Where do we go from here? Faculty placement of deaf linguists in US PhD programs

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PROBLEM

- Documentation of understudied, minoritized, and minority language varieties is a vital activity in Linguistics
- But Linguistics has a very unequal relationship between researchers and the researched peoples and their languages
  - e.g. training and faculty placement of Black linguists[1,2] and Indigenous linguists[3,4]
  - No official data about training and faculty placement of deaf linguists in the US, which remain a very small group despite the rise in sign language linguistics research
- **Where are the deaf linguists? Why are there so few in Linguistics Departments?**

BACKGROUND

- The academic study of sign language linguistics began in the 1960s. Research shows that signed languages are suited for the expression of human languages comparable to spoken languages[5,6]
- Deaf people have always been involved with American Sign Language (ASL) research, mostly as research assistants and/or language consultants but few obtained Ph.Ds due to numerous difficulties[5,6]
- Hearing people started studying, publishing, and teaching linguistics of ASL (and other signed languages) **without deaf-led collaboration**; this trend of dominance continues to this day[5,6,7,8]

METHOD

For identifying faculty who specialize in sign language linguistics, we considered:

- Faculty who are in a Ph.D-granting Linguistics Department (by primary or joint appointment) in the U.S. according to the LSA
- Faculty who have at least a few peer-reviewed publications about signed languages (regardless of how they self-identify) based on Google Scholar

We used our social networks and personal experiences to identify the hearing status of faculty

We also used Hochgesang's survey on inclusion of deaf linguists and signed languages in linguistics[6]

We did not consider:

- Faculty who have a Ph.D in Linguistics but work in other departments
- Non-tenure track positions (post-docs, lecturers, etc.)
- Teaching ASL professorships and emeritus faculty

RESULTS

- 15 out of 71 departments have tenure-track or tenured faculty members who have published about sign language linguistics
- **5 deaf faculty members (3 departments, or 4%)**
  - Gallaudet (Paul Dudis, Julie Hochgesang, Gaurav Mathur)
  - University of New Mexico (Erin Wilkinson)
  - University of California, Santa Barbara (Lynn Hou)
- **25 hearing faculty members (13 departments, or 18%)**[9]
- No official data for the placement of deaf linguists in other departments yet — but see Carol Padden (UCSD Communications) Joseph Hill (NTID, ASL and Interpreting Education)

DISCUSSION

- The low representation of deaf faculty in Ph.D-granting linguistics departments highlights multiple barriers for deaf people, especially those with multiply marginalized backgrounds: institutional, cultural, linguistic, etc.[10]
- Deaf faculty encounter tokenism, marginalization, and exclusion at their jobs from research to teaching to social networking

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Linguistics Departments must educate themselves (don't just invite deaf linguists to talk about their experiences)
- National linguistics conferences must center accessibility in their planning and make more space for both sign linguistics research *and* deaf linguists
- Universities & departments must invest in the professional development, recruitment, and retention of deaf linguists by leveraging key resources:
  - Make the linguistics curriculum more accessible and applicable to deaf and signing students, and even revise it for their interests
  - Implement more accessible and even **direct** communicative practices in the workplace
  - Hire qualified ASL interpreters for graduate students & faculty
  - Do cluster hires of deaf and signing faculty across allied departments, but avoid burdening deaf faculty with ASL language teaching responsibilities[11]
  - Collaborate with deaf students and faculty on research projects
  - Support deaf faculty's careers — from funding needs for research to social networking
  - Recognize and credit different ways of sharing knowledge, not just academic publishing (e.g., ASL videos)