



Children of Deaf Adults in Ireland: Bilingualism in Irish  
Sign Language and English, and Biculturalism in Hearing  
and Deaf cultural communities

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## ABSTRACT

Hearing children raised by d/Deaf adults (CODAs) are a unique group in terms of their linguistic and cultural upbringing. They are potential members of the Deaf community, if their parents pass on sign language and Deaf culture to them, and at the same time they pass as typical members of the hearing community, acquiring the spoken language and majority culture of the community. To date, very little research has looked at CODAs and no research has looked at adult Irish CODAs as a linguistic and cultural minority. This study aims to begin filling this gap in the literature and explore the language, culture and identity of Irish CODAs.

This study used mixed methodology and two distinct samples. Questionnaires and follow-up interviews were used with a sample of 18 Irish CODAs. Additionally, a focus group was conducted with 3 leaders of the Deaf community in Ireland in order to include the perspectives of d/Deaf individuals and the Deaf community regarding CODAs.

The findings indicate that Irish CODAs identify with a CODA identity. They see bilingualism in Irish Sign Language (ISL) and English, and biculturalism in Irish hearing and Irish Deaf cultures, as key aspects of that identity. They see themselves as members of the Irish Deaf community but can struggle to construct a role for themselves in the Deaf community due to their status as hearing individuals, and in the hearing community due to low awareness on the part of hearing individuals about Deaf culture and ISL. These findings highlight the need for greater awareness about CODAs in the Deaf community, and for the hearing community to increase their awareness about the Deaf community for an improved minority-majority community co-existence, and suggest that more support is needed for CODAs within the education system to ensure their linguistic and educational potential is achieved. The results also indicate that there are many promising areas for future research where CODAs can teach us more about issues such as language maintenance, sign and spoken language bilingualism and minority-majority identity construction.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides an introduction into the background and aims of this study and will outline each chapter.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

This research looks at the language, culture and identity of hearing individuals, who were raised by one or more d/Deaf adults. These adults are commonly referred to as Coda/s/ CODAs (children of d/Deaf adults) or, while under 18, they are referred to as KODAs (kids of d/Deaf adults). Throughout this dissertation, CODAs will be used to describe hearing children of deaf adults. CODAs are sometimes also referred to as 'mother father deaf' as this is how they are described when using Irish Sign Language (Clark, 2003), which will be referred to throughout this dissertation by its acronym, ISL.

The use of the combined small and capital 'd/D' when using the word 'd/Deaf' is in recognition of the distinction between the medical term, deaf with a small 'd', and the term for a member of the Deaf community and culture, Deaf with a capital 'D', and how d/Deaf individuals vary in how they describe themselves (Pizer, 2008; Mathews, 2011). By using the combined form individuals or groups who identify as Deaf or deaf are both represented without being forced under a label that they are uncomfortable with.

Over 90% of d/Deaf individuals are born into hearing families, and over 90% of d/Deaf parents give birth to hearing children (Clark, 2003; Karchmer and Mitchell, 2004). Most d/Deaf individuals eventually adopt sign language as their primary language for communication (Piñar, Dussias and Morford, 2011). In the Republic of Ireland ISL is most commonly used, meaning that in a family unit with d/Deaf parents and children (where one or more are hearing), ISL is often the primary language of communication for the family, though families vary in how they choose

to communicate (Pizer, 2008). This study will examine how language proficiency and social networks of CODAs (and the language use and cultural connections within them) interact with, and relate to, their bilingual, bicultural identity.

Language proficiency in English and ISL are examined in this study as important variables when looking at language maintenance and attrition, the role of language in CODA identity, and language in the family environment in a mixed hearing-d/Deaf home. The social networks of CODAs will be explored as a measure of contact between CODAs and the hearing and d/Deaf linguistic and cultural worlds. These variables will in turn be examined to see if they are linked to CODAs' language proficiency and identity as bilingual biculturals. Bilingualism, biculturalism and CODA identity are explored to see what Irish CODAs identify with, in order to learn more about Irish CODAs and why they do or do not identify with these terms or concepts.

At present no research within the field of Applied Linguistics has been carried out focusing on Irish CODAs as the population of interest. There is a paucity of research on sign language communities in Ireland more generally as well as a paucity of Applied Linguistics research on CODAs internationally. This research aims to begin addressing this gap in the literature.

## **1.2 RATIONALE**

The interest in this research area is both academic and personal. The personal interest comes from my own family: my aunt is Deaf but my mother and her family were never encouraged to learn ISL, meaning my aunt's primary language and culture is different to that of the rest of the immediate family. Academically, there is a paucity of research and theory available on sign language bilinguals, and on ISL users in Ireland. This may simply be because many researchers have not had first-hand experience with sign language and sign language users. This is an important area of research both to develop the academic field and to address the ways in which policy regarding CODAs fails to take into account their unique

linguistic and educational needs, an issue reflecting the overall failure of policy to meet the needs of the Deaf community, as a linguistic and cultural group, in Ireland, and further afield, to date (c.f. Section 2.4).

### **1.3 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION**

In Chapter 2 the key concepts examined in this research will be outlined and relevant literature on these topics will be critically reviewed. In Chapter 3 the mixed methodology used in this research will be discussed, the questionnaire, interview and focus group instruments will be examined and the research population and sample will be outlined. In Chapter 4 the results of the research are presented and in Chapter 5 these findings are discussed in light of the literature available to date. In Chapter 6 conclusions are drawn from the results of the research, as well as acknowledging limitations of the research and highlighting directions for future research.

### **1.4 RESEARCH AIMS**

The first aim of this study is to investigate how Irish adult CODAs view themselves, their identity, their culture and the languages they use. The second aim is to explore the variables that affect CODA identity, to what extent their social network is associated with their language proficiency, how their language proficiency relates to their identification with a bilingual, bicultural CODA identity, and what other variables the CODAs themselves identify as important factors in influencing their language, culture and identity. The third aim is to explore how the Deaf community view CODAs, how CODAs are perceived by Deaf parents and what is the role or place for adult CODAs in the Deaf community in Ireland. Finally, this study aims to find out where future research in this area should be directed, based on the results of this research.

Before examining the instruments and results of the research carried out for this dissertation, the context in which this research is taking place will be outlined, and the existing theory and research that relates to this study will be explored.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter provides an overview of the context within which this research is taking place as well as examining key issues relevant for the understanding of this study.

### **2.1 BILINGUALISM AND SIGN LANGUAGE BILINGUALISM**

Bilingualism is found across the world and bilinguals vary in age, social status and language proficiency (Bhatia and Ritchie, 2005; Grosjean, 2013). Although there is debate on the definition of bilingualism, many agree that bilingualism concerns the knowledge and use of two or more languages (Bhatia and Ritchie, 2005; Butler and Hakuta, 2005; Grosjean, 2013), but hold varying opinions regarding the degree of knowledge or use a bilingual needs, and whether this knowledge needs to be balanced across reading, writing, speaking and listening (Edwards, 2005; Meisel, 2005). Many believe that bilinguals do not need equal proficiency in their languages and that they do not need to have acquired their languages as a young child (Meisel, 2005; Grosjean, 2013). In this study a bilingual is someone who uses “two or more languages in their everyday life” (Grosjean, 2010: 134).

Language mode is the state of activation of a bilingual’s languages, i.e. how many languages the bilingual could use with the interlocutors in a conversation (Grosjean, 2010). It is a continuum from monolingual mode to bilingual mode (Grosjean, 2013). Depending on the situation, a bilingual’s language(s) are activated, and in this way, language mode interacts with language choice (Grosjean, 2013).

The relationship between a bilingual’s languages changes throughout their life (Grosjean, 2013). The Complementarity Principle (Grosjean, 1997) says that a bilingual’s languages are used for different functions, with different people, or in different aspects of their lives. A language can be used for external functions, such as at school, or internal functions, such as counting (Mackey, 2000). The influence

language function has on proficiency depends on the amount, frequency or duration of contact with a language and the pressure a bilingual feels to use a language, for economic, cultural or religious reasons (Mackey, 2000; Seliger and Vago, 1991). A language used in more domains is likely to be of higher proficiency and bilinguals can have gaps in their vocabulary depending on which domains they use that language in (Grosjean, 2013). The Complementarity Principle explains how bilinguals have varying proficiency levels in their languages, how this proficiency can shift over time, or how bilinguals can lose one or more languages throughout their lives (Grosjean, 2013). Language shift takes place when the dominant language begins to occupy domains previously occupied by the minority language, and this shift can occur repeatedly and often occurs across generations, especially when children have a language with higher prestige than that of their parents (Appel and Muysken, 1987; Meisel, 2005).

Much of the literature on bilingualism overlooks sign languages (Ladd, 2003; Grosjean, 2010). Bilinguals in spoken and sign languages are sometimes referred to as bimodal bilinguals (Hoffman and Chilla, 2015). Modality is what makes sign languages different to spoken languages as while spoken language uses the auditory-vocal modality, sign language uses the visual-spatial modality (Berent, 2005). Sign language acquisition has similar patterns, pace and milestones to spoken language acquisition (Hoffman and Chilla, 2015; Grosjean, 2010). Most hearing children, raised by one or more d/Deaf adults, follow bilingual patterns as children, as they acquire the (minority) sign language of their parents and the (majority) spoken language of society, but as adults, there is large variation in language proficiency in the minority language among CODAs (Pizer, 2008; Pizer, Walters and Meier, 2012).

Bilinguals are often divided into those that acquired their languages simultaneously and those that acquired their languages successively (Edwards, 2005; Yip, 2013). Simultaneous language acquisition, or 'bilingual first language acquisition', is the acquisition of two languages that a child is exposed to from birth and uses regularly in their early years (Meisel, 2005; Yip, 2013). It is often associated



with the 'one person, one language' approach to raising children where one language only is used by each parent (Edwards, 2005). One language is often dominant even for simultaneous bilinguals (Yip, 2013). Successive language acquisition is where a bilingual acquires one language and then at a later age an additional language is acquired (Edwards, 2005).

Although it is often assumed that CODAs acquire spoken language in the same way as their hearing-parented peers, research suggests that CODAs can be simultaneous or successive (with similar patterns to those in immigrant contexts) bilinguals, depending on their family situation and the language exposure and input available (Hoffmann and Chilla, 2015). Most CODAs are successive bilinguals, learning sign language first, and then the spoken language, which usually becomes dominant over time (Johnson, Watkins and Rice, 1992; Pizer, 2008; Hadjikakou, Christodoulou, Hadjidemetri, Konidari and Nicolaou, 2009). However, some CODAs are successive bilinguals, e.g. when a hearing relative exposes them to spoken language from an early age. Additionally, research has shown that adult CODAs vary widely in terms of sign language proficiency and that their adult proficiency does not reflect childhood bilingualism (Preston, 1994; Pizer, 2008).

Research on young CODAs in Finland looked longitudinally at the relationship between linguistic environment and language development with 10 families with CODAs while aged 1;0 to 2;5 (Kanto, Huttunen and Laakso, 2013). They found that parents' language choices and strategies determine the quality and amount of exposure to language the child has, and ultimately impacts their language use as they grow older. This suggests the minority language may need additional exposure because the majority language benefits from higher status and visibility. However, parents reported feeling pressure to ensure CODAs get exposure to the majority spoken. Unlike previous research (e.g. Johnson *et al.*, 1992), this study compared CODAs' language development to other bilinguals rather than to d/Deaf children or spoken monolinguals). However, the sample were mostly simultaneous bilinguals, which research indicates is less common for CODAs (Pizer, 2008; Hadjikakou, *et al.*, 2009) and may affect the generalisability of the findings. Kanto *et al.*'s findings echo

those of Pizer *et al.* (2012) that CODA language choice relates more to parents' language ability than their strategies or preferences.

While research has shown that CODAs get adequate spoken language exposure (Singleton and Tittle, 2000; Kanto *et al.*, 2013), research has also shown that some CODAs recall struggling with English or speech (Hadjikakou *et al.*, 2000). This variation may depend on the support CODAs receive in the education system, which depends on the status of a sign language and the support available for CODAs within the education system.

Ethnolinguistic vitality, a group's ability to survive as a distinct entity in a multilingual context, is created from many factors (Landry and Bourhis, 1997), including domain and function of a language. These factors are a model of language maintenance or loss (Appel and Muysken, 1987) but this model overlooks necessity, whether or not effective communication would be possible if the majority language took over from the minority language in domains such as the home. The necessity of a language for communication has been considered the common link between all types of bilingualism (Edwards, 2005), and seems to be especially pertinent for CODAs as research found that the amount of English understood and tolerated by parents in the home was an important factor in determining the sign language fluency of the CODA participants in later life (Pizer, 2008).

Individuals belong to different groups and communities based on multiple factors, one of which is language (Romaine, 2005). The bilingual is a member of a speech community (Edwards, 2005). Many bilinguals, such as immigrants, have the language of their minority group, but they are part of a society that uses a different, majority, language. If their minority language has no official or legal status in the state, or wider community, the minority group is faced with political, legal and education systems that are all conducted through non-L1 language(s) (Dorian, 2005). There can also be tension between minority language users and the wider majority language community (Romaine, 2005). Like second generation immigrants, CODAs have a minority and majority language, and face similar challenges, such as poor

transmission of language across generations (Pizer, 2008). Sign languages are particularly vulnerable to language shift because extended family without sign language cannot provide linguistic support (Pizer *et al.*, 2012), and there has been a significant decrease in the d/Deaf population, due to medical advances, cochlear implants, and eugenics (Johnston, 2004). However, the increased interest in, and prestige for, sign languages is a positive sign, with some even suggesting that sign languages have become “sexy” (Preston, 1996: 32; Ladd, 2003; Cooper, Reisman and Watson, 2008). Sign languages are not always the minority language, sometimes hearing populations learn the sign language of local d/Deaf people (c.f. Martha’s Vineyard in Groce, 1985).

Immigrant children are sometimes asked to interpret between their parents and the wider community, a phenomenon called language brokering (Buriel, Perez, Terri, Chavez and Moran, 1998). Research has found that girls are more likely to be language brokers than boys and that there is a positive relationship between language brokering and biculturalism (Buriel *et al.*, 1998). Research on CODAs shows they too serve as language brokers for their parents (Clark, 2003; Hadjidakou *et al.*, 2009; Preston, 1995; Singleton and Tittle, 2000) and that first-born, and female CODA children are more likely to be language brokers than subsequent or male children (Hadjidakou *et al.*, 2009; Preston, 1996). The experience of language brokering is viewed positively and negatively by CODAs (Hadjidakou *et al.*, 2009; Preston, 1995). The experience may become negative when CODAs are asked to do too much language brokering, especially in age-inappropriate situations (Preston, 1995). Others suggest that the use of CODAs as language brokers should be avoided (Clark, 2003).

While there is consensus that language is an important part of culture (Hamers and Blanc, 2000), the complexity lies in defining the relationship between language and culture (Wardhaugh, 2010). Language can be seen as a component and a product of culture, but it is a unique component as it is also a means of transmitting culture internally and externally by the individual (Hamers and Blanc, 2000).

## 2.2 BICULTURALISM

Bicultural individuals take part in the life of two or more cultures, adapting to each by changing their language, behaviour and values to suit cultural cues, and potentially blending aspects of their cultures (Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, 2007; Grosjean, 2013). Culture relates to the lives of a group of people: their organisation and rules, behaviours and traditions, beliefs and values (Grosjean, 2008), or is the information and behaviour that an individual must know in order to function as a member of a particular society (Wardhaugh, 2010). Because culture is such a complex concept, it is very difficult to define or analyse in a way that covers both the breadth and depth of culture (Ladd, 2003). A bicultural's dominant culture can change over time (Dennis, 2008). While biculturalism and bilingualism are related there are bilinguals who are not bicultural and biculturals who are not bilingual, for example students who learn French but who are not bicultural in French culture, or later generation immigrants whose parents pass on the heritage culture but they do not become bilingual in the heritage language (Grosjean, 2013).

Being at ease in a culture does not necessarily mean that a bicultural will be accepted by that cultural community (Dennis, 2008). Biculturalism can be a source of pride from being unique or having two rich cultures, but it can cause identity confusion when mutually exclusive values clash (Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, 2007), and a bicultural can feel they are an outsider to one or more of their cultures (Dennis, 2008). A bilingual bicultural can use their languages in a way that a monocultural bilingual cannot due to their deeper understanding of the cultural context in which a language is used (Grosjean, 2013). Membership to a culture takes place informally such as through socialisation in childhood (Dennis, 2008).

Biculturalism is also related to identity (c.f. Section 2.5), as biculturals are likely to have constructed identities relating to both cultures (Dennis, 2008; Grosjean, 2008; Luna, Ringberg and Peracchio, 2008), and bilingual biculturals will also have the languages of the cultures reinforcing the link with identity.

CODAs grow up in the (majority) hearing culture, and the (minority) Deaf culture of their parents which means they can be bicultural (Hoffman and Chilla, 2015; Hadjikakou *et al.*, 2009; Kanto *et al.*, 2013; Preston, 1995). Some see CODAs as more natural members of the cultural majority (Preston, 1995), while others view them as having the potential to share the language and culture of both the hearing and Deaf communities (Singleton and Tittle, 2000).

Deaf culture stems from being d/Deaf and creating a community with a shared language, identity, heritage and values (Preston, 1995). Being d/Deaf is not the only criteria for being culturally Deaf (Singleton and Tittle, 2000). Identifying with the Deaf community, and sharing life experiences, history and values are key components to Deaf culture (Preston, 1995; Ladd, 2003). Other key features are the use of sign language, cultural norms, engaging with political issues relevant to the community, and attitude towards the Deaf community and Deaf culture (Singleton and Tittle, 2000; Preston, 1995; Ladd, 2003). In the Irish Deaf community getting someone's attention appropriately involves tapping them on the shoulder, waving to get their attention or switching the light on and off in a larger gathering (Matthews, 1996). Sign language is important both as a vehicle of communication but also as a visible marker of the cultural identity (Preston, 1996), and some consider it the key characteristic of Deaf culture (Ladd, 2003). Deaf culture has many aspects, including sport, art, story-telling and theatre. Although some Deaf and hearing humour overlaps, most hearing people would not find Deaf humour funny and vice versa (Matthews, 1996). An important role is played by Deaf institutions, from local Deaf clubs, to international organisations involved with events like the Deaflympics (Ladd, 2003). CODAs grow up in the Deaf community and culture, but may become less involved or accepted as adults (Ladd, 2003). Deaf and hearing culture are always in contact which causes cultural influences and overlap, e.g. shared values (Ladd, 2003). Research on CODAs has found that many CODAs identify with a bicultural label, or with the idea of belonging to Deaf and hearing cultural worlds, but that some feel they belong only in the hearing world (Hadjikakou *et al.*, 2009).

## 2.3 COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

The community is difficult to define, due to difficulties defining key aspects, such as language and culture (Wardhaugh, 2010). One important aspect within communities is group membership, where a community forms a group, can be made up of smaller groups, or be part of a larger group (Holmes, 2013). An individual can belong to a number of speech communities, communities centred around the use of a shared language, or communities of practice, groups that develop around shared activities, goals or interactions (Wardhaugh, 2010; Holmes, 2013). Language can be an important part of the community, and members of the community will change their language use, within a language, or between languages, to fit the identity of the group they are interacting with (Holmes, 2013). Another way to look at the community is to examine the networks an individual participates in and to construct a sense of community from their network (Wardhaugh, 2010).

Social network analysis aims to measure and represent the structural relations between entities (Knoke and Yang, 2008). A relation is a specific kind of connection or tie between actors within a network (Knoke and Yang, 2008). Social networks can affect the perceptions, beliefs and actions of their individual members (Knoke and Yang, 2008; Scott and Carrington, 2011). Networks help to create common interests and shared identities and promote shared cultural norms by channelling information and resources among the entities in the network (Knoke and Yang, 2008). These networks are the primary building blocks of the social world (Marin and Wellman, 2011). Networks are dynamic structures that are continually changing based on the interactions within them (Knoke and Yang, 2008).

One of the earliest ways of linking culture with networks has been to see networks as carriers of social influence, e.g. attitudes (Mische, 2011). Social network relations are seen as the principle vehicle of language change (Paolillo, 1999). The social network of a language user has a strong correlation with their linguistic behaviour (Hirano, 2013). Research looking at the relationship between social networks and language has been used to predict speech based on social network

(Milroy and Margrain, 1980), or how the individual member of a social network, or the context of contact affect language use or code-switching (DiMaggio, 2011).

Social networks can be more or less dense depending on how many of the members of the social network are also connected with one another (Hirano, 2013). With increasing development of technology, modes of transport and personal communication an individual's social network, or personal community, has gotten smaller, and is less spatially defined, but it remains a central part in the life of an individual (Chua, Madej and Wellman, 2011). Ties in a social network vary from strong, e.g. family or close friends, to weak e.g., casual acquaintances, depending on the frequency of contact and the social capacities in which the individuals associate (Paolillo, 1999). In this way, social network theory ties in with bilingual theory, as language contact and function affect language maintenance and attrition, which in turn is related to the bilingual's social network. Having a large network is particularly important for the maintenance of minority and heritage languages (Gollan, Starr and Ferreira, 2015), such as the sign language of CODAs.

## **2.4 CODAS AND THE DEAF COMMUNITY IN IRELAND**

The Deaf community can be seen as a community of those who are culturally Deaf (Preston, 1995). This community exists on both a local and global scale from international organisations to local community centres or Deaf clubs (Ladd, 2003). Deaf communities tend to have a very high endogamous rate, as many d/Deaf individuals choose to marry another d/Deaf individual (Preston, 1995). Sign language and Deaf culture are integral parts of the Deaf community (Singleton and Tittle, 2000). The Deaf community see themselves as a minority language community rather than a disabled group (Ladd, 2003; Lane, 1995). Sign languages in the EU have the lowest status of all minority/ regional languages (Batterbury, 2012) which affects employment, education, access to media and political participation as there is no legal power to enforce the inclusion of sign languages when they are not official languages (Bosco Conama, 2013). d/Deaf people have a lower socioeconomic status than the general population and a significantly higher rate of unemployment and

underemployment than their hearing counterparts, phenomena which are inextricably linked to sign languages' lack of status (Bosco Conama, 2013; Ladd, 2003).

