To sign or not to sign

The choice made by late deafened adults whether to learn a signed language or not and the factors influencing this decision
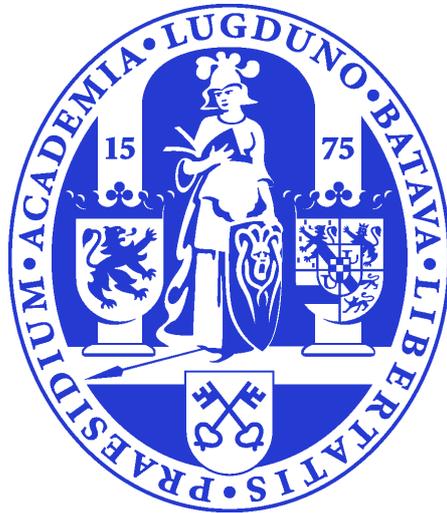
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Contents

Abstract

Signed languages are used by deaf communities globally and are considered the languages of deaf people. Late deafened people are also deaf in an audiological sense, although they lost their hearing after acquiring speech, yet are commonly assumed not to learn signed languages. The aim of this thesis was to test this assumption by exploring 1) how frequently late deafened people choose to learn a signed language and 2) the factors which motivate this choice, focusing on native English speakers. Two separate studies were performed using both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to gather data for these two research questions. In the first study 25 adults with hearing loss completed an anonymous online survey comprised of both multiple choice and open questions. The second study analysed five blog posts written by late deafened adults in order to gain insight into their attitudes towards signed languages and their identities in relation to their hearing loss. The survey results showed that over half (59%) of the late deafened participants had learned a signed language, although they did not frequently use it and mostly communicated through speech. The factors which appeared to influence the choice to learn or not were found to be: the participants' level of satisfaction with their ability to communicate without knowledge of a signed language; the support of their family and friends; and a positive attitude towards both signed languages and the Deaf community. Overall, my research found that late deafened people face a struggle in terms of their attitudes and identity when they become deaf and, although the majority of them continue to use English, many also choose to learn a signed language.

1 Introduction

Late deafened people have severe to profound hearing loss which developed after childhood, once they had acquired speech. They often face extreme difficulty in adapting to their hearing loss, as it causes a previously unexperienced communication barrier. Therefore, they must resort to new strategies in order to continue communicating effectively. Signed languages are considered to be languages used almost exclusively by deaf people. However, despite being deaf, late deafened people are often said to be unlikely to learn a signed language because a) they would find it too difficult or b) because they feel it would mean that they admit they are no longer a part of the hearing world (Barnett, 2002:695; Cowie & Douglas-Cowie, 1992:2; Luey et al., 1995:179). It is assumed, rather, that late deafened people will continue to communicate primarily using their native spoken language, despite the difficulties they face in following conversations successfully. Signed languages allow unhindered communication in spite of hearing loss when used with others who know the same language. Therefore, learning one could be extremely useful to late deafened people.

Very little has been published on the linguistic choices made by late deafened adults and much of the available research on this group concerns either the medical or psychological impacts of becoming deaf. It was my aim to fill this gap by investigating how frequently late deafened people choose to learn signed languages and the factors that could affect this choice. Since it seems there would be so much for a late deafened person to gain by learning a signed language, this thesis investigates whether they do choose to learn one or not and what the reasons are for this choice by proposing two research questions: 1) How frequently do late deafened people choose to learn a signed language? 2) What are the motivating factors behind this choice? I also looked into the communication methods which support a continued use of English for people with hearing loss, in order to discover if late deafened people are satisfied with their ability to communicate using these methods. If it is found that late deafened people are satisfied that they can communicate readily with the methods available, they will be less likely to learn a signed language than those who are not. Information was gathered for the research through two studies. The first study used an anonymous online survey generated on Qualtrics to be completed by English speaking late deafened adults between the ages of 18 and 65. The second study analysed five blog posts written by late deafened adults to provide insight into factors that could influence the decision to learn a signed language. This study focused primarily on attitudes towards signed languages and deaf identity since the more positive an attitude a late deafened person has, and the more they identify as deaf, the more likely they will be to learn a signed language.

The following chapters consist of a background section, which first provides a brief introduction

to signed languages, how they differ from spoken languages, and a history of attitudes towards them. Secondly, information on types of hearing loss and deaf identities is presented, then an overview of the motivations and attitudes towards second language learning in general, followed by a discussion of factors which could influence the choice for late deafened people to learn a signed language or not. The subsequent chapters contain the methodology and results of the two studies, followed by a discussion of the findings.

2 Background

2.1 Signed languages

There are many different languages used for communication by people around the world. The exact number is unknown. Ethnologue, a leading source of information on world languages, lists over 7000 with over 130 of these being classed as signed languages (Ethnologue, 2015). However, since signed languages have been studied far less than spoken languages, there are believed to be many more as yet unrecorded. Signed languages vary from country to country, though many share similarities due to language contact (McBurney, 2012:934). British Sign Language (BSL) and American Sign Language (ASL) are examples of two different signed languages which are used in predominantly English speaking countries: the UK and the USA respectively. ASL is also widely used and acts as something of a lingua-franca in the worldwide deaf community (McBurney, 2012:935). Since signed languages do not rely on sound to convey meaning they are fully accessible to those who, through a partial or total inability to hear, are unable to communicate completely using speech. Therefore, they are extremely useful to, and indeed mostly used by, deaf people.

