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Deaf International Students at RIT/NTID and their Perceptions
about Learning English

Master's Project

Submitted to the Faculty
of the Master of Science in Secondary Education of Students
who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Rochester Institute of Technology

By
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In partial fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science

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Deaf International Students at RIT/NTID and their Perceptions about Learning English

I. ABSTRACT

Deaf international students are a vital part of the student population at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). Those students arrive at RIT with a variety of English skills and at various levels. The objective of this study is to investigate how deaf international students improve their English skills once they arrive at RIT/NTID. Did they improve their English skills through Spoken American English, American Sign Systems (i.e. American Sign Language and/or Signed English), and/or English classes from NTID/RIT? Furthermore, participants were asked how they felt about learning English and if their feelings changed while attending NTID/RIT. Participants were selected by responding to a formal e-mail announcing the nature of this study and its goal. Data were collected, analyzed and placed into thematic categories related to learning English, communication styles and feelings about improving their English. Findings show that, unlike American deaf students (Meath-Lang, 1980), deaf international students have generally positive experiences related to learning English. However, their responses indicate confusing views about using sign language.

II. INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

This investigation addresses deaf international students and how they improve their English skills once they arrive at RIT/NTID, as well as how they feel about learning English. In the era of the globalization, the United States is a part of a global village, which is a place that deaf foreigners admire. Also, English is a lingua franca of study in the United States.

While the term "foreign student" is used at many colleges, I will use the term "international students" because the term "international student" has been used in the bulletins and the brochures concerning non-American students at RIT. The term "international student" is most common, yet the terms "oversea students" and students from "Non-English Language Speaking Backgrounds" are recognized in the literature, and they are terms that are used respectively in Europe and in Australia. "Deaf" includes all students at NTID/RIT with a hearing loss.

Importance of the Problem

While there is some research related to young deaf individuals who immigrate to the United States with their families, there has been a lack of research concerning deaf students who come to the United States to study at the college or university level. Furthermore, there is limited research on deaf students where English is not their native language. As for deaf international students, there are a few studies that I will discuss in the literature review. Clearly, there is a

shortage of investigation on the needs and situations of deaf international students' learning English as a second language. Those situations in the area of English as a second language are distinctive because international deaf students face two different languages while they attend a college in United States, the spoken American English Language and American Sign Language.

When entering NTID, the ACT Assessment or the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT-1) is required for the American deaf students while the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is taken by all international students regardless their hearing status. Some international students enter directly into RIT because their scores on all the tests (ACT, SAT-1, and TOEFL) satisfy the admissions requirements. Some deaf international students do not satisfy the admissions requirements of RIT, but they satisfy the NTID admissions. Depending on whether these deaf international students enter RIT or NTID, they are then placed in an "appropriate" English class that matches their level of skill according to placement procedures.

As is mentioned above, there is limited research on deaf international students regarding how they perceive their continued English learning to satisfy college requirements. Students come from a variety of cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds. Using the point of view of varied backgrounds, this study will investigate deaf international students' perceptions of learning the English language. It will question those students who currently and in the past have been

managing at least with two languages while they were growing up. Because of the proximity of the distance and cultural outlook between the United States and Canada, international students from Canada will be excluded. This research project focuses on the experiences and perceptions of international deaf students who are currently enrolled in colleges at RIT. Also, this project will help in understanding issues regarding college deaf international students and their learning English which has not fully been investigated. Another goal is to investigate issues related to English services at NTID/RIT and how they can improve for deaf international students.

Order of Presentation

After the introduction, a literature review will follow with issues related to international students, hearing and deaf in United States and perceptions of American deaf students with regard to learning English. Specifically, the literature review starts with the characteristics of international students that may be applicable to deaf international students. Then, the paper will discuss the deaf international students in several universities in United States where deaf international student attend. Finally, the literature review will close with a discussion on the perceptions of deaf American students about English.

After the literature review, there will be a description of the procedures and the method of this research. This will be followed by a description of the

participants and by a short description of their background. The results and the discussion then follows. Results about the interviews will be reported.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Characteristics of International Students

International students leave their home country for a better education. According to Ryan and Zuber-Skerritt (1999), "they are required to study in a language and culture which for them may range from the very foreign to the very familiar, depending on their educational and cultural backgrounds" (p. 120). They vary in linguistic, cultural and religious background. Also, they may come from a culture that is not Western, and it is noted that students from non-Western cultures are disadvantaged (Ryan and Zuber-Skerritt, 1999). In addition, they may experience a lot of changes because of cultural shock (Bochner, 1982).

According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), international students have the characteristics of the sojourner groups. The authors define "sojourn" as a "temporary stay at a new place" (p. 112). These students who stay for a short time tend to be young, have high motivation, and have high adaptation ability. Furnham and Bochner refer to three types of academic difficulties that these students tend to approach: language problems, the high standards of universities (specifically, they refer to British universities, since their study occurred in England), and difficulties in relationships between teacher and students.

It is said that nations where the medium of instruction is English, students tend to go to countries to pursue their studies where the official language is the same as the medium of instruction in those nations (Cummings, 1991). It is well accepted that English is internationally recognized and used as a second language in educational systems around in the world where English is not a first language (Cummings, 1991). Therefore, the United States has many international students, hearing and deaf.

Deaf International Students in United States Universities

The United States has a long history in postsecondary education from the eighteen century. In 1784, the United States opened its doors to non-American residents seeking to attend an advanced education program (Wheeler, King & Davidson, 1925). In 1864, the educational opportunities for deaf Americans in the United States were accessible in the establishment of the Columbia Institution, later named Gallaudet University. Opportunities become available for deaf non-Americans to attend Gallaudet at least beginning in 1969 (Rees, 1983).