An important aspect of Deaf culture is shared history, particularly d/Deaf oppression. One of the most impactful forms of oppression has been Oralism, a system of education where children were prevented from learning or using sign languages because it was thought to lead to better acquisition of written and spoken language for d/Deaf children (Ladd, 2003). Nearly a century after its introduction, research from Oxford University (Conrad, 1979), and replicated in many countries, showed that children leaving Oralist education were functionally illiterate (O'Connell and Deegan, 2014), with an average reading age of 8 or 9 years old (Ladd, 2003).

In Ireland, schools for the d/Deaf were founded throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the main schools became St. Mary's School for Deaf Girls and St. Joseph's School for Deaf Boys, in Cabra, Dublin (Mathews, 2011). At that time they largely taught through sign language, but by the mid 1950s the schools were beginning to use Oralist methods, most likely due to parental pressure upon hearing that d/Deaf children abroad were 'being taught to speak' (Mathews, 2011; O'Connell and Deegan, 2014; Crean, 1997). Under Oralism in Ireland children were separated by degree of hearing (partially d/Deaf or profoundly d/Deaf) and exposure to sign language (Mathews, 2011; Crean, 1997). This was then extended over time to include separating students outside of teaching hours, surveillance and punishment of students, forcing students to sit on their hands, instilling shame in those who used ISL, only allowing oral students to take public exams, contacting employers to advise them against allowing sign language users work together, instructing parents not to sign with their children, and letting go any teachers with sign language abilities (O'Connell and Deegan, 2014; Mathews, 2011; Crean, 1997). This system remained in place in Ireland for nearly 70 years after it had been abandoned elsewhere (Mathews, 2011). The effects are still felt by the community, for example Oralism paved the way for mainstreaming, where d/Deaf children attend hearing schools



without any specific facilities for d/Deaf students, as it ensured d/Deaf children were segregated from their d/Deaf peers (O' Connell and Deegan, 2014; Mathews, 2011), and despite sign language services, using speech with young d/Deaf children remains the overwhelmingly more popular choice for Irish families (Mathews, 2011).

The Irish Deaf Community share a language, culture, values and history (Mathews, 2011). It is a small community, with about 5,000 members, though the lack of demographic information on d/Deaf individuals makes this difficult to estimate (Mathews, 2011; Morrissey and Way, 2007; Matthews, 1996). The community uses ISL as their predominant language of communication but it remains an unofficial language in Ireland, despite campaigning from organisations involved with the Deaf community (Morrissey and Way, 2007; Mathews, 2011). ISL is closely related to *Langue des Signes Française* (LSF) as French educators were involved in designing the signs that were used in the Schools for the Deaf in Cabra (Mohr, 2014). American Sign Language (ASL) is also related to LSF while British Sign Language (BSL) is not and while ISL is distinct from BSL there are influences from BSL on ISL e.g. due to the availability of televised BSL in Ireland (Leeson and Saeed, 2004; Mohr, 2014).

Little is known about Irish CODAs, but research abroad has found that young CODAs are accepted members of the Deaf community, but CODAs can feel they are being pushed out of the community in later life (Preston, 1995). 60% of CODAs work with the d/Deaf in some capacity (Preston, 1994), a choice that highlights their connection with the community (Hadjikakou *et al.*, 2009). However, the lack of demographic information about the Irish Deaf community, and about CODAs (Mathews, 2011; Morrissey and Way, 2007; Preston, 1995), coupled with findings abroad that CODAs can feel their family has been let down by the state highlight a need for changes to policy to provide more support for CODAs (e.g. Singleton and Tittle, 2000; Hadjikakou *et al.*, 2009).

## 2.5 LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

Language can be a marker of an individual's identity as each individual is thought to have their own unique idiolect, an individual's way of speaking (Edwards, 2005; Wardhaugh, 2010). The languages an individual speaks and the speech communities they are a member of create group identities and linguistic and social influences that interact with the individual's identity, as group-membership is one way in which an individual conceptualises themselves (Edwards, 2005; Hamers and Blanc, 2000). Identity is constructed from interaction with others and socialisation, a person's experiences (Wardhaugh, 2010). Group identity influences language and the language of group members influences the group identity (Edwards, 2005; Wardhaugh, 2010). An individual's social identity comes not just from the membership of social groups, but also the values and other aspects of membership (Hamers and Blanc, 2000). The influences from a bilingual's languages can work together or create tension for the individual, which can manifest as low self-esteem, especially in immigrant or minority-language contexts (Edwards, 2005)

Minority-language users often have a raised awareness of language and identity, and related issues such as how to achieve language maintenance (Edwards, 2005). Language can play an integral role in the minority community as a resource for cultural support (Edwards, 2005). When language is an important component of the culture it becomes an important feature of identity, a salient factor in determining membership into the cultural community, and being a marker of group membership (Hamers and Blanc, 2000). This can make the language a target for denigration aimed at the wider community or culture (Preston, 1996). The deeper the group is embedded into another community the greater the impact on the group and individual identities (Edwards, 2005). This would suggest that the identity of sign language bilinguals would be strongly impacted by the unique way in which sign language users are tied to the hearing world due to the single generational nature of d/Deafness and the lacking status of sign languages.

Recent research on CODAs has begun to identify some markers of identity, features and experiences that CODAs have in common, but limited sample sizes and lack of literature on CODAs means that the construct of CODA identity remains at an early stage. Additionally, research to date has looked at the experiences CODAs had in common, but without considering whether these form an individual or group identity (e.g. Pizer, 2008). Research on CODAs suggests that sign language, the experience of acquiring, maintaining and/or losing sign language, is an important shared feature for CODAs, as are their experiences of Deaf culture and the Deaf community.

## **2.6 RESEARCH ON CODAS**

To date very little research has been done with adult CODAs, but this section will provide a brief overview of research, beyond single case studies, looking at issues of language, culture and identity with adult CODAs.

Preston (1995) carried out interviews with 150 adult CODAs in the U.S., aged 18 to 80, looking at what it means to be a CODA. Among the findings, many CODAs reported starting education as a point when they began to see themselves as different to their family members, or their family as different from other families. Some reported that their family passed on a distrust of hearing people, while hearing society added to this by making nasty and ignorant comments about d/Deaf people within earshot of the CODAs. The CODAs reported that they had extra responsibilities as children to aid with communication between their parents and hearing society, and that they were accepted members of the Deaf community as children, but their membership and identity became complex and ambiguous with age. It should be noted that Preston himself is a CODA, which could introduce bias into his research.

Pizer (2008; and discussed in Pizer *et al.*, 2012) carried out semi-structured interviews with 13 adults CODAs in the U.S., aged 20 to 66, and case studies of three families with one or more d/Deaf parents and hearing children. Their aim was to obtain a sample that varied in terms of sign language proficiency and use, and

community involvement, yet all participants were sourced through the Deaf community, which makes the sample likely to have a higher involvement than CODAs who no longer are connected with the community and they do not outline the community involvement of the sample, e.g. whether individuals worked, socialised or were involved with organisations in the community, making it difficult to examine how varied the sample actually was. Their main findings were that all CODAs, despite variation in their sign language proficiency and affiliation with the Deaf community, shared a language ideology centred around the idea of putting in appropriate, but not unnecessary, effort in order for successful communication, and expecting the same of others. They also found links between language choice in the home, sign language proficiency and cultural affiliation. The children wanted to use speech with one another as much as possible, only eldest children would code-switch or code-blend to include their parents when they were present during sibling discussions. Some of the CODAs reported that their productive signing was better than their receptive signing, which may be because speech is more difficult to understand than produce for many d/Deaf individuals (Pizer, 2008). Pizer suggests there may be a generational shift in how hearing people are treating the d/Deaf as younger CODAs had fewer such experiences. The CODAs noticed pressure to develop a hearing identity and felt there was additional expectations on them before they were accepted by the Deaf community relative to other hearing sign language users. Many described their identity as linked to their language use.

Hadjikakou *et al.* (2009) carried out semi-structured interviews with 10 adult CODAs in Cyprus, aged 21 to 30, looking at their experiences as CODAs. Although their age range is limited, they tried to make their sample as representative as possible using demographic information, e.g. 60% of CODAs work in the Deaf community, from previous studies. Their main findings were that most of their CODAs identified as L1 sign language users and as biculturals, saw sign language as beneficial, had protected their parents from insults and general safety threats. They reported good, but superficial, relationships with their parents. They also highlighted the role of the extended family, especially grandparents, in helping CODAs navigate the hearing

world. The CODAs felt that the State had let their parents down but saw technology as an important tool for their parents and for communication.

This research suggests that CODAs in different countries do share some features, but that many variables remain unexplored. For example, the superficial relationships reported in Cyprus, but not in the USA, may be context-specific due to differences, currently and historically, in status of sign language and education of the d/Deaf. In light of this, the methodology used to explore CODAs in an Irish context will now be examined.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the research questions, variables and participants of this study. The research design, data collection and analysis, pilot study and limitations of the methodology are presented.

### **3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Six research questions were formulated to explore the identity of Irish CODAs. The first research question addressed the general aims of the study:

1. Do CODAs maintain their languages in adulthood and do they identify as bilingual biculturals? To what extent does the interaction of CODAs with Hearing and Deaf cultural communities, the interaction with interlocutors of their languages and the language maintenance or attrition of ISL by CODAs determine their bicultural, bilingual identity?

The second research question addressed language and cultural contact, operationalised as the contact participants had within their social networks:

2. What do the social networks of CODAs reveal about (a) the extent and nature of their contact with ISL and (b) their interaction with the hearing and Deaf communities ?

I was also interested in how linguistic and cultural contact affects proficiency levels:

3. Is there a relationship between the extent and nature of contact between CODAs and (1) ISL and (2) the Deaf community and their self-reported ISL proficiency?

This led to considering other factors related to language maintenance or attrition:

#### 4. What factors govern the maintenance or attrition of ISL in CODAs?

CODAs are often described as bilingual biculturals, but many bilinguals do not self-identify as bilingual, including sign and spoken language bilinguals (Grosjean, 2010). This led to the following research question:

#### 5. To what extent do CODAs identify with a bilingual, bicultural identity?

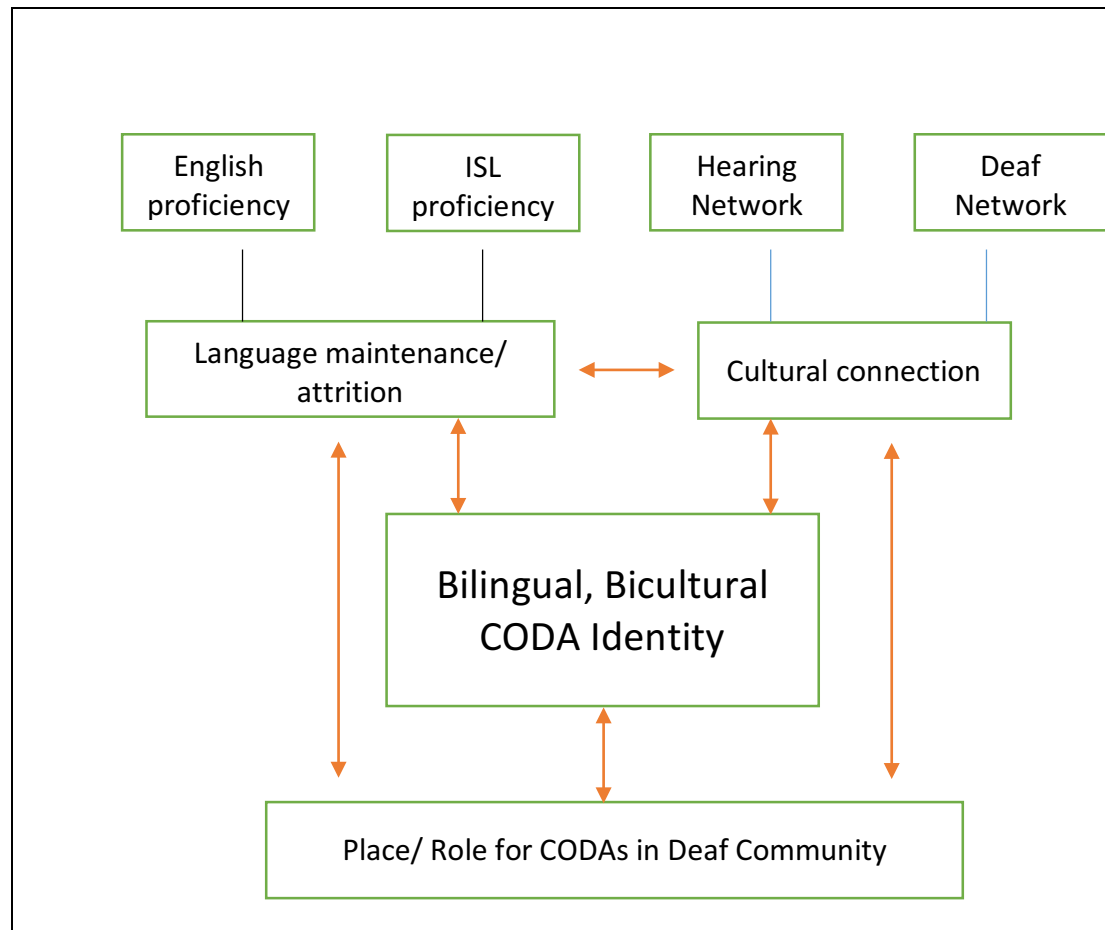
Finally, it was important to include the views of the Deaf community and d/Deaf individuals on the issues being examined in this research:

#### 6. How do members of the Deaf community characterise CODAs?

### 3.2 VARIABLES

The variables in this study are shown in Figure 1. The dependent variable is CODA identity, a multifaceted and incomplete construct, potentially made up of bilingualism (c.f. Section 2.1), biculturalism, operationalised as participants' identification with (1) Deaf culture and (2) community membership, operationalised as the extent to which an individual participates in and feels accepted by a linguistic or cultural community. Due to issues identifying a majority hearing culture and due to the overlap between hearing and Deaf culture (Ladd, 2003; Dennis, 2008) identification with hearing culture was assumed unless participants indicated otherwise. The independent variables are: (1) proficiency in (a) ISL and (b) English (operationalised as self-reported proficiency across a number of skills); (2) linguistic and cultural contact (c.f. Section 3.1) ; (3) language maintenance or attrition in ISL and English (as shown by self-reported proficiency) as previous research on CODAs found that language proficiency in adult CODAs, and how much sign language the CODA has maintained or lost, is important to their community membership, cultural

connection and identity as a bilingual bicultural (Preston, 1995; Pizer, 2008); and (4) the place or role for CODAs in the Deaf community (operationalised as the role and place CODAs identify for themselves, as well as the role or place for CODAs identified by leaders of the Deaf community in Ireland).



*Figure 1: Model of Variables*

### 3.3 PARTICIPANTS

This study uses two samples, both consisting of potential members of the Irish Deaf community. The main sample consists of CODA adults while the focus group sample consists of leaders of the Deaf community in order to include the perspectives of d/Deaf individuals on the issues being examined.

The CODA participants were recruited using snowball and criterion-based sampling procedures. Although random sampling is most representative of the



research population (Hoffman, 2013), the lack of demographic information made random sampling impossible for this study. Criterion-based sampling is when a researcher selects participants according to criteria, while snowball sampling is when the research sources initial participants and asks them to identify further members of the research population, which is useful when there are access issues, or issues identifying members of the research population (Dörnyei, 2007).

For this study organisations working with the Irish Deaf community were emailed (Appendix 2) asking them to pass on recruitment information to their membership. Approximately 20 organisations were contacted, and sent a follow-up email, as well as a number of personal contacts. From these emails approximately 40 individuals responded, a mixture of CODA participants, interested CODAs who were unable or ineligible to take part and interested members of the Deaf community. These individuals were invited to pass on the recruitment information to any CODAs they know. This information (and the information letter, Appendix 3) outlined that participants should be hearing individuals, over the age of 18, who were raised by one or more d/Deaf adults. Additional criteria (see Table 1 below), e.g. language impairments, were identified from questionnaire responses. The sample for the pilot study (c.f. Section 3.5.2) came from CODAs who were ineligible to take part in the main study.

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>How applied</b>
Hearing	The sampling frame excluded d/Deaf or hard of hearing participants	Verified by asking about hearing impairments in the questionnaire
Adult	The sampling frame excluded CODAs under the age of 18	Verified by asking for age in the questionnaire
d/Deaf parents	The sampling frame included those with one or more d/Deaf parents	Questionnaire asked for number of d/Deaf parents
Language impairment	The sampling frame excluded those with language impairments that may affect language acquisition and/or maintenance	Questionnaire asked for participants to identify any known language impairments
Bilingual child	The sampling frame included simultaneous and successive bilinguals but excluded CODAs raised monolingually	Verified by questions about language acquisition and language input in childhood
ISL	The sampling frame only included CODAs raised with ISL	Mentioned in personal communication with Northern Irish CODAs, Questionnaire referred to ISL specifically
Living in Ireland	The sampling frame only included CODAs currently living in Ireland	Verified by personal communication when arranging to meet with participants for data collection

*Table 1: Sampling frame*

Using this sampling frame, 18 CODA participants (N=18) were included in the main sample, of which 10 were female (55.6%) and 8 were male (44.4%). This sample provided data for Research Questions 1-5, answering the questionnaire and indicating if they were willing to take part in a follow-up interview. The participants ranged from 18 to 51 years of age. The mean age was 35 (SD =10.7). The majority of the participants lived in Dublin, but participants were recruited from urban centres and rural areas around the country, both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, once they were ISL users rather than BSL users. BSL was not examined in this study as BSL users may feel more closely aligned to the British Deaf community

and the use of BSL may affect cultural and community affiliation Addressing these questions would have required time and resources beyond the scope of this study.

A number of participants came from the same immediate or extended families (as indicated by the Relative column in Table 2 below), including relatives who took part without one another's knowledge but were identified through their social network responses (c.f. Section 3.4.1.3). The participants ranged from those who are very involved in the Deaf community professionally and socially to those with no involvement professionally or socially.

I met with 11 participants in person, and 7 using Skype, as discussed in Section 3.5.3. The question about hearing or language impairments was included to ensure that only hearing children of d/Deaf adults were included in this study to know of language impairments such as dyslexia that could affect participants' self-report proficiency. Two participants reported a hearing or language impairment (e.g. tinnitus), but both impairments were minor and occurred in adulthood, so their data was included in the analysis. To ensure that neither the impairment nor the in-person meeting variables affected, or interacted with, the other key variables being analysed for correlations these variables were included in a Kendall's tau test (c.f. Section 4.1.3) but no significant correlations were found.

Although the sampling frame included CODAs with one d/Deaf parent, all participants in this study had two hard-of-hearing or d/Deaf parents. All participants were willing to take part in a follow-up interview. Table 2 outlines the CODA sample.

Number	Relative	Gender	Age	Impairment	Meeting type	Work with d/Deaf	Profile
1**	Yes	Male	46	No	In person	Yes	2
2	Yes	Female	44	No	In person	Yes	1
3	Yes	Male	26	No	In person	No	3
4	No	Female	51	No	In person	No	3
5**	Yes	Male	20	No	In person	No	3
6	Yes	Male	42	No	In person	No	4
7	No	Female	47	No	In person	Yes	1
8	No	Female	32	No	In person	Yes	1
9	Yes	Female	34	Yes	In person	Yes	1
10	Yes	Male	27	No	In person	Yes	2
11	Yes	Female	18	No	In person	No	3
12	No	Male	35	No	Skype	No	4
13	Yes	Male	44	No	Skype	No	3
14	No	Male	30	No	Skype	No	3
15	Yes	Female	51	No	Skype	Yes	1
16	No	Female	20	No	Skype	No	4
17	No	Female	32	No	Skype	Yes	1
18	Yes	Female	39	Yes	Skype	No	3

*Table 2: Details of CODA sample*

*(\*\* indicates participant took part in an interview)*

At approximately the half-way point in questionnaire data collection, interview recruitment began based on questionnaire responses. There were four main profiles emerging in responses at that point (c.f. Table 2 above). Profile 1 labelled themselves as bilingual biculturals and were involved in the Deaf community. Profile 2 did not (fully) identify as bilingual biculturals but they were involved in the community. Profile 3 labelled themselves as bilingual biculturals but they were not involved while Profile 4 neither identified as bilingual biculturals nor were they involved with the Deaf community. Profile 4 was excluded from the interview sampling frame as their questionnaire responses clearly linked their identification to their lack of proficiency or involvement with the Deaf community.

One member of Profiles 1, 2 and 3 were contacted by email. If they did not respond, they were contacted by phone if they had included this in their

questionnaire response, or the next individual in that profile was contacted. At the time of interviews two female participants were identified as belonging to Profile 1 but neither responded to attempts to contact them for follow-up interview. A male participant from the other two profiles responded and took part in interviews. The participant from Profile 2 was one of the youngest participants, aged 20, while the participant from Profile 3 was one of the oldest participants in the sample, aged 46.

The d/Deaf leaders were also recruited to take part in the focus group using criterion-based sampling procedures. The criterion for participation was being identified as a leader of the d/Deaf community by a CODA participant. CODAs were invited via email or after completing the questionnaire to suggest leaders of the Deaf community for the focus group. In cases where CODAs asked what 'leader of the community' means, I told them these leaders could be important in organising activities such as sport, art or religious life in the Deaf community, they could be committee members or leaders of Deaf organisations, or anyone they see as having a leadership role within the Deaf community. Individuals that were identified by the CODA participants were contacted by email and invited to take part in a focus group. Three female leaders of the Deaf community were available and willing to take part in the focus group. Two of the leaders were also parents, one a parent of CODAs, the other a parent to a partially d/Deaf child, and each leader was involved with the Deaf community in different ways, none of their leadership roles were within the same activity or organisation. The focus group took place in Dublin with a female CODA interpreter facilitating the discussion.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Given the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study a mixed-methods research design was adopted to provide a more comprehensive understanding of CODA identity by triangulating a number of data sources.