Communicating through the gestural modality is so natural for deaf people that deaf children born to hearing parents who have no language input have been known to create their own 'home-sign,' a system of gestural communication similar to signed languages but with less complexity (Goldwin-Meadow, 2005:65). Some modern signed languages are based on these home-signs. In the eighteenth century L'Epée (1712-1789) founded the first school for deaf children in Paris in which the home-signs used by deaf children were formalised into a standard language: French sign language (langue des signes française or LSF) (Winefield, 1987:5-6). It has been found that use of signed languages in the early years of life can be extremely helpful with language development (Moeller, 2006:6-10). It can also greatly improve children's cognitive development and communicative ability, even if they are able to hear. Research has shown that teaching signed languages can be helpful to hearing children and can improve their visual-spatial cognitive ability (Capirci et al., 1998) and even their English vocabulary (Daniels, 1994). Since signed languages are such a natural method of communication for deaf people and even have proven benefits for hearing people it should also follow that they will benefit late deafened people.

Signed languages use the visual rather than auditory channel for communication. They are now widely acknowledged to be complete natural languages, like spoken languages, differing only in the modality used to convey meaning (Yule, 2010:200-201). However, this has not always been the case. Until Stokoe's work 'Sign Language Structure' was published in 1960, very few people believed that the gestural communication used by deaf people should be classed

as natural languages. Stokoe was one of the first people to recognise ASL as a legitimate, natural language. He worked towards it being acknowledged as such and, in doing so, began the field of sign language linguistics (Maher, 1996:1-3). One of the reasons that signed languages were not classified as natural languages earlier was the belief that arbitrariness is a key characteristic of human language and that signed languages were too iconic to be considered arbitrary enough to be "real" languages; they were traditionally believed by many to be more like "pictures in the air" (Valli & Lucas, 2000:5). Iconicity in language means that the form of a word resembles the meaning, though the sense of the word is not necessarily transparent. Although signed languages do show greater iconicity than spoken languages, iconic signs differ between different signed languages (Pfau et al., 2012:388). The fact that there are hundreds of signed languages which are not mutually intelligible shows that signed languages cannot be completely iconic.

Although signed languages and spoken languages are natural languages they do have some general differences. A key feature of human languages is their ability to be broken down into smaller parts. In spoken languages the smallest parts that words can be broken down into are phonemes but, rather than phonemes, signed languages use parameters. There are five different parameters in signed languages: hand-shape, movement, location, orientation and non-manual signs such as facial expression (Valli & Lucas, 2000:19-21). A change to any one of these parameters can bring about a change in meaning just as a change to a phoneme in a spoken word would.

2.2 Attitudes to signed languages

The idea of signed languages not being "real" languages is only one aspect of the historically negative attitudes towards signed languages. There is a very long history of negativity towards both signed languages and deaf people based on a phenomenon known as audism. This is a type of discrimination, much like racism, in which deaf people are viewed to be inferior or even stupid due to their inability to hear and communicate using spoken languages (Eckert & Rowley, 2013:5). Audists (those who practice audism) seek to have control over deaf people in terms of their language and education. Due to this, there has been a long debate, still ongoing, about whether deaf people should be allowed to learn signed languages as their first language or whether they should be taught only to speak the primary spoken language of their country and understand it through lipreading.

Some scholars such as Stokoe (1960) considered signed languages to be the natural communication method of deaf people and believed them to be the best languages to use in the education of deaf children. Those who follow his school of thought follow the manualist movement. In opposition to this view are the followers of the oralist movement who believed that signed languages inhibited the speech development of deaf children. They protested the use of any form of signed languages for any purpose (Baynton, 1996:1-14) and often viewed them as a last resort to be taught to deaf children only when the oral method had failed (Burns et al., 2001:197). Instead, the oralists focused on teaching deaf children to speak English and thus providing them with the option to integrate with the hearing society (Yule, 2010:200-201). The oralist

method was favoured in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and had a devastating effect on the language development of the deaf children of that time (Baynton, 1996:1-14). Many deaf children were left unable to speak intelligibly and often lacked basic literacy skills (Lynas, 2005:201). This caused outrage within the Deaf community who believed that, in enforcing an oralist regime, society had caused a "holocaust" of sorts by killing the minds of perfectly healthy deaf children, since very few are able to learn using the oral method alone (Ladd, 2003:27-30). The enforced use of the oral method at that time likely contributed to the negative view that signed languages were devoid of value and not "real" languages (McBurney, 2012:920).