Currently, the educational system in the United States offers opportunities to deaf non-Americans to attend postsecondary programs. Worldwide, colleges that provide support services for deaf students are few; in the United States there is a comparatively larger number of postsecondary programs with support services for deaf students. In the geographical area of the United States, Gallaudet University, the National Institute for the Deaf (NTID) and California State University at

Northridge (CSUN) gather a significant number of deaf American and deaf non-American students. In addition to these postsecondary programs, Menchel (1995) refers to approximately 157 other postsecondary programs that provide services for deaf students. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the number of American deaf students enrolled in postsecondary programs, and the likelihood for determining the specific number of non-American deaf students is more limited. Menchel (1995) claims that about 11,000 American deaf students attend postsecondary schools intended for hearing students. Thus, any available evidence that would indicate a portrait of deaf non-American students who attend postsecondary programs in the United States is sketchy.

The study Hearing Impaired Foreign Students at Gallaudet College: Profiles and Trends investigates the statistical profiles of deaf international students at Gallaudet. Rees (1983) refers to deaf international students who attended Gallaudet from 1969 until 1983. In 1969-1970, 26 deaf international students enrolled into Gallaudet while in 1981-1982, the number of deaf international students increased to 110 students. It shows that there is no difference between deaf international students at Gallaudet and hearing international students regarding their characteristics. One characteristic was hearing and deaf international students were older than American students and, also, they tended to major in computer or business fields rather than Liberal Arts subjects such as history, English or social sciences.

As for the language backgrounds, deaf international students indicated that they came from countries where English was the official language "used by their government or was commonly commonly used in business transactions" (p. 90). Also, all of these students were exposed to English in school. This study shows that Gallaudet University didn't provide facilities for deaf international students to improve their English skills.

In 1965, the opportunity of a postsecondary technical education for deaf students happened when President Johnson established Public Law 89-36, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf Act. Three years later, in 1968, the National Institute for the Deaf (NTID) accepted the first deaf students. From the NTID annual report (1968), NTID's first students were limited to residents of the Rochester area (75 students). One student came from another state. The same report determined the prospective students as three from the Rochester area, 10 from the New York State and 26 from other states. As for the admission of the first international students, it appears it happened in 1969 with a student from Rome, Italy. Specifically, the report of the year 1969 states that, during the academic year 1969, 244 deaf students attended NTID. In describing the characteristics of those students in this report, the geographic distribution is divided by state/territory. In those states/territories, Rome, Italy is included as one student's origin. It is not clear if this student came from Italy for the purpose

of obtaining a degree or under a situation of immigration. In addition, it is not clear if the student was named officially as an international or foreign student.

As for information for non-American deaf students from 1969 until 1990, there is none available. However, it is possible some non-Americans attended NTID from the 1969 until 1990 when the entrance for admitting international deaf students was inaugurated. In the book, From Dream to Reality. The National Institute For The Deaf: A College of Rochester Institute Of Technology (Lang & Conner, 2001), there is a timeline describing significant events for NTID where it mentions the acceptance of the first international students. However, it seems that from 1990 until now, research on deaf international students at RIT regarding English language is almost absent.

Perceptions of American Deaf Students

Research on the perceptions of deaf students regarding learning English is very limited. Bonnie Meath-Lang (1980) investigated the perceptions of deaf students about learning the English language in her dissertation. 87 first-year students at NTID were asked to response to an open-ended essay question on their feelings about learning the English language. Those essays reflected the students' feelings about their previous English language experiences and "what they had learn about English and communication" (1980, p.33). Those students were profoundly deaf and for the most part, "their primary language learning environment" (1980, p.33) was the school. As for the mode of communication, there was a variety

because of the various educational experiences and languages used in the home. The data collected through the essays discussed those students' experiences on learning English.

According to Meath-Lang, most of the essays reflect a feeling of helplessness related to learning English because of parents and teachers trying to protect these deaf students "from failure". Also, the students demonstrate a passivity and dependence on the teachers for the correction of their English. For analyzing the data, the researcher elaborates on themes related to English: methods of learning English recalled, concepts of the functions of language, concepts of the role of reading, concepts of language in relationship to modality, sense of self-determination, feelings about teachers' communication skills, perception of the mother (family) as teacher, repetition of English-related aphorisms, conflict in feelings toward English, and perceptions about deaf students in relationship to hearing students. Meath-Lang found that the students viewed themselves as communicators in "need of improvement" but that who improve their skills. Therefore, the overall conclusion regarding these themes could be the need for improvement in learning English as both a language and a communication tool.

Conclusions

This literature review indicates that there is limited research on deaf international students. The research available related to culture issues investigates characteristics of international students. This research focuses on hearing

international students, which could apply to deaf international students. However, a need exists to more thoroughly cover a gap in the area of deaf international students. Also, the literature review provides some information about the enrollment of deaf international students in the north-American universities. The limitations of the review call for further investigation on deaf international students regarding academic issues. In particular, it would be of interest to investigate the perceptions of deaf international students toward English similar to the study by Meath-Lang. The limited research on deaf international students and their perceptions about learning English demonstrates the necessity for further research on the characteristics of deaf international students and their experiences about using English.

IV. METHOD

Procedure

The names of deaf international students were collected from the International Students Service at RIT. Non-Canadian students were eliminated from the sample. The remaining 25 non-Canadian international students received an e-mail in their RIT account with a questionnaire. The questionnaire sought answers to questions regarding their age, hearing loss and their major. The last questions addressed their preference for mode of communication and their willingness to be interviewed using the Instant Messenger. Twelve out of 25 students responded.

