream school and had a mix of Deaf and hearing teachers. We tended to use sign names. (male student, 19 years old)

It is in these contexts that the two linguacultures meet and merge, shaping individuals' attitudes and linguistic behaviors in present and future interpersonal exchanges.

A relevant role in developing faculty's views on address is played by mentors encountered during their undergraduate and postgraduate years, i.e. 20 to 40 years ago depending on the age of the interviewee. Many informants report modelling address on previous experiences with their own professors. Titles in addressing the teaching staff are described as the custom in several public universities in those years, especially by undergraduate students but also by postgraduates through PhD completion. The use of first names of faculty members was frowned upon and explicitly corrected. A different situation is described for Gallaudet University, where reciprocal first names were fairly common. The following episode recounted by one of the interviewees (extract 8) contrasts the address practices in Deaf and hearing academic environments, and effectively shows the risks of communication breakdown that may originate by speakers' different expectations on address, but also by the difficulties entailed in mediated communication involving interpreters.

(8) I was an undergraduate student here at Gallaudet and we used professors' first names. That was the 1980s or 90s – probably early 90s. The years went along and I came back to school to do my PhD here [i.e. Gallaudet]. At that time, I used people's first names and sign names. It was "I or P on-chest" name sign. I don't remember ever using the title D-O-C-T-O-R (fingerspelled). It was more like 'HI IRENE (mouths Irene while signing 'I' on chest), can I speak with you?" I was never corrected by professors here [i.e. Gallaudet]. Then I transferred to a different university. The university had a strong affiliation with a medical center. There were labs and hospitals that they had partnerships with. At that time, I was working with a neurologist who is also a friend of mine, and we were on a first-name basis with one another. Once that case was completed, I was communicating with my advisor about that case. The conversation was through video relay service and the interpreter didn't understand the spelling of their last name. I continually said doctor and spelled their last name. After doing this multiple times, I finally fingerspelled N-A-N-C-Y. The interpreter

voiced ‘Nancy’ to my advisor. My advisor reamed me out and said “Never call me by my first name! It’s always Dr. and the person’s last name.” [...] From that point, I understood clearly and after I defended my PhD, I talked with my advisor. She said “you can now call me by my first name because we are colleagues”. I thought it was very interesting how that transition happened, graduating and then being able to address someone by their first name. (female faculty member, 46 years old)

The use of titles is also reported by informants who attended Gallaudet University in those years, as a practice coexisting with the reciprocal exchange of first names. The importance of titles as markers of respect and effective strategies to clarify the separation of roles in academic settings is summarized in the brief anecdote in extract 9 below.

(9) I did my undergraduate and my graduate studies here [i.e. Gallaudet]. I saw one student calling another professor by their name and there was an explanation of roles as a professor. “I’m a professor, you are a student and it’s appropriate for you to address me as Dr. and my last name”. The veteran faculty said, “it’s important that students call you Dr. [last name]. It’s important that they don’t use first names because it can be disrespectful in an academic setting”. My ideas about address came from my experiences in the classroom as well as being advised by that faculty member. (female faculty member, 59 years old)

Some similarities in the use and perception of titles with other universities and the Deaf academic community at Gallaudet University were therefore already present several decades ago and were carried through to present day address practices by the next generation of academics.

7. Conclusion

This study examines address practices as reported by Deaf undergraduate students and faculty at Gallaudet University in Washington DC, the only liberal arts university in the world that is officially bimodal and bilingual with ASL and English. Aware that sociolinguistic parameters alone may not be entirely explanatory, a descriptive approach has been followed that aims to capture how social messaging unfolds in the Deaf community through the direct perception of its members. The data uncovers distinctive traits of address in this unique bilingual academic setting as well as degrees of contact with the non-signing hearing community.

Firstly, address forms and practices are shaped by the structural conventions of ASL. The nature of ASL grammar is such that signers mostly resort to manual, facial, and physical signals to express linguistic and social meanings, while lexical terms such as first names and sign names are less central in classroom interactions. Similarly, English honorific titles do not have standardized lexical items in ASL and need to be incorporated via fingerspelling, with additional communicative efforts for interlocutors and a penalization of the flow of conversation. As a result, Deaf participants do not regard formal titles and names as a priority in the visual modality of sign languages and favor gestures, eye gaze, body leans and facial expressions to convey an attitude of respect or familiarity, respectively.

A second factor influencing the expression of address terms in ASL are the educational and familial backgrounds experienced by Deaf students and faculty prior to entering the postsecondary environment. In the past, nearly all Deaf students attended schools designed specifically for Deaf children, where linguistics norms were taught and modeled by fellow students, faculty, and administrators. More recently, Deaf students increasingly experience a variety of educational backgrounds, including being mainstreamed in public schools where English is the language of instruction. Here Deaf students may learn address norms for an English-speaking environment but may not acquire address norms in ASL. Further, since the vast majority of Deaf children are born to hearing parents, the use of address forms may not be communicated readily in the home because the children may not have full access to their family language. Thus, Deaf students bring a variety of

educational and familial backgrounds without established norms for how language can mark social boundaries and show respect. While the Deaf faculty in this study also come from a variety of backgrounds, many express a desire for their students to learn to use address forms used in both the Deaf community in ASL as well as in written communication in English, so that they can successfully navigate their two speech communities.