When used in isolation quantitative research is about confirming a hypothesis, in an objective way, that can be generalised to the research population,

and qualitative research is about discovering more about a sample, in a more subjective way, that is not generalizable to the research population (Mackey and Gass, 2015). Mixed methods research allows the best of both types of research by providing greater triangulation of findings (Mackey and Gass, 2015), and can offset the disadvantages of quantitative-only and qualitative-only research (Dörnyei, 2007). The instruments for this study, questionnaire, interview and focus group, will now be examined.

### **3.4.1 Questionnaire**

A questionnaire (Appendices 5 and 6) was used to collect data addressing Research Questions 1-5. The questionnaire used in this study had a number of parts. The first section was a pen and paper questionnaire examining language proficiency, upbringing and identity. The second part was a drawing task representing how the participant's language proficiencies changed over time. The third part was a computer questionnaire to map the social network of participants.

Questionnaires are one of the most commonly used methods of collecting data on attitude and opinions from a large number of participants (Mackey and Gass, 2015). They are versatile and relatively easy and quick for the participant (Dörnyei, 2007). However, they must be well constructed to avoid becoming invalid or unreliable and the data can be superficial (Dörnyei, 2007). There are two main types of question used in a questionnaire, closed questions with a limited number of options, which are more reliable, and open-ended questions where participants are allowed to express their own thoughts and ideas on the topic of the questionnaire (Mackey and Gass, 2015). A number of Likert scales were used in the questionnaire for this study. Some of these Likert scales used an odd number of scale points, e.g. 1-7, but some used an even number, e.g. Never/ Rarely/ Sometimes/ Often/ Very Often/ Always. There has been a lot of debate about whether Likert scales should have a mid-point as participants may use the mid-point to avoid making a selection, but this is not supported by the proportions of responses when comparing the two types of Likert scale (Schleef, 2013).

#### 3.4.1.1 Language and Identity Section

The first items in this section asked participants to rate their current proficiency in English and ISL using a Likert scale from 1-7 where 1 is 'no practical proficiency' and 7 is 'native/ bilingual'. Self-rated proficiency was used as no known standardised tests of ISL proficiency existed at the time of instrument design. The 1-7 scale was made as I wanted to use the same question for all questions about proficiency across the questionnaire and when looking at self-report scales used in other questionnaires a number of problems arose. Questions that ask about difficulty using language (e.g. Winke, 2013) would not work when discussing ISL and English, languages which operate in distinct modes as choice is determined by mode in some contexts e.g. a phone call . Similarly, questions that ask about competence (e.g. Nagano, 2015) are unsuitable for CODAs given that both languages are likely to have been learned informally, in the home. There was also a risk that traditional scales using language such as *good, very well* or *poor, not very well* (Courtney, Graham, Tonkyn and Marinis, 2015; Dewey, Belnap and Hillstrom, 2013) would be insensitive or offensive when discussing d/Deaf individuals' proficiency in English given how d/Deaf individuals are often viewed by the hearing majority as disabled, rather than a linguistic and cultural minority. Additionally, asking children to rate their parents' proficiency in a language they may have struggled with their whole lives using 'poor' or 'good' would be very insensitive. Instead, the questions in this questionnaire broke the languages down into their skill components such as reading in English, or finger-spelling in ISL and asked participants to rate proficiency numerically, with the labels at either end as a guideline.

These self-ratings were accompanied by open-ended questions asking participants if they had received any formal training in ISL and inviting them to include any other details they felt were relevant about their language proficiency.

The next set of questions asked participants the age they began to learn ISL and English, whether one or both of their parents were d/Deaf and what languages were used in their home as children. Participants were also whether they would

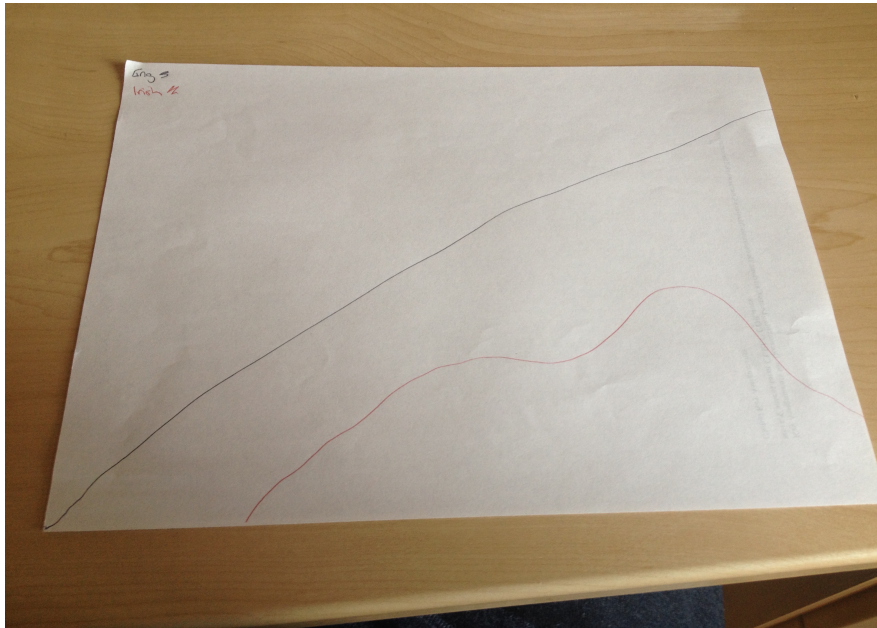
consider themselves bilingual, culturally d/Deaf and a member of the d/Deaf community. Definitions of these terms were not provided and if asked I gave vague overviews rather than definitions in order to give participants the opportunity to explain what each term meant to them, and to obtain an idea of how much the participants knew about each concept. Following each multiple choice question there was an open-ended question where they could elaborate on their response.

The final set of questions asked participants for their age, contact details (if willing to be interviewed), and any known hearing or language impairments. This section was left until last as the demographic questions can be off-putting and intrusive for participants and thus they are best left until the end of the questionnaire (Schleef, 2013).

#### 3.4.1.2 Drawing Task

In this task participants were asked to draw two lines on a page, representing their languages. This task was inspired by the task used by Chik (2014) where drawing can allow participants to represent ideas that may be difficult to express or isolate in questionnaire or interview items. Visual methodologies are used because images can be elicitation devices and improve the capacity to express thoughts (Galman, 2012; Sligo and Tilley, 2012). In designing this study, questions regarding language maintenance and attrition were causing difficulty as detailed questions about language development would have been too time-consuming, and difficult to word concisely whilst still obtaining valid and reliable data, but it was an area of this research that I wanted to explore with the full CODA sample. Given these concerns, the drawing task allowed participants to give an indication of their language maintenance or attrition, and provide data that could inform interview questions. Figures 2 and 3 below outline the drawing task.





*Figure 2: Sample Drawing Task English-Irish example*

“So what I’m going to ask you to do next is draw a picture of how your ISL and English have changed over time. As an example I’m going to draw a picture with my first languages, in my case Irish and English. So first I’m drawing a line, and it’s more or less continuing to grow over time as I learned English at home, in school and now it’s beginning to slow down as an adult. Next I’m drawing a line for Irish, this line starts a bit later, I only started learning Irish in school. It grows, has a bit of a dip, grows again, but then it starts to fall as I’m losing my Irish now, I don’t have much of it left. Now I’d like you to do the same, but with ISL and English and however the picture from birth to now would look for you.”

*Figure 3: Sample Instructions for the Drawing Task*

#### 3.4.1.3 Social Network Section

This section (Appendix 6) was based on the Study Abroad Social Interaction Questionnaire (SASIQ), the instrument developed by Dan Dewey for research on learners on study-abroad programmes (e.g. Dewey, Ring, Gardner and Belnap, 2013). This instrument was designed to gain insight into how learners’ social networks related to their language outcomes while studying abroad. In Dewey *et al.*

(2013) they outline how students who get involved with the speech community by making new contacts (expanding their social network) have the most opportunities to use the target language and improve their proficiency.

In this study, the context and research aims differ so the SASIQ was used as a starting point to develop the social network section for this study. A platform called Qualtrics was used and the title participants saw when commencing their response was 'Oxford Research on Irish CODAs' (henceforth ORIC). Unlike the SASIQ, the ORIC asked participants to respond about their contacts in both of their languages, and asked about (A) family and (B) friends and acquaintances. Finally, the measures of proficiency used in the earlier parts of the questionnaire were also used in the ORIC.

Participants were asked to give full names of their contacts but I explained the names were only being used to identify individuals in more than one participant's network and that individuals would not be contacted or have their names made public in any way. Points of overlap were indicators of hubs of social, linguistic and cultural connection within the Deaf community, and among CODAs.

### **3.4.2 Interviews**

Follow-up interviews were conducted to obtain in depth, qualitative data on Research Questions 1-5. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow participants to introduce topics they thought were important and to clarify or expand upon material raised in the questionnaire responses. Participants were also shown their social network diagram and their drawing task and given the opportunity to discuss those data. For a sample interview schedule see Appendix 7.

Interviews are often used with questionnaires in mixed methods research as they allow researchers to investigate phenomena that cannot be directly observed or measured, such as perceptions and attitudes, but potential weaknesses include memory loss and selective recall on the part of the participants (Mackey and Gass,

2015). Interviews are a good instrument for obtaining rich data but are time-consuming and require good communication skills (Dörnyei, 2007).

### **3.4.3 Focus group**

A focus group was used to gather data on Research Question 6, which asked how members of the Deaf community characterise CODAs, with a sample of leaders of the Deaf community. As with the interviews, a semi-structured guide was prepared for the focus group (see Appendix 10). The themes presented to the focus group included the issues for d/Deaf parents raising a CODA and the place of CODAs in the d/Deaf community. The discussion was facilitated by a sign language interpreter, who had been approved by the members of the focus group in advance. The session was video-, and audio-recorded, and the transcription was sent to the group and they were invited to member-check the contents and ensure the discussion was accurately reflected. These steps were taken to avoid previous issues where d/Deaf participants felt they had no control over how they were represented by researchers (Authority, 2015). Member checking is often used by researchers to establish their ability to be trusted by groups of participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1986).

Because a focus group allows collective brain-storming about topics, it allows a researcher obtain high quality data from deep and insightful discussion (Dörnyei, 2007). However, it is very time-consuming to transcribe due to difficulties in ascertaining which participant is contributing to the discussion at a given time-point (Dörnyei, 2007).

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

#### **3.5.1 Ethical Approval**

I submitted an application for ethical approval to the Central University Research Ethics Committee of the University of Oxford. When I received approval (Appendix 1) on February 20<sup>th</sup> 2016, I began recruiting participants. Participants were given an information letter (Appendix 3), outlining the objectives of my research and details of what their involvement would entail, as well as explaining anonymity and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. All ethical procedures followed in the main study were also followed in the pilot study.

For the d/Deaf participants modified versions of the information letter and the consent form were provided (Appendices 6 and 7). These versions of the information were designed in consultation with a number of sources about ethical issues in working with d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing participants as English is a second language for many d/Deaf individuals and they may have limited proficiency (Authority, 2015; McKee, Schlehofer and Thew, 2013; Accessible Information Working Group Guidelines, 2011).

#### **3.5.2 Piloting the study**

Two CODAs living abroad took part in the pilot study. They were sent the information letter and consent form and then the written questionnaire and the link to the ORIC. They were asked to note how long it took them to complete and asked for any feedback on question wording, their experience taking the questionnaire or other comments. Based on the pilot study, wording in the ORIC was simplified to make the instructions more clear and concise. The question about familiarity with Deaf culture was moved as one pilot participant felt that this question influenced their next answer on identifying as culturally Deaf. Other issues with unclear wording or grammatical and spelling mistakes were also corrected.

### **3.5.3 Procedure with questionnaire**

I arranged, via email, to meet with the participants to fill out the questionnaire. Where possible I met with participants in person, choosing a neutral, familiar environment, e.g. d/Deaf or hearing community centres or coffee shops in their local community. For other participants, particularly those who lived far away from Dublin, or in rural areas, meetings were arranged using Skype, or similar technology. Participants were given the information letter, encouraged to ask any questions, and if they were happy to proceed, sign a consent form (Appendix 4), which reminded participants of their right to anonymity and to withdraw. After the pen and paper section the participants completed the drawing task and then completed the ORIC online. I provided the computer for participants meeting in person and participants doing a Skype interview used the computer they were using to facilitate the meeting. For participants doing a Skype meeting they emailed back to me the materials by taking a photograph or scanning their materials and emailing attachments of any word documents.

### **3.5.4 Procedure with interview**

The sub-sample for the interviews was approximately 10% of the original sample. The answers in the written questionnaire, the social networks and the drawings were used as prompts for discussion about these topics in the interviews. The interviews were audio recorded for later analysis. The interviews varied in length, between 16 minutes and 42 minutes long. Both interviews took place using Skype due to time and geographical constraints.

### **3.5.5 Procedure with focus group**

I emailed the focus group participants about the proposed interpreter and each of them responded to confirm their approval. They were reminded that they could request a different interpreter. The approved interpreter was a female CODA

who took the questionnaire prior to interpreting for the focus group. The questions for the focus group were printed out for participants to refer to during the focus group but they were also read aloud and the interpreter translated the questions into ISL. One of the focus group participants chose to speak and sign for many parts of the focus group, while the other two participants signed only, although they all identified as bilingual in sign and spoken language. It is common for d/Deaf individuals to prefer signing to using voice (Emmorey, Borinstein, Thompson and Gollan, 2008). After the focus group was transcribed into English, the group were given the opportunity to member-check the discussion and any suggested changes were to ensure the transcription was an accurate reflection of the contributions of the leaders of the Deaf community as discussed in ISL.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

In table 2 below the research questions from this study are shown with the data collection method and data analysis procedures used. The first research question is not included, as it encompasses all the subsequent research questions.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>
What do the social networks of CODAs reveal about (a) the extent and nature of their contact with ISL and (b) their interaction with the hearing and Deaf communities?	Social Network Section of Questionnaire <i>Quantitative</i>	Analysis of the data from responses, using correlational statistical analyses
Is there a relationship between the extent and nature of contact between CODAs and ISL and the Deaf community and their self-reported ISL proficiency?	Questionnaire <i>Quantitative</i>	Correlational statistical analyses
What factors govern the maintenance/ attrition of ISL in CODAs?	Semi-structured interviews <i>Qualitative</i>	Coding and analysis based on theory informing the pre-prepared questions as well as based on grounded-theory approach
To what extent do CODAs identify with a bilingual, bicultural identity?	Semi-structured interviews <i>Qualitative</i>	As above
How do members of the Deaf community characterise CODAs?	Focus group <i>Qualitative</i>	As above

*Table 3: Outline of Data Analysis used*

Questionnaire data was entered into SPSS and processed to provide descriptive statistics. Different questionnaire items were subjected to relevant statistical tests, e.g. for correlation between variables. Interview and focus group data was transcribed and analysed based on expected results suggested by theory, as well as using grounded-theory approach on unexpected factors introduced by participants.

### **3.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY**

There are a number of limitations to be noted in the methodology used for this study. A number of steps were taken to ensure that the sample of this study was representative of the population. For example, a number of different organisations working with the d/Deaf or CODAs in Ireland were asked to send out the call for participants to their membership to reach a wider range of CODAs e.g. varied age, location and socioeconomic status. However, snowball sampling was also used, to increase sample size, meaning that the sample may have more participants with similar backgrounds. The sample was smaller than hoped, with 18 CODAs and 3 leaders of the d/Deaf community, meaning that the questionnaire responses are not generalizable based on a sample of 18. However, this would have been an issue regardless of sample size as so little is known about how many CODAs there are in Ireland and what their demographic make-up looks like.



## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

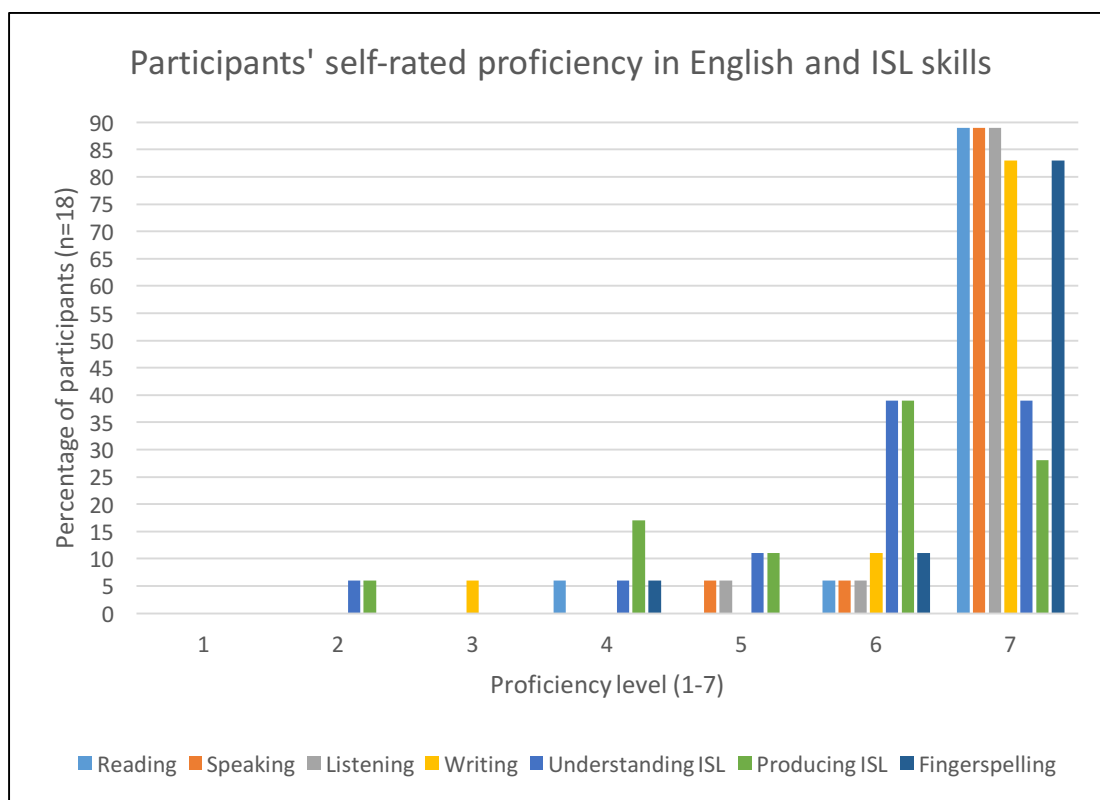
This chapter describes the results of the questionnaires, interviews and focus group. The data was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively as set out in the research questions (see Section 3.1).

### **4.1 FINDINGS FROM QUESTIONNAIRES**

#### **4.1.1 Findings from written questionnaire and drawing task**

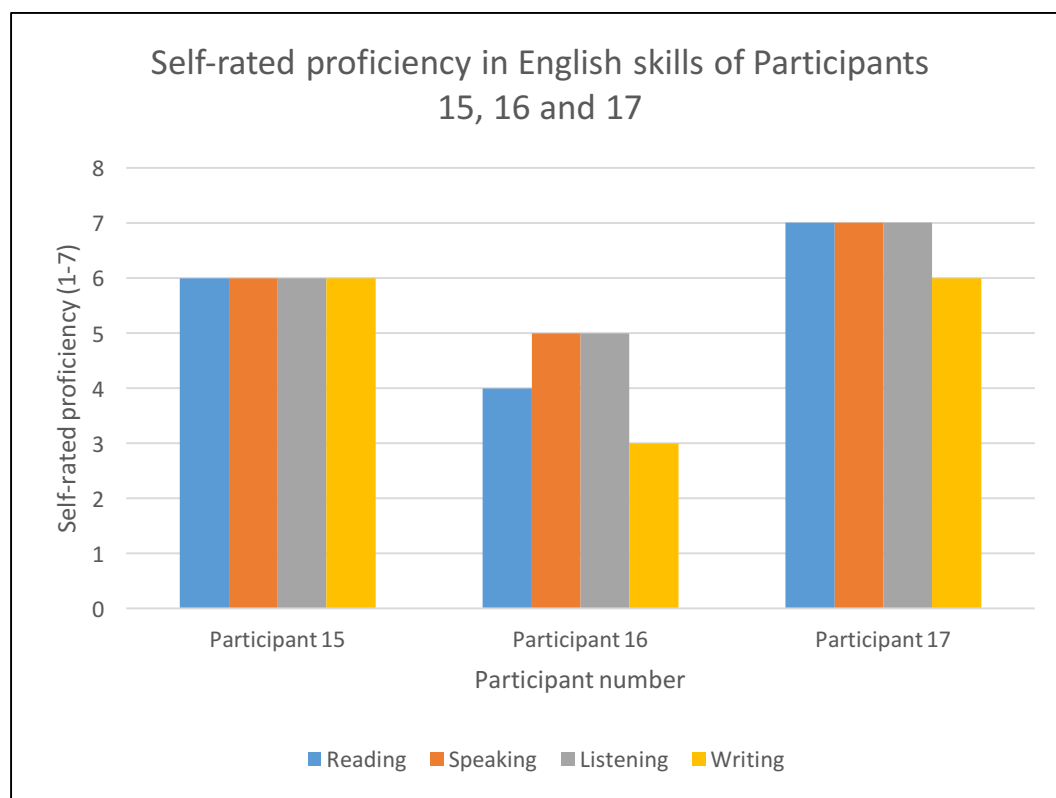
##### Theme 1: Bilingualism

The first question asked for participants' self-reported language proficiency across skills in English and ISL on a 1-7 scale, "where 1 means no practical proficiency and 7 means proficiency equivalent to a native or bilingual user of the language". This question was used to assess current language proficiency of participants and as an indicator of language maintenance or attrition. The variables 'reading written ISL' and 'writing written ISL' were excluded from the analysis as almost all participants asked for clarification about what these terms meant, and those who understood the terms held varying ideas of what written ISL was, from a way to gloss transcriptions, to a printed version of visual materials. The remaining skills were English reading, speaking, listening and writing and ISL understanding, fingerspelling and producing and the results are outlined in Figure 4.