From those who responded, as their communication mode, nine preferred speech and sign at the same time or only signing and were willing to be interviewed. Two preferred speech only and one student filled out the questionnaire, but she was not willing to be interviewed. Therefore, those last students were excluded because the research was designed to additionally investigate the use of sign language. For this study, nine students were interviewed. After explaining the process of this research, they accepted the interview through Instant Messenger. The interviews were saved in a Text File or a WordPad and printed for purposes of analysis. The duration of these interviews was about 90 to 120 minutes. The data analysis for this research was conducted by looking for themes in the responses to each question.

Participants

Seven deaf international students out of nine, who were interviewed, were from Asia. Specifically, four participants were from India and their first language was English. Two participants came from China and learned Mandarin Chinese as their first language. One student was a native Japanese speaker since he was born and grew up in Japan before he entered the United States. The last two students were from Africa; one Ghanaian and one Ugandan. They learned English and local languages (Dagomba in Ghana and Luganda in Uganda).

The age of the nine participants ranged from 20 to 33 years old. The gender of the students was mostly male (six) and three were female.

Their hearing loss was profound, ranging from 80 db to 150 db. Four of the participants were born deaf; three lost their hearing between the ages of 1 and 3 and two students became deaf between the ages of 9 and 10. Regarding their preferred communication mode, seven out of nine participants preferred sign and speech together. The two students who stated that they preferred signing only came from Africa.

As for the majors of the students at NTID/RIT, there was a variety. Three out of nine students were majoring in Information Technology. Two were enrolled in Social Work. One student attended courses in Graphic Media, and one student was in Computer Sciences. Those seven students' aim was to receive a bachelor's degree. Two remaining students planned to receive NTID degrees: Associates in Occupational Studies and Associates in Applied Science - one in Digital Imaging and Publishing Technology and the other in Applied Computer Technology.

V. RESULTS

The results focus on the answers from the deaf international students. In depth information on each participant was collected via the questionnaire. Descriptive data concerning each of the participants' family and cultural background is reported below. Demographic data on each participant is shown in Appendix I. (Initials used to identify participants are not given in the appendix in order to insure confidentiality). After reading the responses for each question,

categories emerged and are discussed. The participants' quotes appear in italics. Instant Messenger was the instrument for the interviews; therefore, the English was not changed.

Background questions and questions on learning English

Each student has various cultural and educational experiences that may have influenced his/her perceptions on learning English and related issues that are raised through this paper. Thus, each student's background is described in the following section.

PM is an Asian student, and has a deaf sister and went to hearing school. Before he entered the hearing school from Kindergarten to 12 grade, he attended a deaf institute that provided the fundamental knowledge of his national language. He learned his national sign language when he was 13 years old. When he was 19 years old, he learned ASL after enrolling in a college in United States. He never took speech therapy courses, but his mother taught him how to speak in his national language. He uses a hearing aid. He started learning formal English in junior high school. He had a private tutor for English, which his school provided. The tutor was hearing, but he had experiences teaching English. PM uses only his national language with his family, and English is not considered as an official language in his home country.

RD learned English when she was about 2-3 years old at pre-school. But, at the same time, she used English with her parents. She does not have any deaf

siblings. Her communication with her family is based on speaking, using gestures and using some home signs. She attended pre-kindergarten for hearing students; at the age of five, she was enrolled in a deaf school, but for the last two grades she was in a school for hearing students. She didn't learn her national sign language, but she learned ASL when she entered Gallaudet, for a short time. Even though she attended a deaf residential school, she never used sign language in that school except fingerspelling. While her family speaks two other languages, RD uses only English with them. In her home country, English is commonly used by people with other local languages. In addition, she used a hearing aid until she entered into high school. Moreover, she never took speech therapy courses, but she used to regulate her voice by using speech machines.

AZ, as RD, learned English from her family, all hearing members. She went to a hearing school, which used English, the national language. In high school, she was waived from learning the second national language and focused on learning English. She learned the national sign language when she was 13 years old from her friends. She used to take speech therapy courses in English after school, and she used to wear a hearing aid. She communicates with her family in English, by speaking and by signing. She, also, had a private tutor for learning English. Her family speaks one local language at home, which AZ knows a little.

HQ used to communicate with her hearing siblings by speaking and sometimes by writing in her national language. Her family does not have any deaf

members, and they use the national language without any use of English. HQ attended an elementary school for hearing students. In middle school, she went to a deaf school where she learned the national sign language at the age of 14 years old. Also, she had the opportunity to learn ASL in her home country after her meeting with American deaf friends and from an ASL book. She has been using a hearing aid from the age of 14 years old, and she started learning English at the age of 17 years old when she attended a college for deaf students in her home country. She never had the opportunity to have speech therapy until she took speech therapy at NTID.

GA grew up with a lot of exposure to English in his home. There are other languages that his family used, but they only used English with GA. His family is hearing, and GA communicates with them by lipreading and writing and using some gestures. At age 17, after graduating from high school, he learned his national sign language through friends and, two years ago learned ASL. He attended a hearing school, but with one deaf friend. He has never used a hearing aid but he took speech therapy courses in English in his home country.

VN was born hearing, and his first language is the local language. When he became deaf at the age of 9, he started learning his country's sign language in a school for deaf students, which is very close to ASL. He started to learn English when he was 10 years old since the government required English as an official language. He never used a hearing aid nor took speech therapy courses.

BG's first language is a local language, but he was exposed to English at an early age because he has been speaking with his hearing family using these languages. He learned the national sign language from friends. His sister uses the alphabet of the national sign language when talking with BG. When he was 16 years old, he learned ASL from a class in his school. He used to wear a hearing aid, and he had experiences with speech therapy courses in his deaf school.

JS's first language was his national language, and he speaks with his family. His family is hearing, and his mother taught him how to speak. He started learning English when he was 12 years old. As a student, he attended a hearing school, and he was the only deaf student. He never learned the local sign language, and his first experience with sign language was ASL when he entered in RIT.