Signed English was created as a possible middle ground between the oralist and manualist movements. It uses signs alongside spoken English, following English grammatical structure rather than that of natural signed languages such as ASL or BSL, which have a different grammatical structure to English. Signed English is taught in some schools for deaf children in the hope that it will facilitate the acquisition of spoken English. From a technological perspective, the use of hearing assistive technology is increasing and more deaf people are being fitted with a cochlear implant (CI). Children fitted with a CI are often not taught signed languages but are educated either with the oral approach or in mainstream schooling. Part of the reason for this is that only 4% of parents of deaf children are also deaf and able to introduce a signed language to their children from a young age (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004:157). Hearing parents usually have no knowledge of a signed language and wish to provide their child with what they consider to be as normal a life as possible. Therefore, they view CIs to be an attractive solution to the communication problem and sufficient for the child to learn to speak (Christiansen & Leigh, 2002:1-4). Many of these children with a CI do have success in learning a spoken language but this is not the same in all cases. Since the use of signed languages in deaf education is decreasing, and due to the current attitude towards them, signed languages are starting to be considered endangered languages (Murray, 2011). Due to this, along with the history of negativity and increasing reliance on technology, late deafened people may be less willing to learn signed languages.

It was these practices of audism and oralism that motivated deaf people to form their own community. Many deaf people consider themselves to be part of a Deaf community, particularly those born to deaf parents or educated in deaf schools. They have a strong sense of identity in terms of their language and culture and do not consider themselves as impaired or disabled but as a linguistic minority group. They identify themselves as culturally Deaf and signed languages are their languages. For this reason, signed languages are seen as an identifying trait of the Deaf community and those who choose to learn them are often thought to be choosing to identify as culturally Deaf (Burns et al., 2001:197-198).

2.3 Hearing loss and late deafness

Audiology   Hearing loss is a general term used to describe all levels of hearing loss from mild hearing loss to complete deafness, and is one of the most common forms of disability, estimated to affect around one in six people in the UK. Around 8% of those have severe to profound

hearing loss: the level at which an individual is usually considered to be deaf (RNID, 2011:25). Hearing levels are measured in decibels (dB) and are defined by the quietest sound an individual is able to hear; those with normal hearing have a threshold between 0 and 20dB across all frequencies, those with mild hearing loss can hear sounds as quiet as 25-39dB, moderate 40-69dB, severe 70-94dB, and those with profound hearing loss cannot hear anything below 95dB (RNID, 2011:23). In hearing tests, an audiogram is generated which defines hearing sensitivity across the full audible range. The more severe the hearing loss, the less speech an individual is able to understand. However, the degree of hearing loss is not the only factor which affects one's ability to understand speech. Understanding varies greatly from person to person, even amongst those with similar audiograms, as it is also influenced by such factors as: the duration of the hearing loss; whether the onset was very gradual, allowing for adaptation, or sudden; and the age at which it began (Seldran et al., 2011:520).

Identity   Although there are audiological levels for hearing loss, many labels are used to identify people with hearing loss which are not necessarily based on audiology, but often also on the self-identity of the individual (Luey et al., 1995:178). The key examples are hearing-impaired, hard-of-hearing, deaf, Deaf, and deafened, each of which has a different meaning. Hearing-impaired and hard-of-hearing both usually refer to people who have hearing loss but still have enough residual hearing to make use of a hearing aid. However, some object to the term hearing-impaired since this implies a disability. These two terms can also be applied to those who are deaf but wish to maintain the social identity of a hearing person, and not associate with the Deaf community (Moore & Levitan, 1993:126). The term deaf (with a lower case d) merely refers to the audiological condition of deafness. On the other hand, Deaf "with a capital D", following a convention created by James Woodward in 1972, is used to refer to those who share a common language, culture and identity (Padden & Humphries, 1989:2). The people who identify as Deaf are members of the Deaf community described above. Deafened is used to describe those who were not born deaf but became deaf later in life, after they had acquired a spoken language.

This thesis focuses on those who are late deafened. Late deafness, also known as postlingual or acquired deafness, is the term used to describe individuals with late onset hearing loss who become severely or profoundly deaf. As the term suggests, postlingual deafness is hearing loss that occurs after an individual has already been exposed to and learned a spoken language, whereas prelingual deafness occurs before a child has learned to speak. Estimates based on the results of a census in America show that over 75% of deaf adults are late deafened. Despite this they are studied far less than the prelingually deaf (Woodcock & Aguayo, 2000:20). This thesis focuses on late deafened individuals who became deafened at the age of 13 or older, after they had acquired a spoken language but before reaching the age of 65. This age group is in line with previous studies on late deafened adults (De Graaf & Bijl, 2002; Kashubeck-West & Meyer, 2008).

2.4 Second language acquisition

Motivation   There are many different reasons why adults learn second languages. A 2006 study on language learning in the EU identified the nine most popular reasons (Cook, 2013:137). These were: to use on holidays abroad, for work which includes travelling, personal satisfaction, to be able to work in another country, to get a better job in your own country, to be able to understand people from other cultures, to meet people from other countries, to know a language that is widely spoken around the world, or to be able to study in another country. Motivation is an extremely important factor in the successful acquisition of a second language. The reasons for learning languages have been divided by second language acquisition researchers between two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental motivation (Cook, 2013:137-138).

Integrative motivation shows that a learner identifies with the target culture in some way and learns the language in order to integrate with this culture. Integrativeness means a willingness to identify in some respect with another language community. The more the learner admires the culture of those with the target language, the more successful they will be at acquiring it. This is considered as an influencing factor in second language acquisition because language is an important part of culture and, therefore, an individual who wishes to be a part of this culture will be more motivated to learn the language than one who does not (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003:174).