*Figure 4: Participant' self-rated proficiency scores in English and ISL skills*

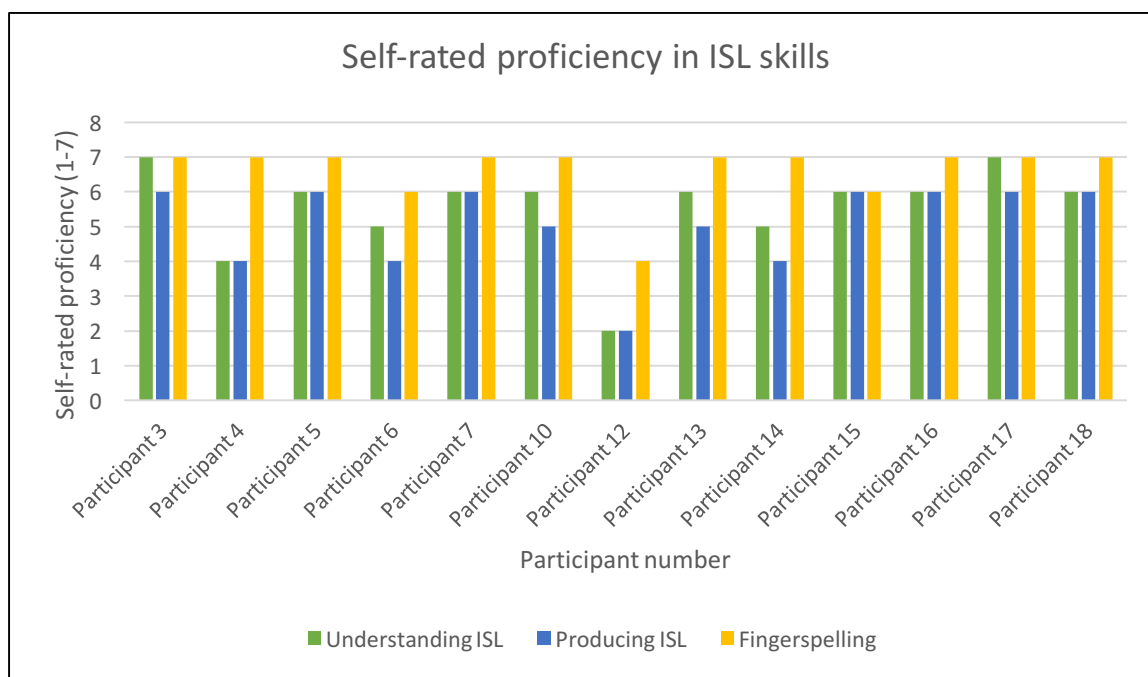
Regarding the English skills, 15 of the 18 participants (83.3%) self-reported their proficiency in English in all skills as a 7. The self-rated proficiency across the English skills of the remaining 3 participants are outlined in Figure 5.



*Figure 5: Self-reported proficiency of participants 15, 16 and 17*

As is visible in Figure 5, participants 15 and 17 give scores of 6 and 7 across the skills, which is consistent with their self-ratings in ISL skills, as shown in Figure 6. Participant 16 however has lower self-rated proficiency in English than all other participants. The scores of 6 or 7 across the English skills by 94.4% of participants also suggests high language maintenance in English.

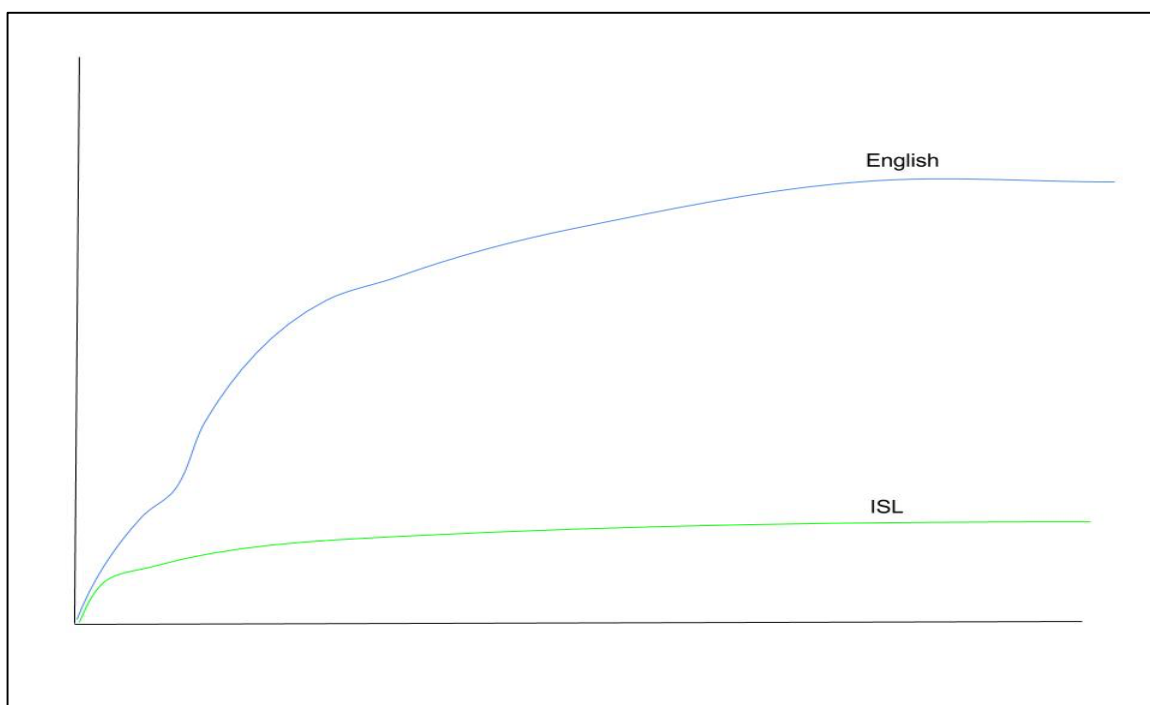
With regard to self-reported proficiency in ISL, 5 of the 18 participants (27.7%) rated themselves as 7, 'native or bilingual' across the skills. All of these participants had also rated themselves as 7 in the English skills suggesting they perceive themselves as balanced bilinguals. The self-rated proficiency across ISL skills of the remaining participants are shown in Figure 6.



*Figure 6: Self-reported proficiency of participants who did not rate themselves across the ISL skills as a 7*

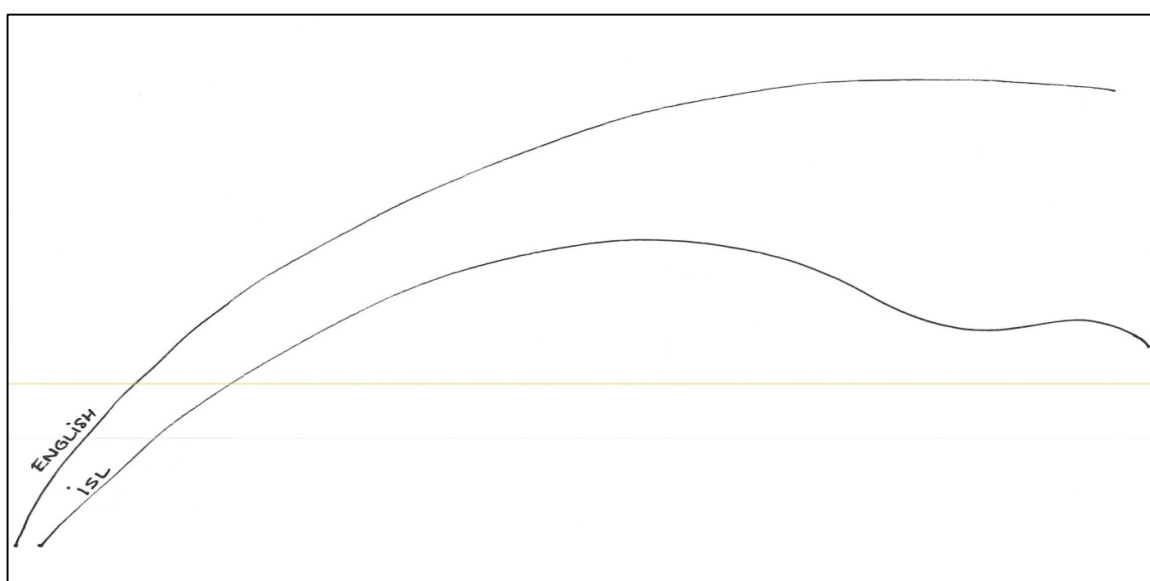
The majority of participants (66.7%) rated their ISL skills using either 6 or 7 scores. This also suggests successful language maintenance for the majority of participants. The remaining 6 participants (33.3%) may have lost some of their ISL proficiency due to first language attrition. Participant 12 has a very different ISL proficiency profile to the other participants with self-rated proficiencies of 2, 2, and 4 in understanding, producing and fingerspelling.

The responses from the drawing task offer additional insight language maintenance and attrition. Some drawings show clear signs of language attrition, while others suggest that despite growing up in a household with sign language, participants' ISL skills beyond early childhood were significantly inferior to their English skills. For example, see figures 7 and 8 below:



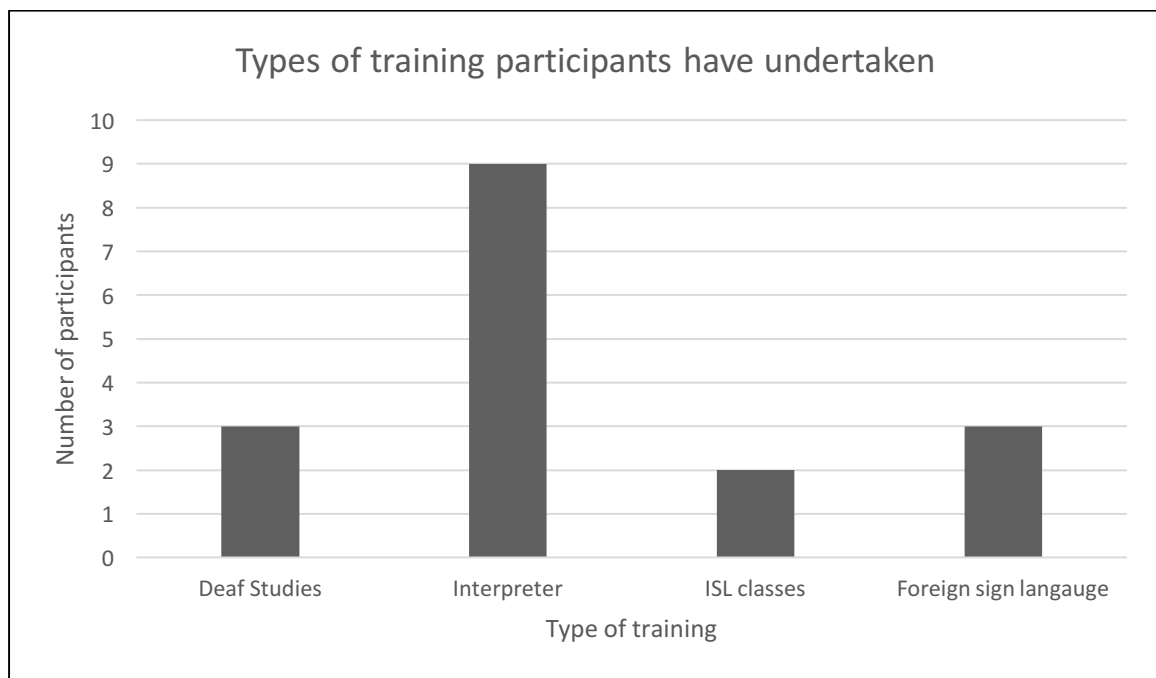
*Figure 7: Drawing (completed using a computer during a Skype meeting) by Participant 12*

Figure 7 shows that Participant 12 did not experience language attrition in ISL but instead their English was very dominant throughout childhood and into adulthood. By comparison, Figure 8 (below) suggests that Participant 13 did at one point have higher levels of ISL but over time they have suffered language attrition.



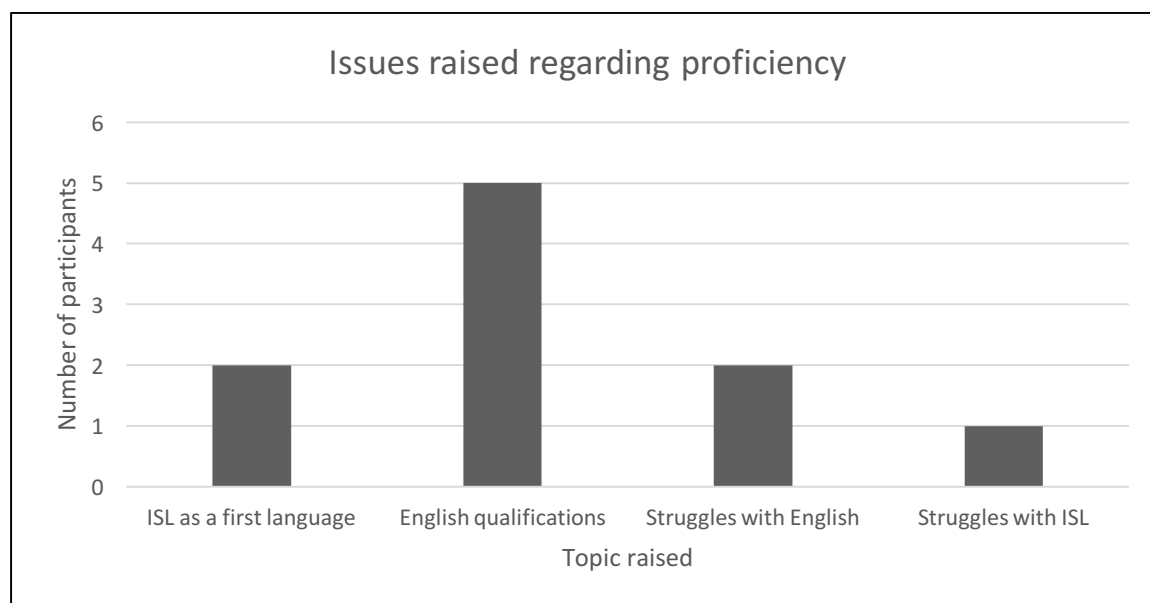
*Figure 8: Drawing by Participant 13*

In the qualitative section of the questionnaire participants were asked, “Have you had any formal training or teaching in ISL?”. 9 of 18 participants (50%) had received formal training. The types of training are shown in Figure 9. This question was also important in identifying involvement with the Deaf community (c.f. Theme 4).



*Figure 9: Training participants have received*

Participants were also given a space entitled, “Feel free to include any other details of your English or ISL proficiency”. The issues raised regarding proficiency are shown in Figure 10.

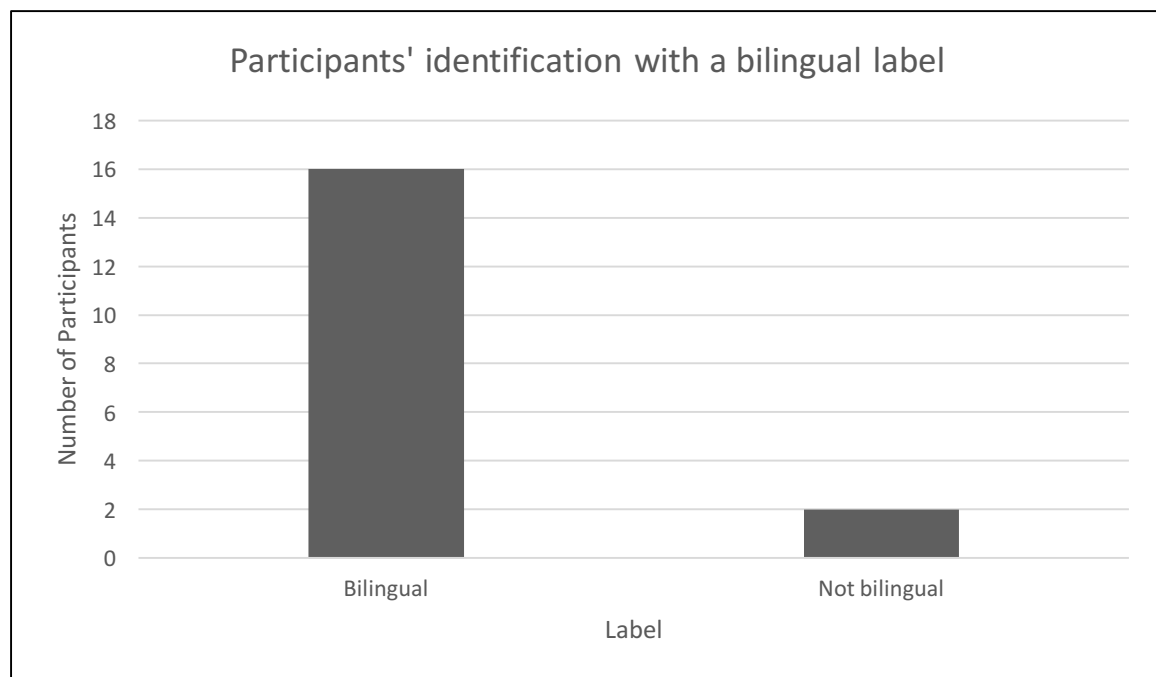


*Figure 10: Issues raised regarding proficiency*

Two participants (Participants 3 and 17) wrote in their responses that ISL is their first language, “ISL was my first language, English my second”, while another (Participant 7) discussed this during our meeting (recorded in field notes) and spoke about how when she gets very tired she finds she slips into ISL even if she is conversing with an English monolingual. By comparison, Participant 6 wrote how they “need to learn more [ISL] in a formal class” and cited a lack of contacts with whom to use ISL as a reason for lower proficiency levels.

Regarding English, some participants, e.g. Participant 7, made it clear that their English had not been affected by having d/Deaf parents, “[I] have had no difficulties with regard to English”. However, Participant 17 wrote “I struggled with English in school . . . I did a lot of training and courses to improve on my written English”, while Participant 16 wrote “my English, I feel, suffered . . . [it] is very weak (sic) now”. This suggests Participant 16 did not suffer language attrition but they may never have fully developed their English.

The final question regarding bilingualism asked participants “Do you consider yourself bilingual in ISL and English?” and why. The results are shown in Figure 11. 11 of the 18 participants (61.1%) explained their choice.



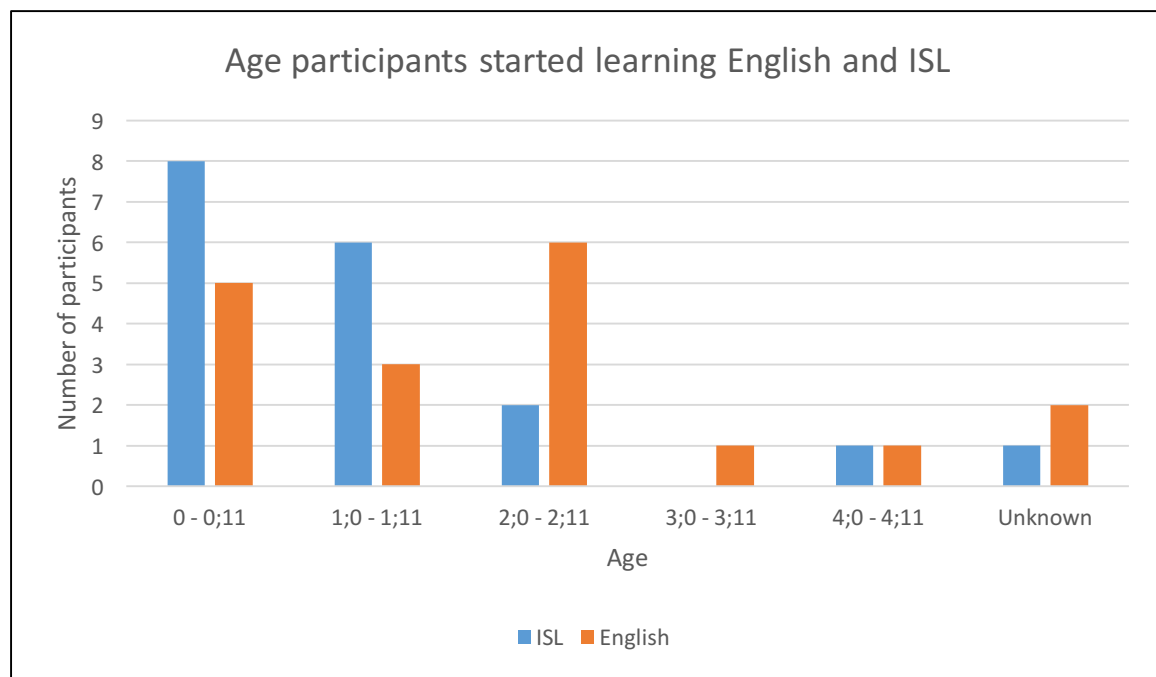
*Figure 11: Participants' identification with a bilingual label*

Both the participants (12 and 16) who do not consider themselves bilingual explained their response. Participant 12 explained that he has “very limited proficiency in ISL” while Participant 16 said she has “higher comprehension in ISL” and feels her English is sub-standard. Regarding identifying as bilingual mentioned daily use of the language, e.g. Participant 8 wrote “I have always used both ISL & English in my personal & professional life on a daily basis.”

## Theme 2: Language background

The first questions relevant to this section asked “At what age did you start to learn ISL/ English?” The responses are outlined in Figure 12. Many participants noted that they were not sure what age they began to learn, or be exposed to either language.