Finally, social conditions and individual perceptions hold a powerful sway in how address terms are used in the Deaf community. The size of the community fosters familiarity, informality, and solidarity among members, which explains why formal address terms are often rejected in favor of language that binds the members together as one. Nonetheless, titles acquire a positive value in interactions involving hearing interlocutors and become powerful strategic way to promote the image of competent and successful Deaf professionals and scholars, with benefits for the whole Deaf community. We argue that these multifaceted attitudes towards the use of titles expressed in the interviews can be interpreted as a point of contact between the Deaf and the hearing culture, an area of sociopragmatics needing further research in which the meanings attributed to address practices partly overlap across the two communities.

The 'us' vs. 'them' distinction between Deaf culture and hearing culture sometimes dwelling in the common perception does not hold strong in address practices in the academic community investigated. Our findings rather indicate that the boundaries are blurred and show influences of language and cultural contact. The apparent clash of values gives way to a creative and dynamic system of social practices not yet explicitly normed but characterized by an ongoing negotiation of forms and identities, which has an impact not only on the Deaf community but necessarily on society at large. We hope this study will help the hearing and Deaf communities to recognize specificities and differences in address practices, thus reducing any potential misunderstanding in present and future interpersonal exchanges.

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Appendix A
Student Interview Protocol

Researcher: I'm looking at the list of courses that you are taking this semester. Who is the teacher for your _____ course? Your _____ course? Your _____ course? (Ask students to name their teacher for each of their courses). Do these teachers have sign names? If so, what are they?

Note: Have the student select one identified teacher who is Deaf. If the teacher has a PhD, that person should be selected for use in the subsequent questions. If the teacher doesn't have a PhD, select one of the other teachers. Ask the student to write the name of the selected teacher on a piece of paper. Then sign, "O.K. We're going to discuss this teacher for the rest of the interview (By pointing to the name, we do not impose an address form when prompting the student responses).

1. If you and a friend were on campus and came across (POINT TO PAPER WITH TEACHER'S NAME), how would you introduce them?

2. Imagine a situation in which you want to ask an extra week for the final paper for your class. You go to the teacher's office. Imagine that I am (POINT TO PAPER WITH TEACHER'S NAME), how would you make that request to me?

3. Imagine a situation that you are in class and (POINT TO PAPER WITH TEACHER'S NAME) is lecturing, but you missed something. How would stop the lecture and ask for the information? (Optional: Can you act it out?)

4. If you're in the dorm (or an apartment) and you talking to one of your friends from that class. How do you refer to (POINT TO PAPER WITH TEACHER'S NAME)? (Optional: Can you act it out?)

5. Now imagine that you need to request an appointment with (POINT TO PAPER WITH TEACHER'S NAME) for next week. Please type an email making that request on this laptop.

6. If you have a Deaf friend on campus and you run into this person (Show the student a photo of the President of Gallaudet University, Roberta Cordano), how would introduce her?

7. Do you think that using titles with your teachers' names is a way to show respect or is it unimportant?

8. Do you think a Deaf teacher with a PhD should be addressed as Dr.? Why or why not?

9. Have you ever used titles like "Mr." or "Dr." during your education? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Faculty Interview Protocol

1. Do you discuss with your undergraduate students how they should address you?

2. Do you have a preference on how undergraduate students address you or refer to you in class?

3. Do you have a preference on how undergraduate students address you or refer to you outside class?

4. Do you ever correct your undergraduate students in the way they address you?

5. How do you address undergraduate students in your teaching?

6. In what contexts do you feel undergraduate students should refer to you, either formally or informally?

7. Do you have any particular rules for the students about using your name sign?

8. Do you ever introduce yourself to other Deaf people with your title?

9. Do you think your professional attainments (e.g., PhD) and your academic position should be acknowledged by undergraduate students? If yes, in what way?

10. Do you think age affects the way students and faculty refer to one another?

11. Do you think academic position affects the way students and faculty refer to one another?

12. Can you recount an anecdote about a student approaching you in class for a request, for assistance, or for an extension of a deadline, in a way that you found inappropriate or offensive in terms of how the student addressed you or related to you?

13a. (Note: This question is for only those faculty who were named by the students). Here is an email written to you by your student. Could you please write out your response to the student on a laptop and send it to us?

13b. (Note: This question is for only those faculty who were NOT named by the students.) Please review these four mock emails from your students (show faculty mock emails) and write a response email for each student.

14. Where did you develop your ideas about how students should address faculty members?

15. Last question, in what ways do students exhibit respect for you?

Bionotes

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