> "integrative" motivational orientation concerns a positive interpersonal/affective disposition toward the L2 group and the desire to interact with and even become similar to valued members of that community [...] in the extreme, it might involve complete identification with the community (and possibly even withdrawal from one's original group). (Dörnyei, 2003:5)

The second type of motivation which Cook (2013:137-138) discusses is instrumental, in which the student chooses to learn a language for a practical purpose, rather than to integrate with native speakers, such as to pass an exam or to advance in their career. This type of motivation is considered to have less successful results in terms of language acquisition than integrative motivation, but each type of motivation will lead to greater success in language learning and a lack of either kind will lead to less successful acquisition (Cook, 2013:140). To complement the idea of motivation as important for language acquisition, Norton (1995) applied the concept of investment to this field. She believed that a learner would have a particular investment in learning a language depending on how much perceived value they could gain from it. With the theory of motivation in language learning, the learners are seen as having unitary, fixed identities, but with investment, identities of the learners are viewed as complex and changeable (Norton & Toohey, 2011:420). As such, for this thesis it is important to understand the factors which motivate late deafened people to learn signed languages, whether integrative, instrumental or from some other perceived value.

Attitude and identity   In opposition to positive motivations, there are attitudes which affect language learning in a negative way. As with motivation, negative attitudes related to second

language acquisition come in two types: attitudes towards learning the language itself, or attitudes towards the speakers of the other language (Gardner, 1985:40). These types of attitude make language acquisition much more difficult and can often cause people to reject it entirely. Some people may dislike the language aesthetically or have a negative attitude towards the speakers of the language. Others may have a negative attitude towards learning a language because they feel that it is not useful. In many respects, for many people, learning a second language is unnecessary and superfluous for daily life if it is possible to fill all communication needs using the native language. Some people even believe that learning a second language, rather than being beneficial to them, will actually threaten their own language and culture in some way. This concept was named by Lambert (1990) as subtractive bilingualism. This may be what is referred to by Cowie and Douglas-Cowie (1992:2) when they state that late deafened people would not want to learn signed languages because it would mean they are no longer a part of the hearing world.

Many late deafened people may at first feel ashamed of their hearing loss and feel that learning a signed language would bring more attention to this and thus would not wish to learn. Since signed languages are often associated with the Deaf community, late deafened people may feel that learning one will mark them out as Deaf, therefore suggesting that they are no longer a part of the hearing world. To some extent this is true, since in order to communicate with others using a signed language, late deafened people would have to integrate with the Deaf community and may believe that doing this will lead them to lose their own culture as hearing people. As Cook (2013:141) explains "a group that feels in danger of losing its identity by learning a second language does not learn the second language well".

It is not surprising that people who have a negative attitude towards learning a language will be less successful in its acquisition. Learning a second language is very different from learning other subjects as it is strongly associated with society and culture (Dörnyei, 2003:3-4). Poststructuralist theories of identity have been increasingly included in the field of language acquisition. Poststructuralists hold the view that a person's identity is not one fixed concept but is multiple and subject to change. A language learner is thought to have multiple social identities and in learning a language is aiming towards another, imagined identity. This identity is imagined because it is based on the learner's own ideas of what the target language community is like. A learner's investment in the language is reliant on their perceived idea of the identity of the target language community (Norton & Toohey, 2011:422). If their idea is negative they will have a lower investment in learning.

The situation of young people in Malta is an example of perceived social identity influencing the choice to learn a language. Malta has two official languages, Maltese and English. Although Maltese is one of the official languages of the country and the traditional language of Malta many of the youth, particularly those from a middle-class background, do not speak it. In fact, these young people take pride in the fact that they are not able to speak or understand Maltese and speak exclusively in English (Grixti, 2006:111). They try to distance themselves from Maltese culture as they believe it to be old-fashioned or even backwards. Thus, although they are Maltese by birth they do not consider themselves to be Maltese by culture and they do

not learn to speak the language.

2.5 Learning a signed language as a late deafened person

The age group my study focuses on is interesting to study in terms of acquisition of signed languages, as the participants will have learned a spoken language as their native language before losing their hearing. Late deafened adults between 18 and 65 will have a different experience of language acquisition than both children under the age of 13 and persons of a more advanced age. This is because adults are believed to be less adept at learning second languages than children (Cook, 2013:147). It is perhaps for this reason that Cowie and Douglas-Cowie (1992:2) believed that late deafened people would find it too difficult to learn a signed language. However, it is evident that many adults who learn a second language are capable of reaching near native level proficiency (Cook, 2013:147). Signed languages use a different modality to speech and do not have a standard written form. Therefore, they could be considered more difficult to learn than foreign spoken languages for those who have grown up with a native spoken language. However, research has shown that signed languages are structured, processed and acquired at a neurological level in the same was as spoken languages (McBurney, 2013:936). It has also been found that many people, hearing and deaf alike, do choose to learn a signed language as a second language. Indeed, in the USA ASL is the fourth most studied language for university students (Quinto-Pozos, 2011:137).