CP was born hearing, and his first language is the national language. English is the second official language in his home country, and he attended a school for hearing students. He communicates with his hearing siblings by speaking and using gestures in the local language. He learned his national sign language after his graduation from his high school. He learned ASL two years ago when he entered RIT.

Variations of English

One issue that came up in analyzing the data was the comment concerning the variations of English, especially British English and multilingual situations in deaf international students' home country.

PM: *"i learned English based on British English...since several teachers of mine learned it in British way".*

Comparing American English with British English, there is cultural and geographic variation. Two students feel comfortable with the pronunciation of spoken British English. The first one, PM, is able to depend on his hearing while the second, VN, is profoundly deaf.

PM: *"American English omits a lot of words and gramamtical words are sometimes vague... but British English is very classical and it's pretty clear...British English is a lot easier to pronounce ...compared to american englishamerican english makes a lot of dull noises...makes a lot of distortion... English pronunciation is not accrrurate"*

VN: *"i enjoyed speaking british than american...because i am familiar with british's accent...americans find it hard to understand my spoken words because of the accent...while in X country, almost many people i spoke to understand me"*

Also, in countries where the English is not the official national language, the national language influenced their English and their pronunciation.

PM: *"we don't speak english like american people do...and pronounce as English, we take similar sounds and pronounce as English ...for example*

tv=terebi, taxi=takushi ...sounds like english ...but it sounds completely different ...but we have some exposure to english in our daily lives in [Asian country]"

Because of the variations in pronunciation of spoken English in different countries, three students are not eager to practice speaking in speech therapy because the American accent doesn't apply in their home country.

GA: (Q: *Is it important to know how pronounce the English words?*)

"no...because pronunciation in America and India is different...pronunciation in UK and India is same..."

VN: *"my fear is, they [speech therapists] teach students to speak with an american accent ...which i think is fine but how will I speak to the people in X country who have thir own accent."*

CP: *"my ascent is not like a merican...book... in America... you may not say k... or sound k...but something else...i cannot remember all...the words...but you should think of an ascent that is foreign...(Q: so is it important for you how to pronounce Engl words? With an american accent?) no... pronunciation is ... an important factor ...american ascent is not important"*

Another student from South Asia, BG, raises the issue of exposure to multilingual situations by using several languages in one country, for example in India:

BG: *"hindi languages in broadcasts in tv... in local states, man/woman speak bengali...sometimes english and hindi... in all over india, man/woman speak hindi in tv"*

One student from India, GA, prioritizes the importance of the knowledge of English here in United States.

GA: *"...in America only English language are spoken...but in India English and hindi language are spoken...more knowledge of english language in America because there is only one official english language in America"*

Briefly, the deaf international students are exposed to variations of English, mostly British English before they deal with American English. Because of this variety in English, many international students are not attracted to speech therapy in the United States. Also, they experience multilingual situations including their national language and English, or English as a national language with local languages.

Everyday use of English

RIT is a school which strongly supports using technological devices such as computers. Instant Messenger System is a part of the everyday communication for

RIT students, especially deaf students. These students commented on the value of Instant Messenger for developing their English skills.

RD: *"...aim helps to teach deaf people to improve better conservations... in english"*

The student feels that chatting on AIM helps him to understand more about American culture.

JS: *(Q: AIM or MSN... you think chatting with native speakers of English, can you improve your English?) "of course... some of them represent American culture"*

CP has a different view on using Instant Messenger and explains how this could help deaf people to improve their English skills.

CP: *"Englis is a language that is learned in school...in most of the times... that spoken English is not the same as one in the schools... that is why even native speakers have to learn it too... learn it...in schools ...(Q: deaf could learn the Spoken English through Instant Messenger?) ...somehow... like if I say, Hey, what is up? a deaf will also copy it and one day... he or she will say the same to his buddies...so in this way, they learnt a lot" about American English conversation.*

Parts of spoken American English are the idioms and their meaning is affected by the American hearing community culture. In academia, the deaf international students have to use American formal English; however when they approach the idioms, they become puzzled.

RD: *"i remember when i was in US at beginning I did not understand american idioms...it confused me and i thought it was strange and funny...for example... when i heard "What's up?" and I thought it meant what will it be there above me?"*

Close captioned TV programs provide an opportunity to deaf people to have access to spoken English that is often used in conversations. Thus, deaf international students can be exposed to everyday American English through close captioned TV programs.

RD: *" it is a great benefit and a huge support to deaf people. I think they can help to improve english skills for people who know english but for international students who dont know english, it would be harder to understand closed captioned in english, maybe it will help if there are their first languages included in closed captioned with english subtitles and they can figure out and learn what they mean when they see their own languages"*

Deaf international students take advantage of the technological tools available at RIT/NTID, and they learn everyday English through Instant Messenger and close captioned TV programs.

Communication styles the teacher would use in teaching English

NTID teachers are required to sign in the classroom, while RIT teachers are not. Those RIT teachers who sign are rare. RIT teachers typically use sign language interpreters when Deaf students are enrolled in their countries. However, NTID/RIT teachers exhibit a great variety of communication styles and sign language skills. The category of the communication styles shows that the students would like teachers who know sign to use ASL because those students can comprehend the concepts better than in signed English. However, when the teacher has low signing skills, all deaf international students prefer speech with signing as the communication mode. When teachers use speech and signing, students can comprehend better the concepts by lipreading or listening to the teacher's speech. However, their preferred mode is ASL

PM: "...total communication...simultaneous communication... use both sign and spoken English....so i wont have to misunderstand... a lot of teachers ...s signing skills is not that great ...and i can see that ... so i dont want to misunderstand... well if teacher sign clear...sign only is fine...but if not... they must use Voice and Sign... "

RD: "... for my major courses, all the professors do not know sign languages but for Liberal art courses with ntid sections, some professors know sign language. One of my professors for Literature 1 and 2 uses Spoken English, not ASL... i mean the professor using signing but it is PSE like spoken English, not ASL. I think PSE (signing and spoken english) ... but it dont matter to me... ASL is fine...Funnily ASL gets me attracted more than PSE...but it tends to weaken my skill of English conversation"... (Q: do you comprehend the concepts while the teacher using PSE?) "...no"

VN grew up using the local sign language of his home country which is very close to ASL.