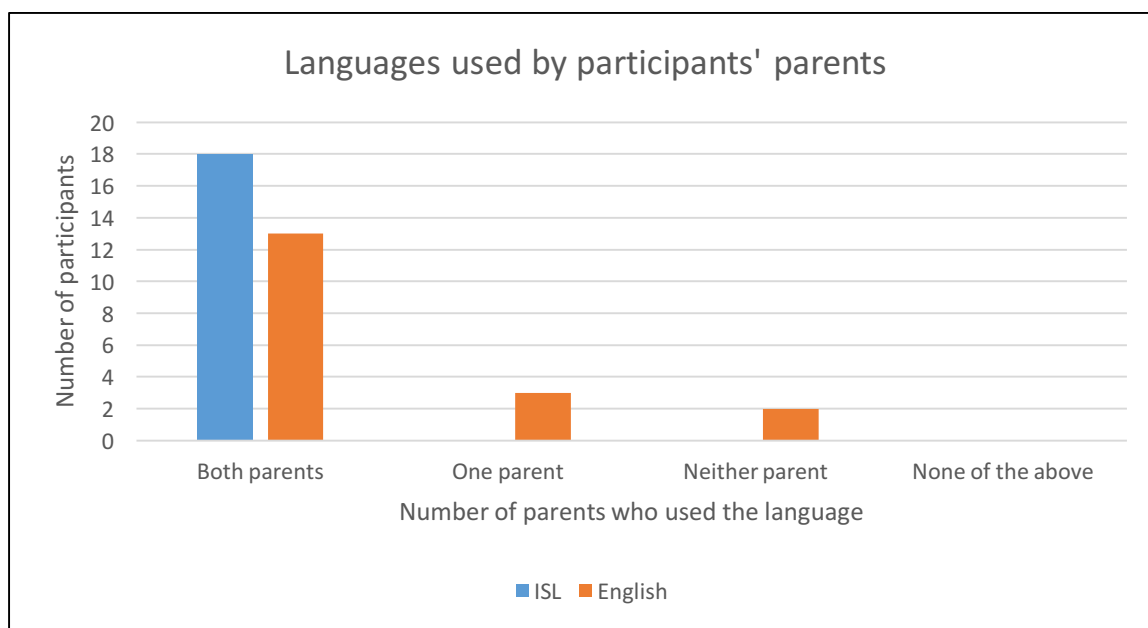




*Figure 12: Age participants started learning English and ISL*

Some participants mentioned that they only began to acquire English when they started at school or pre-school, e.g. Participant 9 whose immediate family was all-d/Deaf, while others had hearing family members who used English, e.g. Participants 5 and 17 both had hearing grandfathers who used English with them. As it appeared that most participants learned English later than ISL I used a Wilcoxon signed-rank test to check significance, but the difference was not significant.

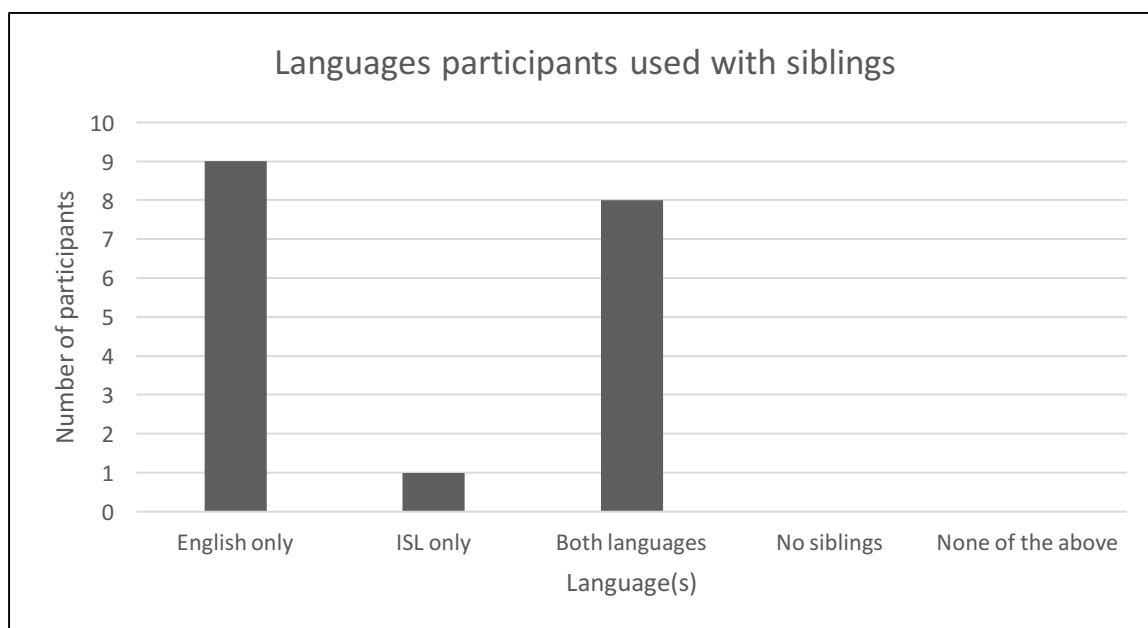
The next questions asked, “Did your parents use ISL/ English?”, with multiple choice options. The results are outlined in Figure 13.



*Figure 13: Languages used by parents of participants*

Participants explained that some parents used more English or used “written only” (Participant 7) or as Participant 5 wrote, that English was only used “sometimes”.

The next question asked “What language did you use with your sibling(s)?” and the results are outlined in Figure 14.

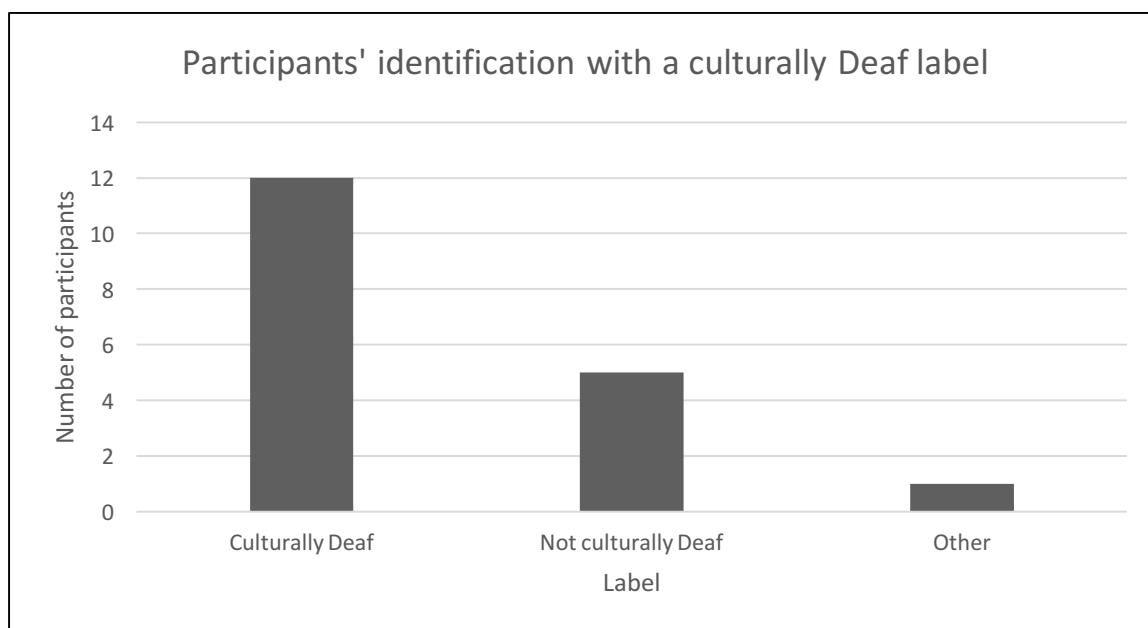


*Figure 14: Languages participants used with their siblings*

Participant 9's experiences as the only hearing member of the family differs from the other CODAs, as they were the only participant who used ISL only with siblings. Two participants wrote that the use of English with their siblings caused fights at home. Participant 5 wrote that their "parents would be angry when I talked to sister in front of them (should sign)" and Participant 15 wrote "if our parents caught us talking and not signing, we got a bit of a wallop!".

### Theme 3: Biculturalism

The first question asked "Do you consider yourself culturally Deaf?" and the results are shown in Figure 15.

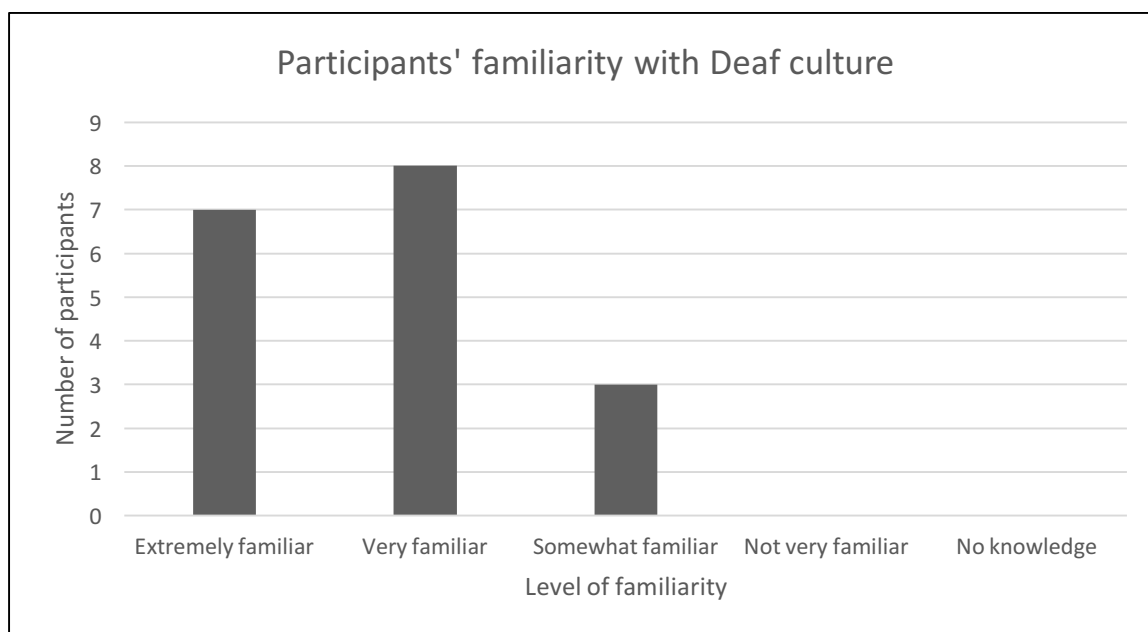


*Figure 15: Participants' identification with a culturally Deaf label*

Participant 10 ticked both Yes and No, explaining while “[they] align [themselves] politically with the perspective and identity of the Deaf community” they are also “obsessed with music”, an aspect of their cultural identity which they feel is at odds with the cultural identity of the Deaf community.

Participants who identified as culturally Deaf mentioned aspects of Deaf culture that they identified with. Participant 7 said they “share the same values of the Deaf community”. Participant 8 talked about behaviours their hearing friends noticed, “like having to maintain eye contact”. Participant 14 wrote that they view things “from a ‘Deaf Gaze’”. On the other hand participants who did not consider themselves culturally Deaf felt this was something unique to hard-of-hearing and d/Deaf individuals, whereas they have a “life away from the deaf cultural way” (Participant 13).

The next question asked participants, “How familiar do you consider yourself with Deaf culture?” and the responses are outlined in Figure 16.

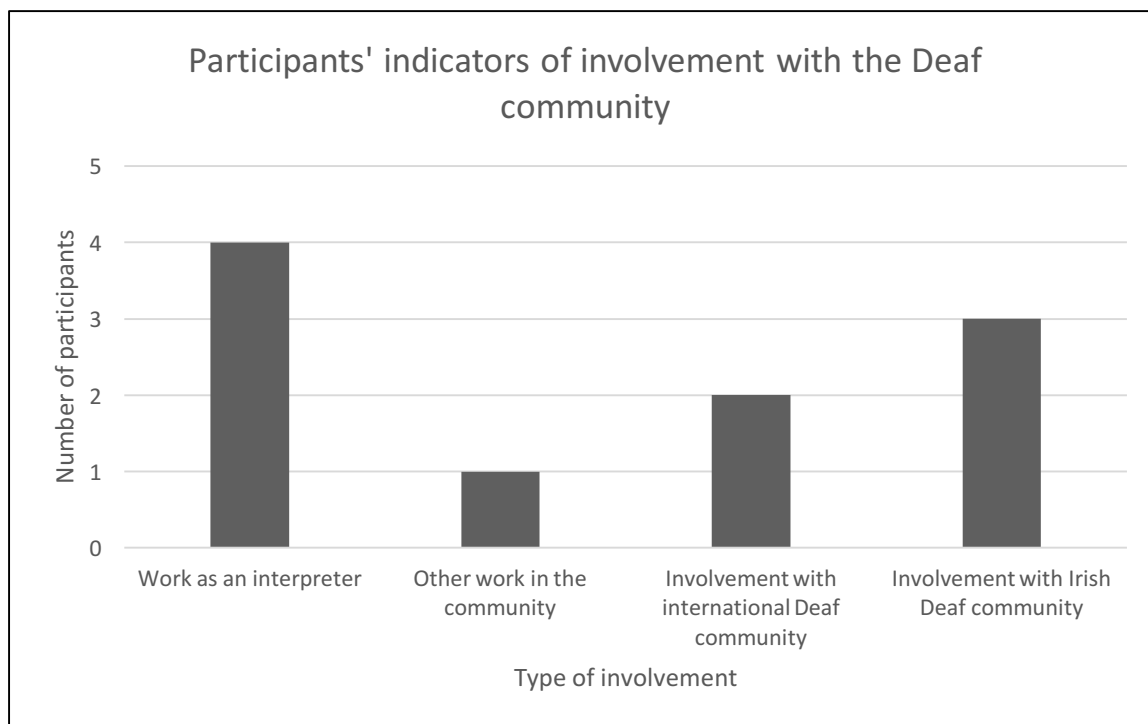


*Figure 16: Participants' familiarity with Deaf culture*

15 of the 18 participants (83.3%) identified as very familiar or extremely familiar with Deaf culture (c.f. Section 5.2).

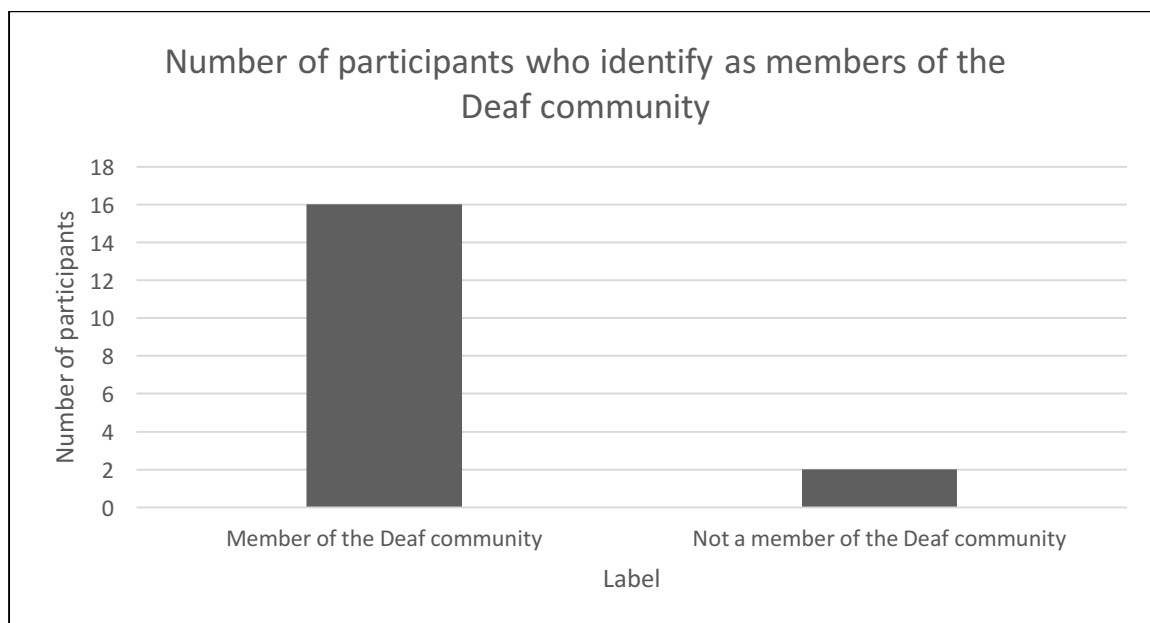
#### Theme 4: Community membership

Answers about community membership were given when asked about language proficiency and training and these results are outlined in Figure 17.



*Figure 17: Participants' indicators of their involvement with the Deaf community*

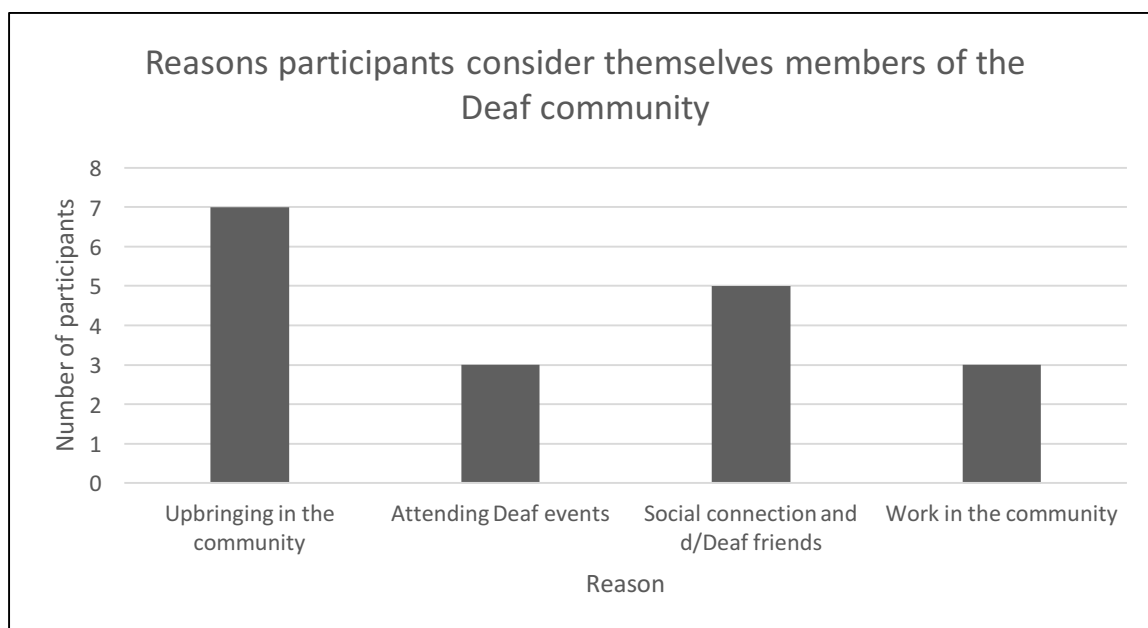
The main question in this section asked participants "Do you consider yourself a member of the Deaf community?". The breakdown of responses is shown in Figure 18.



*Figure 18: Number of participants who identify as members of the Deaf community*

The two participants who did not consider themselves as members of the Deaf community gave similar responses to their answers about not being culturally Deaf e.g., because they are “not Deaf” (Participant 6).

A number of participants gave the same reasons why they consider themselves a member of the Deaf community, as shown in and these reasons are displayed in Figure 19.



*Figure 19: Why participants consider themselves to be members of the Deaf community*

Some of these reasons are linked, e.g. their parents' involvement in the community meant participants were brought along to Deaf events and through these events they got to know other members of the community. Participant 14 explained how he "grew up within the Deaf community" and that some of his first friends were d/Deaf children and KODAs, and how these friendships maintain his connection to the community.

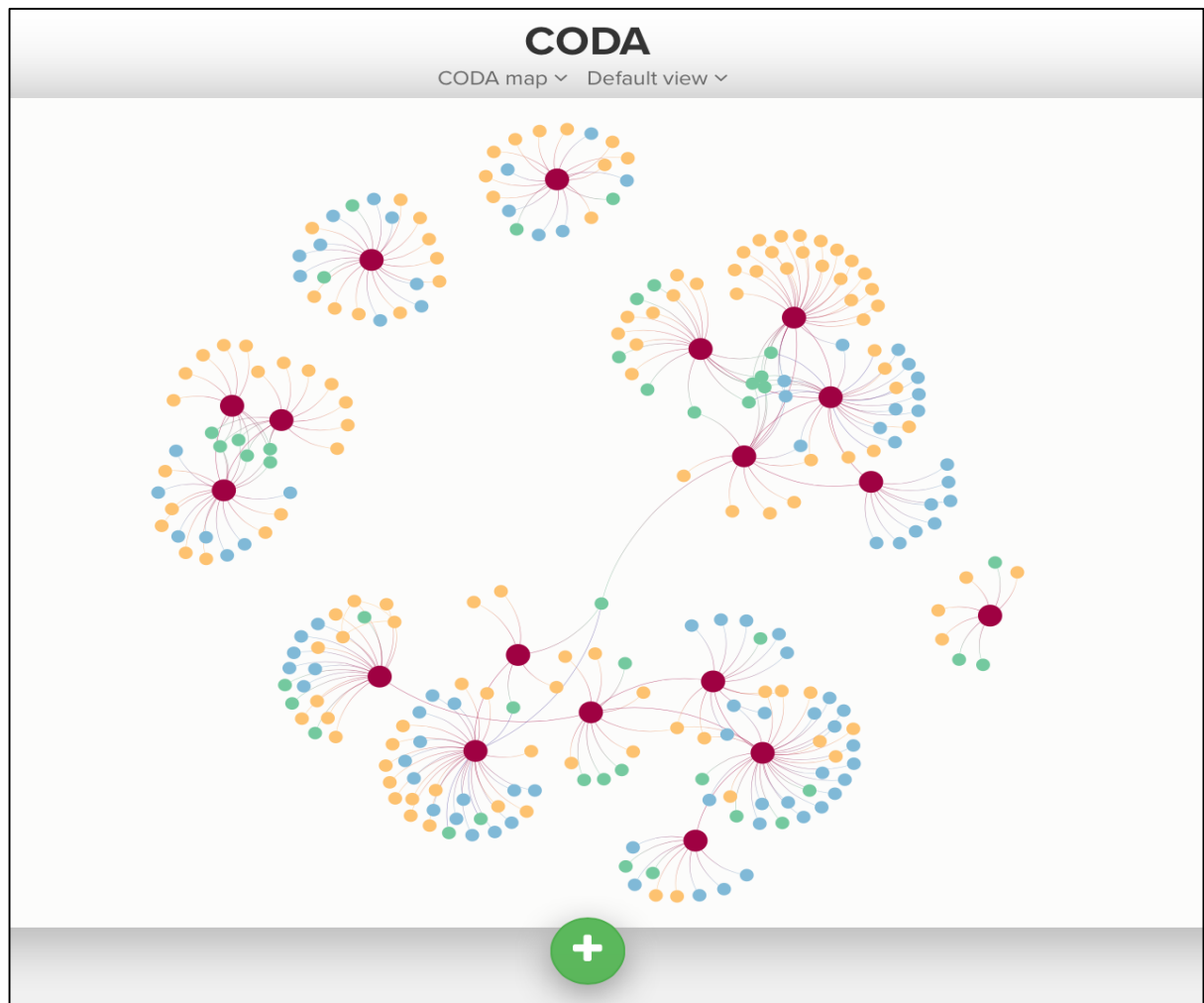
#### **4.1.2 Findings from social network questionnaire**

Initially these data were entered into a separate SPSS dataset due to its size (314 contacts and 18 variables for each contact). The qualitative data was transcribed from the Qualtrics platform for analysis.