Learning a signed language as a late deafened person differs in terms of motivation from learning a foreign language as a hearing person. Hearing loss is more than just a pathology, it is a social and psychological issue, since it causes a breakdown in communication, something which is a fundamental part of human socialisation (Munoz-Baell & Ruiz, 2000:44). In some respects, becoming deafened could be compared to becoming an immigrant in a country with an unfamiliar language since, through their hearing loss, deafened people are no longer able to fully understand the people around them. The usual motivating factors for language learning do not apply in this situation, since signed languages will not be useful for travelling and are unlikely to help advance a career outside of a career working with deaf people. It is likely that late deafened people would not even consider learning a signed language before they lost their hearing, unless they had friends or family members who were deaf.

2.5.1 Emotional impact

A key factor that could have a strong influence on the motivation behind choosing to learn a signed language is the emotional impact of hearing loss. Becoming deaf is extremely traumatic and often associated with embarrassment, loss of confidence and anger at this change in identity and capacity. It causes increased difficulty in communication, which raises a social barrier and puts a strain on relationships. Late deafened people face different difficulties and more anxiety when it comes to communication than prelingually deaf people since, in losing their hearing, they lost full access to their native, spoken language. Studies show that late deafness has a negative

impact on the psychological wellbeing of an individual (De Graaf & Bijl, 2002; Kashubeck-West & Meyer, 2008). It has also been found that, although both postlingually and prelingually deaf people showed an equal feeling of isolation from the hearing world, postlingually deaf people are much more likely to suffer from psychological problems as they mourn the loss of their hearing. They are also much more likely to view their hearing loss as a disability than prelingually deaf people (De Graaf & Bijl, 2002:61-70). Those who were born deaf, who never had full access to an oral language and have a signed language as their native language, do not face the same difficulties in communicating. This is because those who know a signed language have full access to that language and are able to interact with other sign language users. They can also easily become a part of the Deaf community, for which this is the primary mode of communication.

Studies have shown that late deafened people who accept their hearing loss and learn to communicate in a new way have a greater sense of well-being than those who do not, thus indicating that it is not necessarily the inability to hear which affects well-being but the decreased ability to communicate which this causes and the isolation from the hearing world that comes as a result of this (Aguayo & Coady, 2001; Barlow et al., 2007; Danermark, 1998; Kashubeck-West & Meyer, 2008; Preminger, 2011). Learning a signed language and communicating with others who can use that same language would help to ease the isolation felt by late deafened people and would therefore be an influencing factor in the choice to learn.

Late deafened people may not wish to integrate with the Deaf community if they do not identify as Deaf. However, social groups have been made available for late deafened people by organisations such as the *Association of Late Deafened Adults* (*ALDA*), which is an international organisation with members from across the globe, and the *National Association of Deafened People* (*NADP*) in the UK, which have been set up to try to provide services for deafened people. They offer an opportunity for deafened individuals to meet others in a similar position to them, which can help them to overcome the feelings of loneliness and isolation that often accompany hearing loss. Group support is very important for anyone who has suffered a hearing loss and these associations do not discriminate between communication methods. All available methods are used, whether signed languages, lipreading, or text-based methods.

2.5.2 Communication methods

Another reason that late deafened people may choose to learn a signed language is because they are unsatisfied with the communication methods available to support the continued use of English. There are many types of communication methods available which deafened and hard-of-hearing people can make use of in order to communicate despite their hearing loss. These have varying levels of success but none are able to fully restore the capability to communicate that came before hearing loss. I have identified three key types of communication methods: those which the deafened listener can employ themselves that assist in understanding spoken language but do not require any additional knowledge of the speaker, those which provide them with written rather than spoken language, and those which are forms of manual communication, which both parties in conversation must be aware of, and that are based on the grammatical

structure of English. The most widely known of these communication methods are briefly described below.

To aid spoken language

There are options available to individuals with hearing loss which allow them to continue communicating using spoken English. They offer a chance for late deafened people to continue, as much as possible, using the means of communication with which they were accustomed, that require no extra effort from the speaker.

Hearing aids and cochlear implants are often the first solution offered to individuals who see a healthcare professional regarding their hearing loss. These have become increasingly sophisticated over the years, and benefit many people, although they require residual hearing to be of benefit. *Action on Hearing Loss*, a charitable organisation which supports hearing loss in the UK, claims that four million people in the UK who could benefit from hearing aids do not have them and that a large percentage of those that do have them do not use them regularly (RNID, 2011). Hearing aids are not suitable for all people or in all situations. They can be problematic in environments with background noise and will not benefit an individual with profound hearing loss. For profoundly deaf people, a CI is the only medical technology available with the ability to partially restore hearing but some people cannot receive CIs and, since the procedure for fitting them involves surgery, some people prefer not to undergo it. CIs convert sound into electrical signals and send them directly to the auditory nerve in the brain. They are an extraordinary medical device, but there is much variance in results between users with some experiencing very little benefit (Faulkner & Pisoni, 2013).

Lipreading is often suggested as an option for people with hearing loss and is very frequently learned. This can be useful in understanding speech but it requires specific conditions to be met if it is to be helpful, including good lighting and visibility of the speaker's face. It also helps for the lipreader to be acquainted with the speaker and know the context of the conversation. If a sentence is given to a lipreader out of context, it is only possible for them to understand around 5% of what is said (Samuelsson & Ronnberg, 1991:134). Therefore, even those skilled at it will struggle if they are unaided by residual hearing, hearing aids or cued speech – a visual system which uses hand shapes to represent letters.