VN: "I understand the lecture better when the teacher uses signed English than pure ASL...but i communicate comfortably with Pure ASL"

He explains the reason:

VN: "listening and communicating are different...becasse, most of the professors that teach at RIT are nto very good at ASL, so when they communicate in sign language you understand them bette because of the pattern of sentences in english helps you even if you miss some words... i mean signed english...but when they communicate in asl, you

see them struggling with it... so it makes understanding them difficult."

If the teachers were skilled in ASL, it seems that it would be the best for this student.

VN: *"I will love that"*

Another student who learned ASL in Gallaudet before entering RIT feels that teachers' signing skills influence students' skills.

AZ: *"...that is why i am weak in sign language... most teachers don't know asl...they use sign and speech together... i think i would be helpful to take ASL course for international student and teachers."*

However, this student is concerned about her English skills and how she can improve her skills.

AZ: *"i prefer speech and sign at the same time...because it teacher use ASL, the student learns from it and English does not improve because ASL is very short."*

BG was exposed to ASL at Gallaudet. However, he doesn't seem to understand the difference between ASL and other signed systems.

BG: *"i like both voices and signed asl.. i can follobw both becasue i am ot skilled in asl. If i follow voices (lipread) i can understand what teachers are trying to say"*

One student, JS, never learned sign language before learning ASL. He started learning ASL one year ago when he took an ASL class at NTID after his arrival at RIT/ NTID. Without any exposure to signs, he accepts that ASL is useful. However, he prefers teachers use speech and sign, but it seems he also is confused about signed English and ASL.

JS: "if it is ASL, i have to admit that it is helpful... of course, it also help me lots... sign English and spoken English... of course, i comprehend, but, i can not understand interpreter well...spell is too fast and too much repeat..."

Also, an RIT student, CP, who took an ASL class, gives the same confusing answer about ASL and Signed English.

CP: "signed eng...with asl...and oral... a combination off all...(Q: why?) for variety and diversity... (Q: Can you understand the concepts conveyed in signed English?) somehow...yes... but not all... like 50 ... 50-50 (Q: if you have hard time to understand, what do you do?) just ignore them... leave them"

Those comments do not give a clear idea of what deaf international students know about ASL and Simultaneous Communication. It seems deaf international students feel comfortable when they communicate in ASL but they may think that Simultaneous Communication is more appropriate to use in the classroom.

Academic English

Even if students know English fairly well, they recognized that they have to take English courses to improve their skills in academic English. Students show that those courses improved their English.

PM: *"...i noticed a lot of improvement... especially in academic english... since i learned how to write a research paper efficiently... and do summary...also i was exposed to a lot of literature... at RIT...it was quite good... that helped me passing all of liberal arts courses... with As"*

One student, RD, who has strong confidence about her skills in English, separates Literature from English courses, and she explains why literature was useful to her.

RD: *"only Literature courses 1 and in RIT, not english courses... it just improved my analysis and theory skill... i remember that my professor at literature said that literature is only processor of understanding the theories... anyway literature dont improve my english skills since I arrived to US, just same english skills but improved my theoretical and anayalis skill"*

VN: *"i think there is no problem in writing...but to be frank, i think i learned a lot in writing in my literature 2...there i learned the pattern of writing in regard to researches...transitional sentences...and how to*

put on a well-developed research papers...also to be honest, i think writing that i learned in my Literature 2 at rit, was helpful, very very I....I benefitted from it a lot than the rest."

Comparing the English courses at RIT with those at NTID, one student, BG, preferred the English courses at RIT.

BG: *"... WCI and WCII are better than NTID english level... i learn a lot afrom WCI and WCII...(Q:NTID English courses didn't help you?) no NTID is just like a stupid prisoner that I hate most"*

BG, transferred from Gallaudet, and his comment about the English courses at Gallaudet was:

BG: *"I was accepted for freshman instead of using ELI courses... well english course in gally is lousy... and i feel that teachers give easy way to deaf students becasue they know that deaf students are weak in englsih.. damned... i do not like it. i prefer rit.. more strict and more challenges"*

Even though this student grew up using English, he feels his weakness in grammar is the verb tenses.

BG: *" i have been to movie...i went to movie ... something like that"*

AZ, whose first language is English, admits that she never learned how to write an essay. She took some courses at Gallaudet and they were too easy for her AZ:

"...Gallaudet I did not like it....it was too basic for me, i felt i was in a baby to learn

abc". When taking NTID and RIT courses, she feels she learned a lot, and the time was not wasted.

AZ: *"At NTID you learn the steps how to write an essay using thesis, body paragraph, and conclusion....in RIT I learn about research paper, compare and contract, MLA."*

One student, VN, feels that taking English class at RIT changed his skills because RIT requires American English.

VN: *"...it just forced me to drop my British English for American's"*

CP, who self-evaluates his English skills as being 100%, accepts that RIT English courses were helpful to him. Also, AZ supports that tutors are useful for improving her English skills.