Participants were asked to name up to 20 family members, and up to 20 friends. The mean number of contacts for participants was 17.4 (SD=8.7). The mean percentage of contacts who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing was 66.4% and the mean percentage of hearing contacts was 33.6%. To visualise the network, the nodes and



connections were entered and drawn into a network using Kumu. The complete network is shown in Figure 20.



*Figure 20: Social network of participants as visualised using Kumu*

The dark red nodes represented CODA participants, blue nodes were hearing contacts, green nodes were hard-of-hearing or d/Deaf contacts and yellow nodes were friends and acquaintances (hearing or d/Deaf). The total number of nodes in the network was 258. 38 nodes were identified as belonging to multiple participants from the questions asking for full names, gender, hearing status and relationship between participant and contact but some others may have been overlooked. As shown in Figure 20 there were also some nodes that linked separate clusters.

To analyse the cultural and linguistic contact between participants and contacts, participants were asked to rate their English and ISL use with each contact, on a Likert scale from Never to Always and the English written, English oral and ISL proficiency of each contact. The proficiency levels distinguished between language choice and using the only language common to both interlocutors, and contacts were divided into those with whom the participant would be likely to be in a monolingual mode (proficiency of 1 or 2) or a bilingual mode (proficiency of 3 or more). The mean number of 'bilingual mode' contacts was 8 ( $SD=5.2$ ) and 'monolingual mode' contacts was 9.4 ( $SD=6.5$ ). However, this varied widely for individual participants. The mean use of ISL with contacts was 3.2, on a 1-6 scale. 3 on the scale represented 'sometimes'. The mean use of English with contacts was 5.1, on the same 1-6 scale. 5 on the scale represented 'very often'. This may come from the fact that some participants only used ISL with their parents and the rest of their social networks were made up of English-only contacts.

The next question asked participants how often they are in contact with family and friends, on a 7-point Likert scale from 'less than monthly' to 'daily contact'. These data were missing for 10 contacts but it is unclear whether this was due to a mistake filling out the questionnaire or if the fields were intentionally left blank. The mean amount of contact between participants and their contacts was 4.3 ( $SD=8.1$ ). Participants were asked how much time they spend in person with their contacts and what percentage of that time is spent in English and ISL but these data were missing for 38 contacts, again it is unclear why, and some percentages did not add to 100% so these data were excluded from analysis.

Similarly there were 20 contacts for whom the participant did not report their relationship level, this may be due to a hesitancy on the part of participants to rate their closest family and friends. The mean relationship level was 6.2 ( $SD=1.8$ ), on a scale of 1-8. Participants were asked to choose the three contacts, with highest and lowest relationship ratings, and explain the rating. Most participants rated distance or not meeting up as a cause for low ratings and common interests and close family relationships as a cause for high rating. Participant 3 said his immediate

family “have always been close as we lived together for most of our lives” while the people rated lowest was “primarily because of distance”.

At the end of the ORIC participants were given some open ended questions to give any other comments on their network groups or any comments about their social network more generally but most participants did not have additional comments.

#### **4.1.3 Findings from written questionnaire after social network variables were added**

The following variables were created in the main SPSS dataset based on the ORIC data: number of contacts for each participant, mean contact with network contacts in ISL, mean contact with network contacts in English, percentage of d/Deaf or hard of hearing contacts, percentage of hearing contacts.

Due to the small sample size, and the fact that questions being analysed included those with Yes/No only responses, this meant there were a number of tied ranks, and because of this non-parametric tests were used, as the assumption of normality for these data could not be met (Field, 2013; Schlee, 2013).

First a Kendall’s tau correlation was used to test participants’ language maintenance or attrition, using current proficiencies, correlated with their bilingual, culturally Deaf identity, their community membership and their , familiarity with Deaf culture. ISL producing was significantly positively correlated with familiarity with Deaf culture ( $r=.660$ ;  $p=.002$ ). Fingerspelling was significantly negatively correlated with being a member of the Deaf community ( $r=-.799$ ;  $p=.001$ ).

A Kendall’s tau showed no significant correlations between the contact participants have with ISL (the mean use of ISL with contacts) and their identity. Similarly there were no correlations between these identity variables and

participants' contact with the Deaf and hearing communities (the percentage of their contacts that are hearing and the percentage that are d/Deaf).

A Kendall's tau was used to see if variables such as formal training, age participants started learning language or language use in the home affected language maintenance or attrition. The test found a significant negative correlation between the age participants started learning ISL and their ISL producing skills ( $r = -.625$ ;  $p = .004$ ), with both other ISL skills approaching significance levels.

## **4.2 FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS**

Themes from the two interviews were identified through the questions asked and the issues raised by participants in their responses. Despite the difference in interview length and the differences between the interview participants many of the same issues and similar views were raised.

### Theme 1: Language: Bilingualism and language maintenance and attrition

The first question asked "what does it mean to you to be bilingual and why do you think that label applies to you". Participant 1 talked about how they were "competent and fluent in spoken and written English" while Participant 5 described bilinguals as being "fully capable of speaking in both languages with no difficulty about any subject". They also said being bilingual is "pretty crucial to my identity". Both participants showed an understanding of what bilingualism means and why they are bilingual (c.f. Section 5.1).

The participants were shown their drawings and asked, "where your languages are changing, what's happening at those points? Why?". They were also asked what they expect to see in to the future and what factors will affect how the line will develop, i.e. will they maintain their ISL or what might cause them to experience language attrition. Both participants referred to the impact of working in

the Deaf community on their language maintenance or attrition in the future. Participant 1 said “if I was to leave the Deaf community professionally” that would cause their ISL levels to decrease but they plan to remain in their job so “it should stay where it is at the moment”, while Participant 5 expects their ISL to continue improving while they train and work as an interpreter. Regarding why they had maintained their ISL into adulthood Participant 5 said, “my parents are d/Deaf, you can’t not speak to them in sign language”.

### Theme 2: Biculturalism

Next the participants were asked “what does it mean to you to be culturally Deaf and why do you think that label applies (or does not apply) to you?”. Participant 1 had identified as not culturally Deaf in the questionnaire but said it was “a mistake”. Participant 1 identified “sign language. . . the language of the household”, involvement with the community and a “cultural awareness” as key parts of being culturally Deaf. Participant 5 saw being culturally Deaf as knowing “what is involved in the Deaf community” and being fully aware of the issues relating to the Deaf community as key aspects to being culturally Deaf, noting that while they identify that way they are less involved than they were as a child.

The participants were given the definition of biculturalism, “the idea that you belong to two cultures . . . [e.g.] hearing and Deaf cultures”, and asked what they think of this idea and if “CODAs can be, or, are bicultural?”. Both participants said, “I think CODAs can be” (Participant 5), but that “I don’t think all CODAs are bicultural” (Participant 1).

### Theme 3: Community membership and social networks

The next question asked the participants “What does it mean to you to be a member of the Deaf community and why do you think that applies to you?”. Participant 5 said “you’ve to know sign language to be part of the Deaf community”,

and that “good awareness”, “a good attitude” and understanding, “the oppression [d/Deaf people] go through” were very important to being a member of the community Participant 1 talked about how the idea of who is a member of the Deaf community has been subject to “discussion” and has changed “over the years”, and they talked about the importance of being an active member rather than “a passive member than turns up once in a blue moon”.

In their responses participants had already mentioned the links between ISL, Deaf culture and being a member of the Deaf community. An element that lies within these responses is the role of the social network, as the contacts in a social network are the people with who the participant is using sign language, and being involved in the culture and community.

The participants were shown the diagrams of their social networks, and given the percentages of English and ISL and hearing and d/Deaf individuals within their network. Both participants were unsurprised by the visual or statistical representations of their social networks. Participant 1 noted that their network would look very different at different points in their life or if it had a section “sign language contact professionally with people”. Participant 5 said “I know all my friends are hearing, I don’t have any d/Deaf friends anymore” and that if they had more d/Deaf friends they would have better ISL proficiency.

#### Theme 4: CODA: Concept and Identity

The participants were asked “what does being a CODA mean to you?”. Both participants mentioned how using the word CODA was a relatively new phenomenon in Ireland. Participant 1 talked about how, he used to refer to himself using the ISL sign ‘*mother father Deaf*’, as ‘*hearing*’ didn’t fully explain his identity. Participant 5 talked about how he “never really [identifies] as being a CODA” but “, [he] completely [is]” and only in this last year “people have started to use the word CODA a lot more”. Regarding what having d/Deaf parents means he said “it’s just my life. I’m very proud of it, I love it . . . It’s just my identity. It’s who I am”.

I asked both participants what “characterises a CODA”’. Participant 5 said “CODAs can be anything” and how he has seen both extremes, from CODAs with no sign language to “CODAs that would be fluent and culturally aware”. He comments that like there is deaf and Deaf “maybe there should be small ‘c’ and a capital ‘C’ [for CODAs] . . some CODAs just haven’t a clue and some CODAs love the Deaf community and will stay in it forever”. Participant 1 felt that a CODA is characterised by “use [and a promotion] of sign language, identifying with the culture, involvement with the community, supporting issues that affect [them]”.

#### Theme 5: CODAs in the community: Expectations, opportunities and change

The next question asked about the role of CODAs in the Deaf community. Participant 5 talked about CODAs as a “hearing voice” to “spread the Deaf community’s ideas” the different experiences and upbringing in the Deaf community that make CODAs unique.

Participant 1 told a story about a CODA who applied for a job, the same story told in a questionnaire meeting by another CODA and in the focus group. The job was at Deaf Village Ireland (a community centre with religious, community, education and sports facilities in Dublin) when it was set up. There was outrage when the CODA got the job, because they were seen to have been chosen for the job over d/Deaf people. As a result of the controversy, Deaf Village Ireland drafted a comprehensive policy with hearing and d/Deaf quotas. Participant 1 felt the incident had started necessary discussion about the qualification that should be required for hearing people to get a job working with the d/Deaf, as “being CODA alone shouldn’t be the reason why they get the jobs”, something that is not standard practice in many organisations working for, and with, the d/Deaf, but at the same time there is a need for roles and jobs within the community for CODAs who want to be involved, “outside of interpreting . . . without it then impacting on d/Deaf people’s access” to employment. The questionnaire participant felt similarly

saying “CODAs are members of the Deaf community when they are participating [as interpreters] but they can face backlash for things like going for a job”.

Participant 1 mentioned language brokering and interpreting for his parents and how there needs to be more support for young CODAs as they sometimes have to deal “with the adult issues at a young age” to make sure they are “equipped to deal with that elevation [in status as the interpreter between two worlds]” but equally that ‘the position of CODAs . . gets more complicated nearly the older you get and especially if you work professionally within it”.

Regarding how CODAs are viewed by the Deaf community, Participant 5 mentioned how individual parents vary in how much they want their child involved but that his parents were “100% has to be as involved as, as proficient as a d/Deaf person”. Participant 1 talked about the struggle of being hearing and “[not wanting] to be identified with that hearing oppressor” and the struggle of working in the community, needing the job but worrying about seen as taking a job from a d/Deaf person, or “becoming the hearing oppressor”.

#### **4.3 FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUP**

The focus group members are referred to as DL1, 2 and 3 for Deaf Leader as each was assigned a code during transcription.

##### Theme 1: Language acquisition and bilingualism

The first question asked “do you think it is important for d/Deaf parents to pass on ISL to their hearing children?”. The group agreed it was important, as CODAs “need to be able to communicate with the Deaf community and . . . with the hearing community” (DL1) DL2 talked about how communicating with a baby is “just natural” and using ISL with a CODA baby is “a must really”. DL3 said the whole family should “have the same language, sign and English . . . both of them”. DL3 also



identified that teaching sign language by using it with a CODA child is linked to passing on Deaf culture.

Focus group participants discussed how Oralism and discrimination may affect d/Deaf parents, for example that parents may be preoccupied with the speech of young CODAs because they were taught to be “proud that they can speak well” (DL2) and to view sign language negatively, which may linger subconsciously. DL3 also pointed out how the Oralist education delayed the language acquisition and education of d/Deaf individuals. These points contextualise the parenting choices of parents of CODAs. All of these points give context to the choices and behaviour of these d/Deaf individuals when they are fulfilling their role as parent to a CODA child.

Participants were asked if they consider themselves bilingual, and if they consider CODAs bilingual. All three members see themselves and CODAs as bilingual. DL1 describing how it was “just natural” for her CODA children to acquire both languages, with the help of their hearing grandfather, and now they are “well able” and have done very well academically in the education system.

## Theme 2: Culture and biculturalism

The next question asked “do you think it’s important to pass on Deaf culture to hearing children”. DL2 said that while “passing on knowledge is good” they “wouldn’t expect [CODAs] to merge themselves in it (Deaf culture), because they’re not fully part of the Deaf culture”. I also asked “do you think CODAs can be bicultural”. DL3 said that they can be involved in both cultures and “they have the best of both”. DL1 talked about the importance of being flexible and adapting to both cultures because it’s impossible to live surrounded by a culture and not be part of it. CODAs are surrounded, in the family unit, by Deaf culture, and at school and in wider society by hearing culture. DL1 used an example of a d/Deaf person who was called ‘blunt’ by a hearing person and they were upset to illustrate the importance of adjusting between cultures.

DL1 talked about how CODAs can struggle to balance life between hearing friends and their d/Deaf parents when their friends do not have sign language or awareness of Deaf culture so they cannot show their friends how “normal” their family is.

DL2 used humour as an example of how CODAs can be measurably bicultural. She said that she doesn’t understand hearing humour without an interpreter, but she could laugh at Deaf humour while a hearing person wouldn’t get the joke, “but CODAs can get both, and that’s the point”.

### Theme 3: CODAs and the Deaf community

DL1 said that while she used to bring her kids along to all the Deaf events once she tried to enrol her son in the Deaf scouts and they said “hearing people are not allowed” and from this her son learned “there were some lines you can’t cross” and some parts of the community he couldn’t be involved in, as CODAs “cannot 100% be in [the Deaf community]”. DL2 explained how for d/Deaf people the d/Deaf community “is the only place. . . where I’m comfortable to be involved”, but CODAs have access to both worlds. This coupled with “sense of fear” (DL2) that CODAs would “take over” may explain why these limits are drawn around CODA membership. DL1 told the ‘CODA applying for the job’ story and how that exemplifies the mixed feelings of CODAs being involved but the Deaf community not always being fully on-board with CODA involvement. DL1 felt apprehensive that “there could be hurt there down the line” for her child who plans to work in the Deaf community in light of “the experiences of my children in the past”.

DL1 said that “in an ideal world [CODAs] could be an ally”, something both other leaders also agreed with. DL1 wanted to see CODAs and the Deaf community “equal, working together”, “not following” so everyone can learn “how we can work with CODAs . . . rather than just using them”. DL3 said she has seen changes, but she doesn’t think the community is at a stage yet where CODAs would be accepted as leaders of the community. DL2 pointed out that CODAs “don’t know where they

really stand either”, showing she has picked up on the feelings that CODAs expressed throughout the questionnaires and interviews.

The members noted the focus group discussion “makes you aware” (DL2) of issues facing CODAs and resolved to host an event, “a come-together, maybe sharing stories” (DL2). They hoped this could make CODAs feel welcome as some d/Deaf people “push them into the hearing world”, “I didn’t realise that was happening” (DL1). DL3 said that Deaf attitudes need to change regarding “welcoming CODAs and an awareness of CODAs”.

Finally, the focus group members were aware of how language, culture and community are connected, DL1 mentioned how language and culture are “impossible to separate” and DL2 said that it is “key to be able to use the language” to engage with the community and Deaf culture.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter looks at the results and analysis from Chapter 4 and how these findings relate to the theory and research outlined in Chapter 2. This discussion will be organised according to the research questions, found in Section 3.1.

### 5.1 CODAS AND LANGUAGE: BILINGUALISM AND MAINTENANCE OR ATTRITION

Part of Research Question 1 asks whether CODAs maintain their languages, ISL and English, in adulthood. The results in Section 4.1.1 suggest that in this sample of Irish CODAs most of them did maintain both their English and their ISL. Participants with lower proficiency scores appeared to either have suffered language attrition, as seen in some participant drawings and qualitative responses, or that from early childhood English became the strongly dominant language, to the detriment of the development of ISL proficiency. This suggests that Irish CODAs may be similar to CODAs abroad who reach milestones in their sign and spoken language at bilingual rates in their early childhood but during the school age period some CODAs continue their bilingual development, but others do not, leading to wide variation in language proficiency in adult CODAs (Hoffman and Chilla, 2015; Grosjean, 2010; Pizer, 2008; Pizer *et al.*, 2012).

Research Question 4 asked what factors govern the language maintenance or attrition of CODAs. This research question was explored by examining the correlation of variables as outlined in Section 4.1.3, as well as through the qualitative data, as outlined in Sections 4.1 and 4.2. Although the social network variables were not found to correlate with the language proficiency of the CODA sample (which may be due to the small sample size), social network was a factor identified by participants as relating to their language proficiency in both the questionnaire and interviews. One variable that was found to correlate was the age participants started learning ISL and their ISL producing proficiency, which may suggest a relationship between the age a CODA acquires ISL and their language

maintenance, as has been found in spoken language bilinguals (e.g. De Bot and Clyne, 1994). Another factor raised by participants in the interviews was a CODA's decision to work professionally with the Deaf community, a decision that creates a language domain for ISL and a social network surrounding ISL use and contact with the Deaf community. Participant 5 said they maintained their ISL to communicate with their parents. This relates to the idea of necessity as a factor governing language maintenance (Edwards, 2005) and previous research finding parents' tolerance of languages was a factor in determining the language proficiency of the CODAs (Pizer, 2008). However, this motivation and necessity should exist for all CODAs, yet not all CODAs do maintain their ISL for this purpose. One possible factor affecting parental language strategy that emerged in the focus group was how the legacy of Oralism and the way it placed value on speech and denigrated sign language may linger in the minds of d/Deaf individuals when they become parents. This may be a factor that affects parenting choices and language strategies in the home in families with d/Deaf parents and CODAs that has not been previously considered by researchers.

The results from the questionnaire about the languages used by parents when the CODAs were children support previous research that parents employ a range of language strategies and that different families make different choices about using one or more language in the home (Kanto *et al.*, 2013; Pizer *et al.*, 2012). Given that there is variation in language outcomes, especially in the minority (sign) language, and there is variation in the language used with CODAs as children, there may be a link between these two variables that future research could investigate. Unlike Pizer's (2008) CODAs who used English wherever possible, the participants in this study reported almost equally using English only, or both English and ISL, with their siblings, which may warrant further investigation about why Irish CODAs differ from their American counterparts in this respect.

Research Question 5 asks to what extent CODAs identify with a bilingual, bicultural identity. Firstly, regarding bilingualism, in the questionnaire most participants did identify as bilinguals, a surprising finding given that bilinguals,

including d/Deaf bilinguals, tend to have low rates of self-identification (Grosjean, 2010). Additionally, through the interviews and the qualitative data from the questionnaires, it was clear that the CODAs had a good understanding of what bilingualism is, some explaining bilingualism in terms similar to definitions of bilingualism discussed in Section 2.1. It is unclear whether the high self-identification as bilinguals is due to Irish CODAs being raised to believe they are bilingual, the Deaf leaders in the focus group also felt strongly that they and CODAs are bilingual and showed good awareness of what bilingualism is, so this may be a belief that gets passed on to CODAs from the Deaf community, or it may be a feature of the sample recruited for this study that they are more aware of bilingualism and identify with the term more than is typical of the Irish CODA population. Future research may be able to determine the cause of this finding, which may be one or more of the possibilities I have outlined.

This findings from this research appear to support previous findings that CODAs can be simultaneous or successive bilinguals (Hoffman and Chilla, 2015) as the Irish CODA sample indicated that depending on their birth order and the presence of close hearing relatives they either acquired ISL and then English, or acquired them simultaneously. The CODAs in this sample seem to have been mainly successive bilinguals, which is consistent with previous research on CODAs (c.f. Section 2.1.).