Written language

Almost all native English speakers in the USA and the UK are able to read and write, and it is very common for people to communicate through a text-based method.

Text and internet messaging through mobile phones, along with other means of electronic communication, opened up a whole new avenue of communication for deaf people and has become a main means of socialisation. These methods are especially favoured because they are mainstream devices that can be used to interact with hearing and deaf alike (Power et al., 2007:81). The same can be said of internet services such as email, instant messaging and social networking.

Captioning can be used to provide a written translation of the audio section of videos. These can be either open or closed captions. The difference between open and closed captioning is that open captions are made as an integrated part of the video and will always be visible, whereas closed captions need to be turned on. This technology currently has limitations, especially on live television such as the news, as it experiences a large time lag and often misses sections. Aside from captions which are created to be provided alongside audio on the television, there is also technology available to translate audio directly into text as it is spoken. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) uses speech-to-text software to provide translations from speech into writing.

Manual communication based on English

Several means of communication are available which allow individuals to continue communicating in a form of English in which some or all words are delivered using manual gestures rather than speech. These require both speaker and listener to be familiar with the gestures used, but are not as difficult to learn as a conventional signed languages as they follow the same grammatical structure as English.

Signed English is a manually coded form of the English language which differs between English speaking regions. The lexicon is made up of signs from a signed language, but follows the grammatical structure of English. Therefore, it can be used alongside spoken English (Yule, 2010:201-202). It has been claimed that some late deafened individuals will choose to learn Signed English as a manual communication system, since it is a language that uses the structure of English so can be used alongside spoken English to facilitate understanding (Luey et al., 1995:177).

Fingerspelling is a manually coded form of communication which uses the hands to represent letters of the alphabet. The main use for fingerspelling is to spell out names of people and places or words from English which do not have an equivalent in conventional signed languages, such as modern technical terms (Wilcox, 1992:9-10). It can also be used by those who do not know a signed language as a first step towards learning it, or to support the lipreading of difficult words. Fingerspelling cannot easily be used on its own as a means of communication as it is very slow, since each letter has to be signed individually. Therefore, it is only really useful for spelling names or clarifying words.

Makaton is a language system used in the UK which was designed to assist the communication of individuals with difficulties beyond hearing loss, such as those with learning disabilities or neurological disorders. It is a simplified language derived from BSL, which uses graphic symbols and signs alongside speech. It is often used to assist with the acquisition of spoken English (Sainsbury, 1986).

2.6 Summary

There are many reasons that people choose to learn second languages, including integrativeness, investment and factors of social identity. Signed languages are natural languages which can be learned as a second language and could benefit late deafened people due to their use of the gestural modality and their ability to be used without auditory ability. Many factors may influence the decision made by late deafened people to learn a signed language or not. One is that late deafened people may feel as if the communication options available to them are satisfactory, but based on a review of literature, this does not seem to be the case. Late deafened people are a relatively under-researched group who are often categorised either with Deaf people, most of whom were born with little to no ability to hear, or the hard-of-hearing, who suffer from hearing loss but have sufficient residual hearing to communicate predominantly through spoken language.

Neither of these identities completely defines late deafened people but when they lose their hearing they may feel as though they have lost their identity as a hearing person. Therefore, they often fall into one of these two groups, for which there is a social support network. This identity categorisation could have an effect on the linguistic choices made by late deafened people who are also hugely affected by the impact that becoming deaf has on their life both psychologically and socially. This may cause them to feel ashamed of their hearing loss and to withdraw from society. Learning a signed language offers an opportunity for late deafened people to have full access to a natural language again. It also offers the chance to socialise fully with other sign language users, though this might require a change in social circles. Despite this there are many reasons why late deafened people may not wish to learn a signed language. The research in this thesis aims to understand what these reasons are.

3 Survey

Surveys are often used in studies regarding late deafened people (Carlsson et al., 2011; Helvik et al., 2007; Kashubeck-West & Meyer, 2008). They are a highly convenient method for gathering quantitative, demographic data, and are useful in representing the characteristics of a population due to their ability to collect a large number of responses. The anonymous nature of surveys also helps to encourage answers to be given more openly. In addition, the flexibility and ease of distribution facilitates a large number of potential participants to be sampled from various countries - an important factor for this study since the desired participants were native English speakers whereas the work was conducted in the Netherlands. Therefore, an anonymous online survey was considered to be the best research method for this study to gather data on how frequently late deafened people choose to learn signed languages and the reasons for this choice.