CP: *"... in professional term...like research work... proper citing of courses...writing convections and rules... I have better knowledge now... in professional term... can write a good term paper unlike before... more improve power of understanding and analysis...etc"*

AZ: *"to improve writing skills it go to tutor... the best way it to get feedback.. with feed back, i would not know where are my mistakes"*

One student, JS, was required to take English courses at ELC, the English Language Center at RIT. This Center focuses on teaching English as a second language to hearing international students. Recently, the Center established a summer program, and it now also includes services for international deaf students.

JS feels he didn't notice any improvement in his English skills while taking English courses at ELC. This was before the program for deaf, American and international, students was set up. Instead of the English courses at ELC, he feels that his upper-level NTID English course was helpful.

JS: "...wrong courses for me. The system is not good for deaf international students... ELC does not have experiences to how to teach deaf international students... is supposed to be a center specialised on teaching English... but, they had been teaching hearing students... I do not think i needed to study english at ELC... in fact, i thought i improved just this quarter that i took writing Communication course"

One question in the interview was related to their weakness in English skills. These Deaf international students' answers vary.

RD: "at first i used to be weak at conclusions but now they improve so much... and other things... I think sometimes it is hard to make good hooks in first line of papers to make lasting impressions... and a bit weak of sentence structure especially in research but others in essays or letters are fine"

AZ: "I am good in throwing ideas, examples, sentence structure, body paragraph, etc but sometimes i am not perfect in grammar... for example, i went to shopping, swimming, hiking... that is known as parallel line."

Deaf international students feel confident about their academic English because the English courses related to the critical literacy are closer to their expectations about improving their English skills than functional literacy courses. As for improving their English, tutoring is a way for them to have a feedback about their writing skills where they are able to recognize their weaknesses.

Suggestions for how to improve English skills

The deaf international students provide some ideas how they improve their English skills. PM is able to understand by reading four languages. But RD talks about English as a second language but she doesn't mention ASL as a second language at all. From CP's comments, it seems English is a language that deaf international can learn and use well.

PM: "... I know how to learn a language... that's the best thing I know... but its really hard for me to teach the way I do... to other deaf people here... because they don't know how to do it... just face it and learn it from your experience.. watch tv... movie... talk with your friends who are good at english... online whatever that would help you.. and you can learn from that"

RD: " I never experienced myself about this and I dont know how international students will be successful in gaining second language - english. I guess they have to take english courses as second language... for example, many students take French or german classes

at rit, they are doing well at learning second language.. so i think it would be fine for international students to take second language classes"

CP: "read books... newspapers... check dictionary.. write letters to family and friends... reading and writing go hand in hand.. read also novels... and magazines... [deaf international students] never give up... Always associate with people who knows english and are willing to help out... never say I know... always says do not know so that are to learn... remember that learning is a lifelong process... keep up"

It seems they know they can improve their English skills by using everyday English; however they don't see ASL as a foreign language.

Feelings about English language

It seems for some these students English is challenging, regardless if English is their native language or not. AZ learned English in her native land and practiced English with her family. But HQ refers to the benefit of learning a foreign language:

AZ: "english is tough...i hate doing an essay and it dreading me.....i am afriad of grammars...but it challenge to me...that life and I have to face it...I understand the language and know how to make sentence, yet still my English is not perfect and i am weak in grammer"

HQ: *"it would wider your chances for the future... you would have more chances if you learn a foreign language"*

One of the questions focused on the self-evaluation of the students. Since some of the students have learned English as their first language, it was interesting to investigate about their feelings toward their English skills.

RD: *".... When i arrived in US, I found deaf people are not good at english and I compared with them, I feel 90 percent good but comparing with hearing english spoken people I feel like 75 to 80 percent good"*

PM is from East Asia, and English is not the native language. PM shares the same feeling of having good skills in English in comparison with American deaf students. If 100% means completely fluent in English, PM evaluates his skills:

PM: *"95% ...but I still got a lot to learn... "*

For BG, English is the key to getting a job and staying in the United States.

BG: *"...yeah...it is very important for everywhere especailly for job....also getting admission to college/university in usa... i am vry lucky to learn about englsih"*

PM feels that learning English has the benefit of access to expression and communication with people of various cultures because English is universally used. Also, RD mentions the example of the Internet.

PM: *"as i learn english, i am able to express my opinions or idea in a better way and i m able to communicate with a lot of people from the diverse cultures...like i can communicate with u"*

RD: *"I think so because it is good for general and world wide communication like internet or anywhere.."*

The student from Africa, CP, saw learning English as a positive challenge.

CP: *"It was a rebel in me...that forced me to study eng. lang as a way of expressing frustrations with my teachers who had ignored me"*

Behind the motivation and the goal for getting a degree, students' attitude influences their process of learning and attending English classes. PM demonstrates one characteristic that international students have: a different attitude towards teachers.

PM: *"....they [teachers] are superior to me.....and i have to obey them as much I can...to show my respect... If they [deaf American students] change the attitude of learning something, they could improve their English...not to criticize teachers."*

Deaf international students do not perceive English as an easy language to learn, however, they approach English as a tool that they can handle. They see benefits of learning and improving English because they view English as a big advantage in their communication and future careers.

Other Comments

During the interviews, interesting comments appeared that are not related to the themes discussed so far. In particular, the students commented about American Deaf students' English skills, the benefits of speech and lipreading and ASL courses. Also, American deaf students' attitudes and behaviors were issues that were discussed during the interviews. Deaf international students' negative comments about American deaf students are interesting because they reflect the difference between cultures and experiences of both groups.