One issue that was not part of the research questions but that came up throughout this study was a perception on the part of CODAs that they may need to prove their English was equal to their peers who were raised by hearing parents. DL1 also pointed out the success of her children in the English-language education system in the focus group. Although previous research has shown that Deaf parents are equally caring and successful parents (Clark, 2003) and that CODAs get adequate exposure to English (Singleton and Tittle, 2000), this may be information that the Irish Deaf community has not been made aware of, or because the average member of hearing society is not aware of these studies, the community feels they must prove how 'normal' families with d/Deaf parents and CODAs are.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that some CODAs did report struggles with English, particularly while school-aged. Literature on CODAs has compared them to bilinguals from immigrant-contexts (e.g. Hoffman and Chilla, 2015), who often are monitored for provision of additional support because English is their second language (Wallen and Kelly-Holmes, 2006; Goodwin, 2002). It is possible that CODAs may get overlooked for such support given ISL's unofficial status, and so English may not be considered a second language for some CODAs. In this sample the participant who received support while in the education system rated their proficiency as native-like or bilingual, but Participant 16, who did not receive extra support, still feels her English proficiency is not at the same level as her peers. This finding suggests that policy and educators need to take into account the language background of CODA children and make sure they receive extra support when it is needed.

Another issue that emerged from the data was how the experiences of siblings within the same family varied depending on their birth order, a finding that is consistent with research on CODAs abroad (Pizer, 2008), and may warrant further investigation to assess how influential a factor birth order is for CODA language acquisition, bilingualism and language maintenance.

## **5.2 CODAS AND CULTURE: BICULTURALISM**

Part of Research Question 1 asks if CODAs identify as bicultural. The fact that the vast majority of participants identified as extremely familiar or very familiar with Deaf culture, but a lower number identified as culturally Deaf may suggest that there is a reluctance to identify with a label that may be new to the CODAs. On the other hand, cultural membership does involve more than knowledge of the culture so this may be reflected by these differing results. However, this does suggest that CODAs receive a cultural upbringing as well as a linguistic one, given the high levels of familiarity they report having with a minority culture, and the fact that the majority still identify as culturally Deaf. In the interviews participants identified sign

language as an important part of being culturally Deaf (as well as showing good awareness of how language, culture, identity and community membership are inter-related), and they drew a distinction between the potential for CODAs to be bicultural and the reality, where some do become bicultural but others do not, depending on their interaction with the hearing and Deaf communities.

Research Question 6 asked about how the Deaf community characterises CODAs. The Deaf leaders were divided on the concept of Deaf culture and CODAs. Some believed that while it is important for CODAs to have knowledge (familiarity with Deaf culture), they have no need for immersion within the culture. However, when discussing biculturalism, the leaders appeared to agree that CODAs are bicultural, in the way they can adapt to the hearing and Deaf worlds and their understanding of Deaf and hearing humour, but that being bicultural can cause struggles for a CODA to fit in between their two worlds. It would appear the Deaf community do see CODAs as having a rich understanding of Deaf culture but without necessarily considering them fully enculturated members of the sociocultural group.

### **5.3 CODAS AND THE COMMUNITY**

Research Question 2 asked what the social networks of CODAs reveal about the extent and nature of contact they have with ISL, and with the hearing and Deaf communities. Analysis of the social networks showed that the average CODA used ISL sometimes, and that the CODA networks were approximately made up of two thirds d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing contacts and one third hearing contacts. The fact that participants had a larger English network (as seen through the mean language use) than ISL network contrasts with the finding that the participants had more d/Deaf and hard of hearing contacts but is partially explained by the bilingual mode data, suggesting that participants may be choosing to use English, possibly to include the monolinguals present in group situations, as often occurs with spoken language bilinguals (Grosjean, 2013).



Research Question 3 asked if there is a relationship between social network contact and the language proficiency of CODAs. Unsurprisingly, a correlation was found between the percentage of a participants' contacts that were hearing, or hard-of hearing or d/Deaf, and the mean use of ISL. The percentage of hearing contacts negatively correlated ( $r=-.669$ ;  $p=.000$ ) while the percentage of d/Deaf contacts positively correlated ( $r=.669$   $p=.000$ ). However, no such correlation was found with English, perhaps due to the bilingual mode, as mentioned above. In the qualitative data, social network contact was referenced as important, with some pointing to their lack of contacts as reasons for lower ISL proficiency, and for their responses about their identification with terms such as bilingual. These findings suggest that like other language users, the social network can affect the language use of an individual and interact with language change, including language maintenance or attrition (Hirano, 2013; Paolillo, 1999).

In the social network data, a number of clusters appeared based around families and community centres or other hubs of the Deaf community, which may also be workplaces for CODAs. It appears that had d/Deaf individuals' social networks been included, or had more CODAs been involved in the research the network may have found more nodes that connected different clusters, which may have increased the size and density of the network, which are factors in language maintenance for minority languages (Gollan *et al.*, 2015).

One of these clusters was the workplace for CODAs who work professionally with the Deaf community. In the qualitative data participants explained that the social networks may have more contact with ISL if the workplace was asked about as a separate domain, alongside family and friends. However, other participants pointed out that they felt as professionals working with the Deaf community they needed to keep their distance socially to maintain that professional relationship, or to separate the working life from personal time. This data suggests that for CODAs who work within the Deaf community there may be additional complexities to their sociocultural relationship with the community.

Although it was not included explicitly in the Research Questions, another aspect of CODA identity was whether they identify themselves as members of the Deaf community and the vast majority of the CODA participants did see themselves as members of the Deaf community. In the interviews and focus group all participants agreed that CODAs are part of the Deaf community, but the Deaf leaders were unsure to what extent that membership extends to complete acceptance to fill any role within the community, or to feel completely welcomed, as there can be an aspect of needing to be d/Deaf to participate in some roles and in some activities. This may relate to a point raised in the interviews that the idea of who is a member of the Deaf community has been changing over the years.

#### **5.4 OTHER ASPECTS OF CODA IDENTITY**

Research Question 6 asked how do members of the Deaf community characterise CODAs. However, in the interviews CODAs were themselves asked about the idea of CODA identity. It would appear that the term CODA is relatively new in Ireland, and exists alongside '*mother father Deaf*', a term that has also been used by CODAs abroad (Preston, 1995). Despite not using the term or discussing the idea of CODA identity prior to our interview Participant 1 said that being a CODA was an important part of his identity. While the interview participants felt that a CODA could be someone who embraces that identity and uses sign language and is active in promotion of the Deaf community and culture, being a CODA does not mean that all CODAs will embrace that part of their identity.

Both the interview and focus group participants were asked about the role of CODAs in the Deaf community, and in responding to this question a number of key issues facing CODAs and the community emerged. Firstly there was a theme throughout the data that there are certain expectations of CODAs. Some of these are more obvious, like needing to know sign language to take part in the community, and that CODAs need to be active members of the community, and perhaps act as a hearing voice for the ideas of the community. On the other hand the qualitative findings suggest that CODAs, like their counterparts abroad, may act as language

brokers, or interpreters, for their parents due to the fact that ISL is not officially recognised in Ireland there is no legal requirement to provide an interpreter when dealing with d/Deaf customers or service users in Ireland. When the CODAs in this study discussed language brokering they had memories of being asked to get involved with conflict or adult issues before they were ready, which was suggested by previous research on CODAs (Preston, 1995; Clark, 2003). This finding highlights the impact of language status and policy on these CODAs and their families.

One area where CODAs felt particularly conflicted about the expectations of them is how to work professionally within the community, in a way that is fulfilling for them as a career, and without facing backlash from the community, as while interpreters are desired, other work in the community as a CODA is not always valued. In the interview Participant 1 talked about the struggle of being hearing and working in the community, “[not wanting] to be identified with that hearing oppressor”. On the one hand, Participant 1 explained how they financially depend on their job within the community, but there is a worry that it is seen as taking a job from a d/Deaf person. Even when a CODA is creating jobs for other d/Deaf people and providing information and services that benefit the Deaf community, they still can face negativity from individual members of the community.

The Deaf leaders also seemed to be aware that CODAs do feel conflicted and feel unsure about what is expected from them. They also pointed out that some members of the community “push” CODAs towards the “hearing world” because they believe they do not need to be part of the Deaf community, but that they do this without the knowledge of the rest of the community. DL1 even felt a need to protect her children from her own linguistic and sociocultural community as she was afraid that working professionally within the community would mean they would get hurt by the Deaf community. This is the same community in which these Deaf leaders expressed feeling safe and comfortable in a way they often didn’t in the outside world. That dichotomy between a safe place for the Deaf community, but not always a welcoming place for CODAs, and how a parent would want to keep her child away, suggests that changes are urgently needed in terms of expectations,

opportunities and a coming-together of the Deaf community about what is needed going forward and how CODAs can be a part of that. The Irish Deaf community seems to be unsure about CODAs, what they want from the community when they work within it professionally, while CODAs seem to be unsure why the Deaf community is divided between supporting CODAs and valuing their involvement, and being fearful of them and not wanting their involvement. These findings also highlights how policy and law needs to change in Ireland as some of these problems were caused by the absence of requiring those working with the d/Deaf to have sign language qualifications, and the lack of recognition of ISL and how that avoids provision of interpreters and other access-enhancing measures, which may partly explain a reluctance to lose existing interpreters and may manifest as backlash.

The final part of Research Question 1 asked to what extent the interaction of CODAs with Hearing and Deaf cultural communities, the interaction with interlocutors of their languages and their language maintenance or attrition of ISL determines their bicultural, bilingual identity. Fingerspelling negatively correlated with being a member of the Deaf community while producing ISL proficiency positively correlated with familiarity with Deaf culture. These findings suggest a relationship between ISL proficiency and cultural and community involvement. Additionally, in the qualitative data participants felt strongly that knowing ISL was important for being a member of the Deaf community, and knowing Deaf culture, and that all of these variables were related to one another. These findings support the literature on the relationship between language, community and culture (e.g. Hamers and Blanc, 2000; Wardhaugh, 2010).

The majority of the CODAs seemed to view their identity and experiences as a CODA in a positive light, and saw the benefits of their minority language, culture, identity and community, while the issues that they pointed were things that could improve that experience, while further support would help them reap the benefits of this rich heritage. The Deaf leaders also had stories, memories and experiences full of praise, respect and fondness for CODAs, though they readily admitted that

while the community was changing slowly ongoing change is needed to support both CODAs and the d/Deaf members of the Deaf community.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the language, culture and identity of Irish CODAs and examine the factors that affect CODA identity, such as their social network and language maintenance or attrition. In examining the relationship between these variables and CODA identity, this research aimed to begin filling a gap in literature and research on sign language bilinguals, CODAs and the Irish Deaf community. This study's exploration of language, culture and identity of Irish CODAs aimed both to look at how adult CODAs in Ireland view themselves and how leaders of the Deaf community view CODAs.

The results of the study found that Irish CODAs, like their counterparts overseas, vary in terms of their identification with terms like bilingual, member of the Deaf community and culturally Deaf, as well as their language proficiency and their experiences as children, but that the majority maintain their ISL and English in adulthood and identify as CODAs, and as bilingual, bicultural members of the Irish Deaf community.

The language(s) used in the home varied among the CODAs, and while many worked in the Deaf community, some had little or no involvement with the Deaf community professionally or socially.

Additionally, this research found that Irish CODAs are beginning to identify more with the term CODA and the qualitative data suggested there may be an individual or group identity as a CODA, but that it is not something that is universal to all CODAs, depending on their sign language proficiency and cultural and community involvement. Social networks and age of acquisition may be a factor in the language maintenance and attrition of Irish CODAs.

Finally, it became clear from the data that CODAs would benefit from a number of changes. Firstly, discussion among the Deaf community, including CODAs,

about what is expected of them, especially regarding work within in the community, would reduce tensions and uncertainty for the whole community. Secondly, similar discussion about social involvement within the community would help d/Deaf parents and their young CODAs, as well as adult CODAs, to feel more secure and certain about their place and role within the community. Thirdly, while most CODAs had no issues in their English acquisition, for CODAs who do, they are often overlooked by the education system and they would benefit from being considered potential second language learners of English, depending on whether they are simultaneous or successive bilinguals. Those who received support now report no issues with English, but the lack of support had huge impacts on one CODA.

However, due to a number of limitations, the findings and conclusions from this study cannot be readily applied to Irish CODAs generally. Firstly, the sample size was very small, although it is difficult to know what percentage of Irish CODAs were sampled in this study and how this sample compares to the general population given the lack of information available about Irish CODAs (Preston, 1995). However, the small sample size may have affected the statistical analysis, and thus some of those tests may not be as reliable as desired. Additionally some participants skipped questions on the questionnaire and this may be due to an overly long questionnaire. A large number of topics and issues were examined within the questionnaire and due to time and financial constraints all of the sections of the questionnaire were administered in the same meeting. It may have been better to have split the sections and met with participants multiple times or have limited the scope of this research and left some of the areas for future research. Finally, some of the variables being explored were entirely new, or being applied to CODAs for the first time and they would benefit from being reviewed and more rigorously operationalised in future research, to improve the validity and reliability of statistical analyses.

Despite these limitations, this research unearthed a plethora of areas, and issues, that would benefit from further research, such as the relationship between language ability and language tolerated by d/Deaf parents, the language used by

CODAs and their language maintenance and attrition as adults as well as longitudinal research examining what occurs during the school-age years when CODAs appear to begin varying in terms of their bilingual development and language maintenance and attrition. Additionally, it would be interesting to investigate whether Oralism has left a lasting impact on the parenting and language choices of parents of CODAs, as well as further examining the numbers of CODAs in Ireland, their demographic information, their involvement with the Deaf community professionally and socially and whether the findings from this study about their bilingualism and language maintenance are consistent with Irish CODAs generally.

This research was particularly important given the unique linguistic and cultural background of CODAs and how they have been overlooked by Applied Linguistics research, educational policy and the state. In light of these findings it appears that CODAs would benefit from further research as a linguistic and cultural population and from recognition of ISL by the Irish State, and recognition as members of a language minority by the education system.

This research, while beginning to close the gap in the literature, is merely the beginning as CODAs are a research population with much to teach us about bilingualism and biculturalism, as well as what it is like to be a hearing person and see the world through a “Deaf Gaze”.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: CUREC approval

Date 20th February 2016

Dear Caitríona

#### **Application Approval**

**Title:** Children of Deaf Adults in Ireland: Bilingualism in Irish Sign Language and English and Biculturalism in Hearing and Deaf cultural communities

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

If your research involves participants whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question (this includes those under 18 and vulnerable adults), then it is advisable to read the following NSPCC professional reporting requirements for cases of suspected abuse

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/factsheet-child-abuse-reporting-requirements-professionals.pdf>

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to [research.office@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:research.office@education.ox.ac.uk) for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.

Yours sincerely,

Jenni

Dr Jenni Ingram  
Member of DREC

## Appendix 2: Sample recruitment email

To Whom It Concerns,

My name is Caitríona O' Brien. I'm an Irish student doing a Masters course at the University of Oxford. For my research project I am looking at the language and identity of hearing children of d/Deaf adults (CODAs) in Ireland. I'm looking for participants who are hearing adults, and who were raised by one or more d/Deaf parents or guardians, to take part in my research. Participation will involve completing a short questionnaire about language use and identity and, if the participant is willing, being interviewed by me about their questionnaire responses. If you would be willing to send out my call for participants please let me know and I can give you further information and a template of the information to send out. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Best wishes,

Caitríona

Caitríona O' Brien  
Masters Student in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition  
Department of Education  
[caitrona.obrien@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:caitrona.obrien@education.ox.ac.uk)



## Appendix 3: Participant information letter for CODA participants

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**Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) in Ireland: Bilingualism in Irish Sign Language and English, and Biculturalism in Hearing and Deaf cultural communities**

**Information for Participants**

You are being invited to take part in a research study led by Caitríona O' Brien, and supervised by Dr Jessica Briggs (Department of Education, University of Oxford). Please take time to read the following information carefully and to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research.

This project investigates hearing children of deaf adults looking at a number of language, cultural and identity issues. For this study, we are seeking the perceptions of those with the experience of growing up hearing, raised by deaf adults. You have been identified as someone with insight into these issues.

It is your decision to take part in this study. You can decide to stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to. Every effort will be made to preserve confidentiality but as this cannot be fully guaranteed by the nature of this research it is possible that you may be able to be identified in the final report. However, your data will be anonymised and you will be allocated a pseudonym so that no one but you will be able to identify your contribution to the dataset. Other than this, there are no known risks to taking part. The benefits are helping to create a picture of what it means to be a CODA in Ireland. Your participation will involve completing a questionnaire, and indicating whether you would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview, which would be audio recorded.

The results of this research will form the basis of an Oxford Masters dissertation. The study will take place over the next 5 months after which time the published results will be publicly available. If you wish to obtain a copy of the published results, please inform the researcher.

The research is funded and organised as an independent Masters research project in conjunction with the Department of Education, University of Oxford. The project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any further questions about this research, please free free to contact me at [caitrona.obrien@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:caitrona.obrien@education.ox.ac.uk) or my supervisor at [jess.briggs@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jess.briggs@education.ox.ac.uk) or +44(0)7805 305 975. If your query is unresolved, please contact Dr Liam Gearon, Chair of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee by e-mail: [liam.gearon@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:liam.gearon@education.ox.ac.uk) or telephone: +44(0)1865 274047.

## Appendix 4: Consent form for CODA participants

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### **Research Consent Form**

**Project Title:** Children of Deaf Adults in Ireland: Bilingualism in Irish Sign Language and English and Biculturalism in Hearing and Deaf cultural communities

This study investigates hearing children of deaf adults looking at a number of language, cultural and identity issues. This is a study undertaken by Caitríona O'Brien and supervised by Dr. Jessica Briggs, Department of Education, University of Oxford. You can contact this researcher at [caitrona.obrien@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:caitrona.obrien@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk), or her supervisor at [jess.briggs@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jess.briggs@education.ox.ac.uk).

Please read the following text carefully:

- I have read and understood the information about this study as provided by the study information on the previous page of this survey and I have had the opportunity to ask questions and get satisfactory answers about this study.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study without any consequence at any time simply by informing the researchers of my decision.
- I understand who will have access to the identifying information provided and what will happen to the data at the end of this project.
- I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I agree to participate in this study.

**Signed:** .....

**Print name** (block capitals):

.....

**Date** .....

**Signed by researcher:**

**Print name** (block capitals):

**Date**

## Appendix 5: Written questionnaire

### Children of Deaf Adults in Ireland: Bilingualism in Irish Sign Language and English, and Biculturalism in Hearing and Deaf cultural communities

Thank you for agreeing to fill out this questionnaire for my Masters research. The written questionnaire contains sections on language proficiency, personal background and contact information. The section to be completed on the computer is about social networks.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Part 1: Language Proficiency**

Please rate your language proficiency as accurately as possible using the scales and questions below.

Please choose the level that best represents your language proficiency in the different skills below from 1-7, where 1 means no practical proficiency and 7 means proficiency equivalent to a native or bilingual user of the language.

1= No practical proficiency

7= Native/ bilingual

1. My level of reading in English is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. My level of speaking in English is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. My level of listening in English is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. My level of writing in English is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. My level of understanding signs in ISL is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. My level of producing signs in ISL is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. My level of finger spelling in ISL is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. My level of reading written ISL is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. My level of writing written ISL is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. Have you had any formal training or teaching in ISL? If yes, please specify.

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11. Feel free to include any other details of your English or ISL proficiency.

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**Part 2: Personal Background**

13. At what age did you start to learn ISL?

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14. At what age did you start to learn English?

---

15. Were one or both of your parents d/Deaf or hearing impaired?

---

---

16. Did your parents use ISL?

Both parents ☐

One parent ☐

Neither parent ☐

None of the above ☐

If you answered none of the above, please explain:

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---

17. Did your parents use English?

Both parents ☐

One parent ☐

Neither parent ☐

None of the above ☐

If you answered none of the above, please explain:

---

---

---

18. What language did you use with your sibling(s)?

English only ☐

ISL only ☐

Both languages ☐

I do not have siblings ☐

None of the above ☐

If you answered none of the above, please explain:

---

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---

19. Do you consider yourself bilingual in ISL and English?

Yes ☐

No ☐

19a. Why do you (not) consider yourself bilingual?

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20. Do you consider yourself a member of the Deaf community?

Yes ☐

No ☐

20a. Why do you (not) consider yourself a member of the Deaf community?

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21. Do you consider yourself culturally Deaf?

Yes ☐

No ☐

21a. Why do you (not) consider yourself culturally Deaf?

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22. How familiar do you consider yourself with Deaf culture?

Extremely familiar ☐

Very familiar ☐

Somewhat familiar ☐

Not very familiar ☐

No knowledge ☐

**Part 3: Demographic and Contact Details**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any known hearing or language impairments?      Y      N

If yes, please specify.

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---

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be happy to take part in a follow-up interview?      Y      N

If Yes, please provide details of the best means of contact, and those details:

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## Appendix 6: Social network section (ORIC)

The ORIC can be found at:

[https://qtrial2016q1az1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cD4Xo0wjxaTlhrn](https://qtrial2016q1az1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cD4Xo0wjxaTlhrn).

The screenshot shows a Qualtrics survey interface with a light blue background. At the top left is the Qualtrics logo and the text 'qualtrics FREE ACCOUNT'. A progress bar at the top right shows '0%' on the left and '100%' on the right. In the center, a white box contains the following text: 'In this section you will be asked to give information about your friends and family members. Please give full names where possible. However, these individuals will not be contacted, and all names will be anonymised and given pseudonyms when they are being transcribed for analysis.' Below this text is a red horizontal line, followed by the label 'Your Name (First and Last):' and a text input field. Another red horizontal line follows. Below that is the section header 'Part A: Family' in bold, followed by another red horizontal line. At the bottom of the page, there is a grey bar containing the Qualtrics logo, the text 'POWERED BY QUALTRICS', and two buttons: 'Start Your Free Account Today' and 'Report Abuse'.