The survey was created, using questions of my own devising, on the survey software Qualtrics - a software which made it possible to easily distribute and gather data online - which looked to find an answer for both of the research questions considered in this thesis (see Appendix 1 for survey questions). The answer to the first question of how frequently late deafened adults learn signed languages is a matter of quantity and, as such, is easily obtained. However, to understand the reasons behind making the choice to learn a signed language many factors must be considered which are discussed below.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Participants

The respondents consisted of 25 adults below the age of 65 who lost their hearing after the age of 12. Initially 51 responses were received but from that number 20 had to be excluded as they dropped out of the survey before completing enough questions to gather any usable data. Six more were excluded due to the respondents being over the maximum age limit of 65. The age range of the remaining participants was 30 to 65 with a mean age of 46. Of the 25 participants 88% (22) were female, a gender bias which is not uncommon in studies investigating acquired deafness (Kashubeck-West & Meyer, 2008) (see Table 2.1). 68% (17) of the participants grew up in the UK, 28% (7) in the USA and one in Sweden. Most participants (84%) were educated to university level or higher with the rest having Upper Secondary as their highest level of education. With regards to hearing loss 44% of participants reported suffering from profound hearing loss and 24% from severe hearing loss. Therefore 68% of the total number fit the definition of late deafened used for this thesis. 32% had late onset mild to moderate hearing loss and will be included in the results for the sake of comparison. For the purposes of this study

Table 3.1: *Demographic and hearing loss data of participants n=25*

Gender			Degree of Hearing Loss		
Male	3	12%	Mild/Moderate	8	32%
Female	22	88%	Severe	6	24%
Country			Profound	11	44%
UK	17	68%	**Suddenness**		
US	7	28%	Very sudden	3	12%
Sweden	1	4%	Somewhat sudden	2	8%
Education			Slightly gradual	7	28%
Upper Secondary	4	16%	Somewhat gradual	6	24%
Bachelor	14	56%	Extremely gradual	7	28%
Master/Doctorate	7	28%			

all individuals with hearing loss which developed after the age of 13 were included so that an analysis could be conducted on the role of severity of hearing loss on learning signed languages. Each of the participants who answered the question on age of onset claimed to lose their hearing between the ages of 13 and 50: 16% between 13 and 18, 21% between 19 and 25, 16% between 26 and 30, 37% between 31 and 40 and 11% between 41 and 50. The suddenness of the hearing loss was varied although the majority of participants (80%) experienced a gradual decline in hearing lasting a year or longer with only 12% experiencing a very sudden hearing loss and 8% a reasonably sudden hearing loss declining over the period of a few weeks or months. All participants who completed the survey were assumed to identify with the term 'late deafened'. Therefore participants were not excluded if they did not conform to the definition of being severely or profoundly deaf. A distinction can still be made in the results, however, between those who fit the definition and those who do not.

3.1.2 Survey Questions

In total the survey consisted of nineteen questions which were a mixture of multiple choice, open-ended questions and questions rating the answers on a five-point Likert scale (see Appendix 1 for full list of questions). The first four specifically concerned the hearing loss of the participants: the age at which they lost their hearing, the severity of hearing loss, how gradually or suddenly hearing declined and whether or not a CI or hearing aid was used. A small descriptor was included beside the choices for each level of hearing loss to help the participants decide since, although this can be measured accurately in decibels, the exact level is not always known. Seven of the questions were multiple choice questions to gather information on the types of communication methods used by the participants and explored the possible factors affecting the choice to learn a signed language or not. Five options were given for the question that asked the participants to select which communication methods they were able to use: lipreading, sign language, Signed English, Makaton and fingerspelling. For the question regarding how frequently they used each method lipreading was replaced with spoken language. The answers given for every question in the survey were taken into account when calculating the number who

used each communication method since there were some discrepancies between answers. This is presumably because some only selected 'sign language' if they felt they had a good knowledge of it or used it regularly. The purpose of the study, however, was to investigate how frequently late deafened adults make the choice to learn a signed language, not their fluency. Four questions were open and qualitative: two asked participants to explain how interested they would be to learn a signed language and to give any further comments they had regarding signed languages; the other two asked if the participants were satisfied with the communication options available to them, what changes they would make in this respect and what they considered to be the biggest change they made in terms of communication after losing their hearing. Finally the survey ended with four demographic questions to put the data into context. The findings for each of the factors investigated in this survey will be discussed in the results section.

3.1.3 Distribution

A link to the survey was distributed online using several methods: firstly by email to associations and charities for the deafened, deaf and hard of hearing in both the USA and the UK; then by posting it on public forums and on Yahoo groups, posting on the social networking site Reddit and sending requests on Twitter and Facebook. Due to its anonymous nature it is not possible to know which of the distribution methods generated the most responses. The link opened immediately onto a written informed consent page which assured the participants that the survey was anonymous, voluntary and that they could drop out at any time. The decision was made to have this message in writing rather than in a signed language video message. This would have been impractical since not all English speaking regions use the same signed language and not all of the potential participants would have knowledge of a signed language whereas, in order to take the survey, the participants must all be capable of understanding written English. This also supported the neutrality of the survey, as it helped to ensure that the responses were not biased towards users of signed languages. The use of a signed language may have attracted more users of signed languages and dissuaded people uninterested in them from answering. The survey was left open for a period of four weeks between October and November 2014.

3.2 Results

In order to address both research questions the data regarding the number of participants who had learned a signed language will be given first followed by possible motivating factors behind the choice to learn. The factors included in this study are: demographic details of the participants such as severity of hearing loss, country of origin, education level, age, age of onset of hearing loss and the use of a CI or hearing aid; communication methods; opportunity to learn the language; attitude towards signed languages; and community including both integration with the Deaf community and the support of the family and friends of the participants.