PM: "... I believe my english is a lot better than american deaf people...A LOT better ...and i believe american deaf people's literacy problem is pathetic...poor english... ASL is the first language ...but that is a good excuse ...of their poor English (Q: what do you think? what is the best way for deaf to learn English?...) American students... they *MUST* have a good educational background in early ages... they have to break the language barrier prior to the age 7 or 9 or something....(Q: American deaf are exposed to English but they are still struggling with this English) well... they are LAZY... I am telling you... complainin about the system... and blame everything... but think about it... if you study hard... you can improve it"

BG: "... international students work more harder than american... some american are smart let say 40% smart... 60% lazy"

Another issue was the use of cochlear implants. For most deaf international students, cochlear implants are a sort of negative or obscure idea.

PS: "(Q: Cochlear implant?) HELLLLLL NO"

BG: "(Q: using a cochlear implant would it help you? in improving English..) god...how do i know"

Deaf international students feel that speech therapy and lipreading help to improve their English skills, and they explain their views on the positives and the negatives of speech therapy and lipreading.

PM: "My first language is spoken X [related to his country], so i learned different languages prior to English by spoken languages... so it would be better than learning through sign language... i had a late exposure to sign myself... voice with lipreadin ... that would help a lot... sign language is a visual language ...so it doesn't help much"

RD: "I think lipreading just help to understand what people talk about it if they dont know signing... for speech therapy it help me to speak better and make people understand me better if they dont know how to understand my signing... for improving my english skills, I think

reading and writing is one way to improve that skill... not speech therapy or lipreading"

PM describes his experience about how he learned ASL and English as a second language at another college before he entered RIT. HQ mentions the benefit of taking ASL class and learning about role models in the American Deaf community.

PS: *"I attended ESL for the Deaf and took ASL for one semester... and I mastered ASL in 3 months cuz I socialized with deaf people who use ASL... not SEE or PSE... all of them are completely deaf ... and they had poor English, so it was good for me to ASL"*

HQ: *"[ASL class]... yes, it was helpful... not wasting time... he [teacher] introduced us about the famous American deaf people.. so I had started founding deaf people could be successful if they work hard.. which is more precious than learning ASL"*

Deaf international students consider themselves as different from American deaf students because of the variety of cultural and educational perspectives. Also, they feel some benefits of speech therapy and lipreading to improve their English; however, they don't see any advantages to having a cochlear implant. Two students raised the issue of ASL as different language from English and the issue of American Deaf culture.

VI. DISCUSSION

The literature review demonstrates that most of the research available on international students focuses on hearing students' characteristics. There is limited research on deaf international students in American colleges. Clearly, there is a need to develop an understanding about deaf international students' perceptions about learning English similar to deaf students' perceptions investigated by Bonnie Meath-Lang.

When hearing international students enter into an American college, they approach culture shock and the difficulties in adjusting to American English. Unlike hearing international students, deaf international students have different experiences because they are international students. Entering NTID/RIT, they often take ASL courses, where they learn about American Deaf culture. Also, they have to get accustomed to academic American English and everyday American English that deaf international students lack because of limited access to spoken conversations.

The findings of this project about deaf international students at NTID/RIT show that these deaf international students have positive feelings about English, even though they recognize English is a tough language to learn. Their feelings are positive because English is a language that is used all over the world. Deaf

international students also state that speaking English provides a benefit in finding a job or for furthering their education.

The findings related to the theme of communication styles of teachers are confusing. Deaf international students admit that they are attracted to American Sign Language; however, they prefer speech and sign together in the classroom.

These results indicate that deaf international students are not aware of the difference between ASL as a language of the Deaf community and Signed English or Simultaneous Communication as inventions to support the communication between low-skilled hearing signers and Deaf signers. Yet, deaf international students believe that using Simultaneous Communication helps them improve their English skills. These perceptions are puzzling, but they are understandable because deaf international students have not been exposed to American Deaf Culture and the various communication methods used in education with deaf and hard of hearing students prior to coming to this country. The results indicate that most of these deaf international students are late learners of natural sign language and of American Sign Language and they have had limited exposure to their national deaf culture compared to American deaf students. For some of them, they have more exposure to printed and spoken English. Learning national sign language late or learning ASL without clarifications of differences between ASL, signed English or Simultaneous Communication appears to result in a disadvantage of comprehending teachers or interpreters who have various styles of signing in the classroom. This

disadvantage would be an obstacle in their process of learning for their major. Also, it would be an obstacle for communication with teachers, other deaf students, and faculty/staff on campus.

Perceptions of deaf international students regarding everyday English indicates that, beyond academic English there are idioms, everyday conversations used on Instant Messenger and spoken American English used in close-captioned television programs. Before entering into a college in United States, deaf international students have limited exposure to spoken American English. Thus far NTID/RIT does not have any systematical way to help them improve their skills in spoken American English.

Unlike Meath-Lang's study about deaf American students and their negative feelings about English language, deaf international students do not feel helpless and dependent on others for learning English. Deaf international students indicate that they feel English language is manageable for a deaf to learn and use well.

Deaf international students face two languages and two cultures when enter into a college in the United States, American English, American culture and American Deaf culture. However, this study shows that deaf international students are not aware of American Sign Language and its role in Deaf community. It seems while growing up, they were dependent on speech or speech with sign and they are not aware of ASL and/or other sign languages as languages with their own grammatical and syntactical features. Thus, it would be helpful for deaf

international students to take preparatory courses in American Sign Language and American English, including academic terminology used often in American colleges and spoken American used in everyday life.

Also, a survey at the end of every academic year at RIT/NTID would indicate if deaf international students are benefiting from English courses at RIT/NTID. Taking courses and feeling that those courses didn't help in improving English would be a negative for deaf international students. Consequently, future research needs to be done to determine the characteristics of deaf international students related to English as a second language.

Further research could focus on identity issues since deaf international students have their home cultural identity; however, a question arises if they can identify themselves as American Deaf when they become involved with the Deaf American culture and are exposed to ASL. In addition, research could focus on their experience in learning English in their home countries by investigating the methods and systems of teaching English as a second language in comparison to the American educational system of teaching English as a second language. Finally, in the area of applied linguistics, studies related to the influences of variations of English on deaf international students' academic American English would be useful for ESL teachers of deaf students in order to develop ways to successfully teach English as a second language to deaf international students.