## Appendix 7: Interview schedule

### Interview Schedule

#### **1. Identity**

- a) In your response you labelled yourself as [bilingual/ not bilingual]. What does it mean to you to be bilingual and why do you think that label does (not) apply to you?
- b) In your response you labelled yourself as [culturally Deaf/ not]. What does it mean to you to be culturally Deaf and why do you think that label does (not) apply to you?
- c) Biculturalism is the idea that you belong to two cultures. For bicultural CODAs these cultures could be hearing and Deaf culture. What do you think of the idea of belonging to both cultures and do you think CODAs can be/ are bicultural?
- d) In your response you labelled yourself as [a member of the Deaf community/ not]. What does it mean to you to be a member of the Deaf community and why do you think that label does (not) apply to you?
- e) Do you think that there is an overlap/ relationship between being a member of the Deaf community and being bicultural/ culturally Deaf?

#### **2. CODA identity**

- a) What does being a CODA mean to you?
- b) What do you think characterises a CODA, what traits or experiences etc. make someone a CODA?

#### **3. Network**

- a) [Show their network – visual image and % of hearing and d/Deaf, ISL and English]  
Does this representation of your social network match your own view of your network? Do those percentages surprise you?
- b) Do you think there's a relationship between your network and your ISL proficiency?

#### **4. Language maintenance/ change**

- a) What (other) factors influence your ISL proficiency?
- b) Why might your ISL proficiency improve/ disimprove in the future?
- c) Why do you think you have maintained your ISL as an adult outside the family home?

#### **5. Role of CODAs**

- a) What role do CODAs have in the Deaf community?
- b) Do you think there is a place for CODAs in the Deaf community?
- c) How do you think Deaf parents/ the Deaf community view CODAs?

## Appendix 8: Focus group participant information letter

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**Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) in Ireland: Bilingualism in Irish Sign  
Language and English and Biculturalism in Hearing and Deaf cultural  
communities**

You are invited to take part in a research study. This study is led by Caitríona O' Brien, and supervised by Dr Jessica Briggs. Please read the following information carefully. Please take your time to decide if you would like to take part in this research.

This project investigates hearing children of deaf adults. The study looks at language, culture and identity issues. We are seeking the views of members of the Deaf community. You have been identified as someone with insight into hearing children of deaf adults.

It is your decision to take part in this study. You can stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to. Your participation will involve taking part in a focus group. A focus group is where a group of people meet for a discussion. This focus group will involve members of the Deaf community discussing hearing children of deaf adults. An interpreter who uses Irish Sign Language and English will be used. We will make sure that all participants agree with the chosen interpreter. The focus group will be videotaped to examine later.

We will make every effort to keep your information confidential. However, we cannot guarantee this. You may be identifiable in the final report. However, your data will be anonymised. Also, you will be allocated a pseudonym so that you will be the only one who can identify your contribution in the focus group. Other than this, there are no known risks to taking part.

The results of this research will form the basis of the Masters dissertation of the researcher. The study will take place over the next 5 months. After this, the published results will be publicly available. If you want a copy of the results, let the researcher know.

The research is funded and organised with the Department of Education, University of Oxford. It is an independent Masters research project. The project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact:

- The researcher, Caitriona: [caitriona.obrien@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:caitriona.obrien@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk)
- My supervisor: [jess.briggs@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jess.briggs@education.ox.ac.uk)
- Dr Liam Gearon, Chair of the Ethics Committee:  
[liam.gearon@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:liam.gearon@education.ox.ac.uk).

## Appendix 9: Focus group consent form

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### Children of Deaf Adults in Ireland: Bilingualism in Irish Sign Language and English and Biculturalism in Hearing and Deaf cultural communities

This study investigates hearing children of deaf adults. The study looks at language, cultural and identity issues. This study is led by Caitríona O' Brien, and supervised by Dr. Jessica Briggs. You can contact the researcher at [caitrona.obrien@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:caitrona.obrien@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk), or her supervisor at [jess.briggs@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jess.briggs@education.ox.ac.uk).

Please read the following text carefully:

- I have read and understood the information about the study.  
I have been able to ask questions about the study and get satisfactory answers.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.  
There will be no consequences. I simply let the researcher to know.
- I know who will have access to my information and what happens to the data at the end of this project.

- I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I agree to participate in this study.

**Signed:** .....

**Print name** (block capitals):

.....

.....

**Date** .....

**Signed by researcher:**

**Print name** (block capitals):

**Date**

## Appendix 10: Focus group schedule

1. Do you think it is important for d/Deaf parents to pass on ISL to their hearing children? Why?/ Why not?
2. Do you consider yourselves to be bilingual in ISL and English? Why?/ Why not?
3. Do you consider CODAs to be bilingual in ISL and English? Why?/ Why not?
4. Do you think it is important for Deaf parents to pass on Deaf culture to their hearing children? Why?/ Why not?
5. Biculturalism is the idea that someone can belong to two cultures e.g. Spanish and Irish culture, or Deaf and hearing culture. Do you think CODAs can be bicultural? Why?/ Why not?
6. Do you see CODAs as members of the Deaf community? Why/ Why not?

*If this isn't covered in response to Q6*

7. What role do CODAs have in the Deaf community?



Appendix 11: Interview transcript (Excerpt from interview with  
Participant 1)

Interviewer: Um, Perfect. So, em, thanks very much for taking the time to go through this with me. I'm going to be referring to the answers that you gave in the questionnaire.

Participant: Okay

Interviewer: So, em, the first question is In your response you labelled yourself as bilingual. What does it mean to you to be bilingual and why do you think that label applies to you?

Participant: Okay, em, why do I think I'm bilingual, well, uh, I'm competent and fluent in spoken English and written English, uh, reading, writing, verbal. Then in terms of sign language, I would be competent in sign language in terms of receptive skills and productive skills and then, um, being trained in Deaf Studies and Sign Language Interpreting, uh, is, further cements that. And then getting R1 Independent Accreditation for Interpreting, uh, adds to it, and in order to be a trained and qualified interpreter, you, you would need to be considered to be functionally, functionally bilingual in both languages.

Interviewer: Perfect, Emm, and then, In your response you labelled yourself as not culturally Deaf. What does it mean to you to be culturally Deaf and why would you say that . . .

Participant: . . . Okay, did I tick 'not culturally Deaf'? I think I, that might be a mistake, so, I think I would have said, that I wouldn't be audilogically Deaf but yes, to culturally Deaf.

Interviewer: Okay. So then, in that case why would you say that that label does apply to you?

Participant: culturally Deaf? Well, em, we grew up, my parents were d/Deaf, so, obviously we grew up in a d/Deaf household in that respect. Sign language was the language of the household, uh, we had [number] other relatives then that were d/Deaf that lived close by. We grew up in, at Deaf events, Deaf parties, Deaf gatherings, not only in [place] but around Ireland. We seemed to have more friends that were within the Deaf community rather than the hearing community, and really identified with the social norms of the Deaf community more than the hearing community. So I have a cultural appreciation of it, and a cultural awareness of it. Then that contradicts, uh, in terms of audiological d/Deafness, I have no understanding of what that's like at all. Me putting my fingers up to my ears, and blocking my ears, doesn't give me any sense of what it's like to be d/Deaf in any shape or form. So, that's where I would put that difference in definition. Yep.

Interviewer: Okay, Perfect. Em, next is "Biculturalism is the idea that you belong to two cultural.. two cultures. For bicultural CODAs that could be the hearing and Deaf culture. Em, what do you think of this idea and would you agree with the idea that CODAs can, or are, eh, can be or are bicultural?"

Participant: I don't think all CODAs are bicultural. Em, I've met many CODAs who've grown up with d/Deaf parents, communicated in sign language at home, but that's about the end of their interaction with the Deaf community thereafter. So, it's, it's limited biculturalism, if that's a word, or a definition. Whereas I think because we had [number] relatives, and then we, myself, my two [relatives], then trained up as interpreters, started working in the field professionally. Our interaction with the Deaf community is, eh, 7 days a week. I mean, it's very strong, our involvement with it. Em, and if anything, we eh, we have, eh, we opt into the hearing world. But that's actually only a percentage of our time. So, yeah, eh, I definitely think CODAs can be bilingual, eh, functionally bilingual, and fully bicultural, but I don't think all of them share the same level of biculturalism or bilingualism.

Interviewer: Yeah, emm, then the eh final . . .

Participant: . . . If I'm answering too long just let me know. . .

Interviewer: No, no, that's perfect, that's great. I'm open to hear all the ideas and so . . . In your response, then the other one that you ticked was, eh, a member of the Deaf community. . .

Participant: . . . Yes . . .

Interviewer: . . . so what would that mean to you and why do you think then that that's a label that applies to you?

Participant: Well, the, eh, there's always been a discussion about who is a member of the Deaf community, and there's, there's some people who would be quite politically Deaf who would say it's d/Deaf people are only, the, eh, only members of the Deaf community, but I think over the years now, they've started to kind of identify that CODAs are a kind of unique, eh, eh, member of the Deaf community. 1, they've grown up within a family of d/Deaf people, in the comm., they've been at the events, be that cultural events, social events, whatever. Em, and as well, they, eh, say that CODAs can be quite a strong advocate of sign language, eh, Deaf communicat., or Deaf rights, em, and can be a very important, em, part of passing on the language, or, or, or, keeping the language, eh, we'll say, fresh and alive, if that makes sense, because, they say 90% of d/Deaf people are born into hearing families, with no knowledge of Deafness, sign language, Deaf issues, whatever. Where a CODA, if they've been brought up in a bilingual, bicultural environment, em, they get the, are getting sign language input, and in our instance we got sign language input much quicker than many d/Deaf people that we knew. D'you know, em, so, eh, I think it's great that we're being identified now as being a member of the Deaf community. And like that, you have to be an active member of it, rather than a passive member that turns up once in a blue moon. I think they're also now looking at sign language interpreters as being a member of the Deaf community, so the definition is, is broadening, and, and then as well, I think that the, the Deaf community, themselves, is now kind of seeing that

the Deaf community itself, is far more varied in its membership, rather than it being a set amount of people.

Interviewer: That's great, em, and would you think that there's an overlap or a relationship between being a member of the Deaf community and being bicultural, or culturally Deaf?

Participant: I think, in order to be quite strongly bicultural you have to be a member of the Deaf co.. you have to be within the Deaf community. Em, you couldn't claim you were a member of the Deaf community if you don't attend events, if you.. In our instance we work professionally within the community so that, eh, helps as well. But if you, if you're not seen around the community, well, then, you're not exposed to eh, the, the norms, and the cultural norms within the community. You're not aware of the issues that impact negatively or positively with the Deaf community. You, you, you're not, if you're not aware of the issues, how can you identify with them, how can you support them. And how can you share, eh, the, eh, elements of the culture with other people if you're not an active participant in it. So, by being an active participant, it enables your biculturalism, I think.

Interviewer: Okay. Emm, then, next is What does being a CODA mean to you?

Participant: The, the term CODA for a long time meant nothing to me really. And anywhere I travel.. anytime I travelled around the world, or, and in particular when I worked within the Deaf community, no matter where you went, in Ireland the three signs that they always use, and I'll sign it, coz you'll see me, but like, straight away when you met people, they said 'oh, *mother father Deaf*'. If you went to the UK then they use the '*mother father Deaf*'. If you went to America it was '*mother father Deaf*'. So I, I very much identified with '*mother father Deaf*'. And I, then understood that that's what, eh, what, to me being a CODA was '*mother father Deaf*'.

Interviewer: mmhmm

Participant: And then people would say to me 'oh you're *Deaf*' and, because they saw me being fluent in sign language at a very young age, straight away they said 'oh you're *Deaf*'. So, and I was going 'no, I'm *hearing*'. But then, when they did the hearing sign, it didn't seem to identify who I was either. Em, so, eh, I only heard the term CODA when I was, eh, much older, and then it seemed to be very much an American phenomenon. And when I would go to a World Federation of the Deaf c/Congress, there used to be a CODA.. all the CODAs were at, that were at the conference had a kind of CODA gathering. And I really didn't understand, or identify with the American CODA culture. It seemed to like, they were, if I met up with Irish CODAs, we'd talk to each other, em, if a d/Deaf person turned up, we'd start to use sign language, eh, and we'd, or else we'd use, we'd talk and speak with each other, to try and include d/Deaf people and hearing people who, if, especially hearing people with no sign or vice versa. Em, but in America they were using, when I met American CODAs, they were using Deaf voice, so they would speak to each other using a d/Deaf voice, and some people called it 'CODA speak', or else they would speak in sign language grammar, so they'd say things like, instead of saying like 'where are you from?' they'd say 'you from where?'. Or else they'd go '//uh, where you from//'. And I couldn't get my head around their, nearly their absorpt.., they were absorbed into being Deaf characters. So that notion of CODA identify.. I didn't identify with it at all. Eh, I went to a conference in America, Detroit, and was overwhelmed by that sort of America CODA culture. And kind of pulled away from it in many ways, and retracted back to the Irish sense of CODA and the European sense of CODA, which was, yes we've grown up with Deaf parents, yes, we have sign language, we use it when it's necessary, but I felt that if we adopted that Deaf voice or that Deaf character, it was nearly being, em, we were kind of being mimics, or that we were mocking people, nearly. Em, and it was only when CODA international came to the UK last year, to a conference called 'CODA land', that it was the first time that I really saw a huge blend of the Irish and American and European blend into it, and it seemed to be less of that real loud, American CODA culture. I know that's a very long answer but anyway.

Interviewer: Em

Participant: So, yeah, so I, I identify far more with the concept of 'mother father Deaf'

Interviewer: Yeah

Participant: Em, And then I identify with Irish and European CODAs. Eh, the American look on CODA is completely, way more, em, advanced or way more developed. They've explored their identity far deeper than we have.

**Legend/ Notes:**

[content] = content is changed to try ensure anonymity

*Italics* = sign language i.e. the participant signs while talking

// Deaf voice//

## Appendix 12: Focus group transcript (Excerpt)

Researcher: Great, so we start with the first question then which is “Do you think”, there’s a copy here if you want to look, emm but it’s “do you think it is important for d/Deaf parents to pass on ISL to their hearing children? And why/ why not?”

DL1 (via interpreter): Okay, just to go back a little bit to make it clear, so to teach, to teach or to just naturally, which do you mean?

Researcher: Naturally

DL1 (via interpreter): Okay, yeah. Yeah, I have two children that are hearing, you know, and I sign with them from day 1, since the day they were born. I knew they could not see me, but the body language, you know, and everything like that, and breast feeding I would have signed right from the time they were growing up so that became their first language. ISL, they have a strong connection with it. English, how they acquired it – bilingual. Yep, they’re still very strong. You know, they acquired it and I can see that. So I think yes, they should because I need to be able to communicate with them. My children need to be able to communicate with the Deaf community and also need to be able to communicate with the hearing community also so it’s very important.

DL12 (via interpreter): It’s just natural. You know the first thing that happens when a baby is born. They’re already using, you know, you’d be talking to them. So, it’s a natural thing to have that kind of communication with them, that they’re there. So if you have, if the communication is there through sign, you know, that they’re going to be, that’s how you’re going to be building the bond. And that’s important, to make a good relationship with the, the parent and the child. So it’s a big yes. And it’s a must really.

DL3: I agree with these two. I think it's very important because the children are part of the family as well so they all should have the same language, you know, sign and English, whatever, both of them. And it's important for them to understand Deaf culture as well, you know, that's part of.. when you're signing ISL, the hearing children will understand that's part of the Deaf culture as well. So I think it's very very important.

DL3: Like, I could just give you an example. There's some words in ISL. I call them 'slang signs' that the Deaf community would use like [sign], but em, the hearing wouldn't underst..

Interpreter: Just to explain that [a sign] is like 'I don't like'.

DL3: So the hearing would take that concept and understand what it means, do you know what I mean. That's part of the Deaf culture. That's what I mean when I'm explaining.. em, it's linked with Deaf culture, so I think that's important.

DL1 (via interpreter): Some Deaf people feel they must speak to the child because of the school system (oral system), they thought it is important for hearing children to talk first so they were kind of worried about speech etc. But some fathers are really good at speech or then it could be the other way around, or the mothers are really good at speech, you know, that the children would, maybe sign less because of it, that they would speak more. So when the children then grow up and they're sitting around with the family, e.g. during the family dinners, it could be either the father and the mother, that they would be talking, either father or mother feel left out. My view is it's very important that both mothers and fathers sign, which it is their first language. They have ISL and English. It's natural that they fit in with the family, that it's just a, like every other normal family. It's very very important that they have both.

DL2 (via interpreter): And you probably have questions later on that are going to be linked to what I'm about to say next (laughter) but for example, it's linked to the



point that [DL1] mentioned. When a d/Deaf, maybe girl, maybe more so than boys, but like I'm going to say girls because that's part of, you know, the schooling system. Girls have a very kind of strong, you know, they're very proud that they can speak well because of their schooling, you know, that they can speak very well, and that's kind of giving them a mark at the back of their head nearly, in their.. to, that maybe using sign is a very negative, that there's something wrong with using sign. So that sense of using sign for them, it was very difficult. You know, to feel that it was okay, to be proud, I suppose, to use it, that that, that has a big influence, when they become parents then, to have a baby and to get.. have the baby and to speak to the baby, to use their voice, and talk like they would have in school. And then they realise that 100% of the communication between the mother and the child is not perfect.

DL1 (via interpreter): And also, just one thing, children growing up, maybe going to the shops with their mother and the mother is talking and her children would say 'oh no, mam keep your voice down' because of that Deaf voice, they would say 'look mam'. They would be saying 'shh, shh'. Even for me, I've a very strong Deaf voice but I don't use it at all, I'd rather not use it, because I wouldn't be comfortable. My children would use sign language in the shop, wherever, restaurants, whatever, they'd be proud of it. When Deaf mother talking to the baby. Later on, you'll see the child will tell mother 'shh' or 'don't use Deaf voice' and the mother will say 'okay'.

DL2 (via interpreter): But the good news now I suppose is that it's more freer. There's more "no absolutely I'm proud, gonna sign" which is great. But before, in the past, it was like you weren't allowed, there was a big taboo on it, in Deaf women, in their minds, the feeling that it was, they don't want to sign, I don't know how to sign, and they were not comfortable with it. So there's a big effect on the communication between them and their children.

DL3: I'm not criticising [school name], good school. But in my time, when I was there, from the time I was 7 to Leaving Cert, 18, emm, I'm partially Deaf right, so in my class you had a mix, profoundly and partially Deaf. At that time you weren't

allowed to sign. All the teachers were 'oral, oral, oral, oral' because they believed the right road was not to sign. They were very strict. Now they know that that's not the right way. At that time, very very strict. You weren't allowed to sign even though we felt comfortable signing. And the nun came along and 'stop'. Anyway, I'm saying it was very difficult for some girls in my class who were profoundly Deaf because they had to struggle. I have some hearing but those girls who were profoundly, really d/Deaf. Lip reading is difficult, you can't do it all day and it depends on the person as well. Very difficult. So there was a big struggle to, you know, to get everything in. So sometimes I could hear, others couldn't and they delayed, so we had to wait, because it took them longer, and it meant that sometimes we got bored in the classroom, and it delayed the English, the language. But if it was sign, all [through] sign, it would have been no problem. We would have taken in more. So it delayed the English, the stimulation of language more because it was just, there was no choice, we had no choice, we had to, the oral system, and it didn't work out. It was not successful. And still it's not. We need to have both sign and oral and if at that time they have both sign and oral we would got a lot more, maybe education and more stimulation and more educated. The system let me down, that's my view, and we could have done a lot better with both language and sign, the right way. But, I felt let down. I have no regrets going to [school name], no regrets, but it could be better, the system.

Researcher: I think this probably ties into the next question . . .

DL3: . . . Sorry . . .

Researcher: . . . No, you're grand, which is 'do you consider yourselves to be bilingual in English and ISL, and again, why/ why not?'. And I might move this in between you two, here.

DL1 (via interpreter): Yep, I'm already bilingual from the time I was small. Every day of my life, I would sign, I would write letters to my parents, I'd read, I'd obviously be reading books and magazines and that would be English language and then I'd be

signing at the same time to my brothers in school. [DL3] mentioned, like in the classroom, of course you'd be using oral in the classroom but with my friends it'd be ISL. And then with the oral we'd have to write in English and we'd talk in ISL. So I was born, definitely, bilingual. It was just natural, just natural to me.

DL2 (via interpreter): Yeah, for me, I was born bilingual, would I say that? Hmm, I think it's kind of... I didn't see myself as bilingual when I was little because I really just saw myself as trying to talk. I'd try and have good speech, you know, look at me I can talk really well. But that changed when I went into the Deaf, emm, when I went to the Deaf, a party. Sorry, I went to a party for d/Deaf people in [place]. And that was the first time I saw everybody signing and I was, I was 11, and I was like... I got such a fright. I was like, what are they doing?! All signing, and I just couldn't believe it. And that had big impact, from that moment, I decided that's it, I am going to learn sign language because they are normal people and they can enjoy themselves just the same and I can do it and I'm the same as them and I can learn. So I learned sign language from them. From that moment onwards that was when I decided to learn. So I worked hard myself to make sure that I was bilingual. So you know I had to change in myself at that time to be able to, to be able to understand and to be able to communicate that I didn't need to use the oral the way the others were. I had to really change myself. And through time and again, of course, I would be able to read English, I was able to acquire reading English and then translate it then myself. So, if I was reading English, and then if I wanted to try and translate what it meant into written English, I found for example, the English language, you must read it, what does it mean, and then translate it into your own words for writing down. I just found that very hard. But then when I signed it, oh, I could do it, I could sign what I was trying to say. And then, thinking about what I signed and then trying to put that down into words. So in time I did become bilingual growing up so now I would be yeah.

**Legend/ Info:**

DL1 = Deaf Leader 1, DL2 = Deaf Leader 2, DL3 = Deaf Leader 3