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DEAF: BORN OR LATE (AGE)	AGE/ GENDER	YEAR/ MAJOR	HOME COUNTRY	DEGREE OF HEARING LOSS	FIRST TIME ENROLLED NTID/RIT	FIRST TIME IN USA	PREFERRED COMMUNICATION	LANGUAGES USED BY STUDENT IN HOME COUNTRY
At birth	30 / male	Information Technology	India	80 dB	Fall 2001	Fall 2000	Sign and Speech	Bengali, English and Indian Sign Language
At birth	25 / female	Graphic Media	India	120 dB	Spring 2002	Summer 1999	Sign and Speech	English
At birth	20 / female	Digital Imaging and Publishing Technology	India	100 dB	Fall 2001	Fall 2000	Sign and Speech	English
At birth	31 / male	Applied Computer Technology	India	105 dB	Fall 2001	Fall 2001	Sign and Speech	English and Indian Sign Language
Late (3 yrs old)	29 / female	Information Technology	China	95 dB	Fall 1999	Fall 1999	Sign and Speech	Chinese and Chinese Sign Language
Late (3 yrs old)	22 / male	Computer Sciences	China	120 dB	Fall 2002	Fall 2002	Sign and Speech	Chinese
Late (1 yrs old)	23 / male	Information Technology	Japan	95 dB	Fall 1999	Spring 1998	Sign and Speech	Japanese and Japanese Sign Language
Late (9 yrs old)	24 / male	Social Work	Ghana	Unknown	Fall 2000	Fall 2000	Sign only	Dagbani, English and Ghana Sign Language
Late (10 yrs old)	33 / male	Social Work	Uganda	120 dB	Summer 2001	Summer 2001	Sign only	Luganda, English and Uganda Sign Language

Appendix II

Questionnaire

Questionnaire should be completed as soon as possible

Name:

Date:

Age (optional):

Sex: Female____ Male____

Major:

Age became deaf:

Degree hearing loss:

Date first enrolled at NTID/RIT:

Date first entered in USA:

Home country:

How do you prefer to communicate most of the time (please circle only one):

A. Sign alone?

B. Speech alone?

C. Sign and speech together (simultaneous communication)?

D. Other? _____ (please specify)

If requested, do you would like an interview through MSN/AIM/Yahoo! Messenger?

Yes____ No____

Appendix III

Interview Protocol

I. Purpose of the study

II. Background Questions

Deaf: born or late?

Age

Year/Major

Home country

Family info: hearing or deaf

How does your family communicate with you? Signing or speaking?

School: residential or mainstream?

How old were you when you started to learn sign language?

Did you take any speech therapy course in your home country? If so, did you get practice in English language?

Do you use any technical device - hearing aid or cochlear implant?

Without hearing aid, can you hear a little?

III. Questions on learning English

How old were you when you started to learn English?

Where did you learn English? Did you take courses in English language at school? Did you have any tutors? How did you get practice? By writing or reading?

Does your family speak English at home? Do you use spoken or written English with your family? What other languages does your family speak at home?

In your home country, do people use English in public, for instance names of stores, conversation in a public place, products etc? Is the English language recognized as one of the official languages of your home country?

IV. Feelings / perceptions

From school in your home country was learning English a positive experience for you? Or negative? Why?

Now as a college student, are your experiences in learning English positive? Why?

Can you compare your experiences from school to college?

Do you have good experiences from the English courses at NTID or RIT? If you took courses at NTID and RIT, can you compare your experiences from both of those colleges? Did you notice any improvements during your studying the English courses at NTID and RIT?

Do your teachers know use sign language? Pure ASL or Signed English? Do they use Total Communication? If so, does lipreading help you to comprehend English?

What of kind of communication do you prefer your teacher use? ASL, Total Communication, Signed English without voice? Why? If you prefer

ASL, how do you learn or recognize the phonological features of the English words and does the syntax of ASL influence in your writing English? If you prefer Total Communication and you don't use any hearing aid, how does the Total Communication help you? If you prefer Signed English, do you comprehend the concepts in signed English?

Do you think speech therapy or lipreading helps you improve your skills in English language? If so, how? Example?

Do either a hearing aid or cochlear implant help you improve your skills in English? How? Example?

What do you do in order you improve your English - Read books in your free time, use a dictionary, watch close-captioned TV programs? What about writing? How do you think you can improve your skills in writing English? Do you work with tutors? Does their feedback help you improve in written English? Do you think using AIM can improve your English when communicating with native speakers of English? Do you comprehend the concepts of English idioms, and if not, what do you do in order you comprehend them?

Appendix IVINFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project: Master's Thesis Project

Your participation in a study research of deaf international students at RIT/NTID and their perceptions on learning English is being requested. This research is being conducted by Argiroula Zangana for her completing her thesis at the MSSE program. The purpose of this research is to help determine deaf international students' experiences on learning English. There is a questionnaire and an interview which will take about 1 hour and half.

There is only minimal risk to individuals who participate in this research study. All of your responses will be kept in strict confidence and your names will in no way related to any data reported. Only identification false names will be used, not real names. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and please be advised that you can withdraw from the study at any time, and without penalty whatsoever, without affecting any services you receive from NTID/RIT, including your participation in classes or your grades.

Following the completion of the study, you will be advised of the results if you so desire. Results will be given regarding grouped data only. No individual data will be reported.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact Argiroula Zangana by electronic mail axz2727@rit.edu

I have read the above description of this study and affirm my willingness to participate

Name (please print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____