3.2.1 Signed languages

In total across all participants of the survey 44% had learned a signed language (Table 3.2). Since only one of the participants with mild to moderate hearing loss had learned a signed language and since they did not technically fit the definition of late deafened they were analysed as a separate group. Of those participants who did fit the definition of late deafened, having severe to profound hearing loss, 59% had learned a signed language. Since there were only 25 total participants and 17 severe to profoundly deaf participants this can not be considered as representative of late deafened people as a whole. However, it is noteworthy that over half of the late deafened participants had learned a signed language.

3.2.2 Demographic and hearing loss factors

The results show an increase in the percentage of people who learned a signed language with an increase in the severity of hearing loss. Those with mild and moderate hearing loss have the lowest rate at 13% and those with profound hearing loss have the highest at 64% (Table 3.2). Two of the participants with moderate hearing loss answered that if their hearing became worse they would choose to learn a signed language (see Appendix 3 for comments). Due to the gender bias of the participants it is not possible to determine whether gender is a factor in learning a signed language. Therefore, this factor has been excluded from the analysis. Level of education could be a contributing factor in the choice to learn a signed language since none of the participants who were educated to below university level learned one. A higher percentage of those with a postgraduate degree (71%) learned a signed language than those with a Bachelor's degree or equivalent (43%) (Table 3.2). The data for the severe to profoundly deaf participants also shows a higher percentage of participants from the UK learning signed languages than from the USA though a larger sample size is required if any clear differences are to be found (Table 3.4).

One factor which could have a significant effect on the likelihood to learn a signed language is the length of time a participant had been deaf. Based on the questions of the survey this is very difficult to determine because of the difference in data type between age and the range of age at onset of hearing loss. In addition to this 6 of the participants did not answer the question regarding the age at which they lost their hearing. Table 3.3 shows the estimated length of time since the onset of hearing loss for each of the severe to profoundly deaf participants who did answer both questions regarding age. Based on these limited results, those who had been deaf for the longest period of time actually had not learned a signed language. It appears that the most frequent group to learn a signed language are those who lost their hearing in their 30s over 10 years ago. The results show that fewer people with extremely gradual hearing loss, which declined over a period of many years, had learned a signed language than any of the other groups (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: *Demographic information of all participants who have learned a signed language*

	Have learned a signed language	Total
All	11 (44%)	25
Education		
Upper Secondary	0 (0%)	4
Bachelor	6 (43%)	14
Master/Doctorate	5 (71%)	7
Country		
UK	8 (47%)	17
US	3 (43%)	7
Sweden	0 (0%)	1
Degree of loss		
Mild/Moderate	1 (13%)	8
Severe/Profound	10 (59%)	17
Age of onset		
13-18	0 (0%)	3
19-25	2 (50%)	4
26-30	0 (0%)	3
31-40	3 (43%)	7
41-50	0 (0%)	2
no answer	6 (100%)	6
Suddenness of loss		
Very sudden	2 (67%)	3
Somewhat sudden	1 (50%)	2
Slightly gradual	3 (43%)	7
Somewhat gradual	3 (50%)	6
Extremely gradual	2 (29%)	7
Cochlear implant		
Yes	9 (39%)	23
No	2 (100%)	2

Table 3.3: *Length of time since onset of hearing loss for severe to profoundly deaf participants correlated with learning a signed language*

Time since onset (Age-Age at onset)	Age	Age at onset range	Has learned a Signed language
3	37	31-40	no
7.5	43	31-40	no
8	30	19-25	yes
9	31	19-25	no
10.5	46	31-40	yes
21.5	57	31-40	yes
24.5	60	31-40	yes
31	53	19-25	yes
38	60	19-25	no
44.5	60	13-18	no
49.5	65	13-18	no
49.5	65	13-18	no

Table 3.4: *Demographic information of severe to profoundly deaf participants who have learned a signed language n=17*

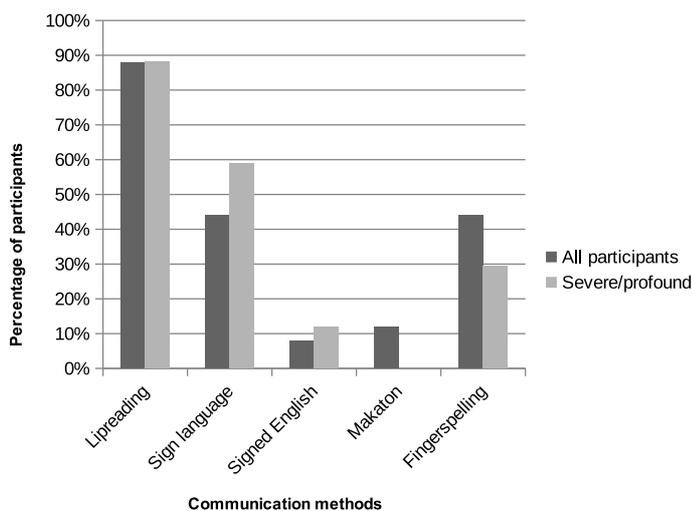|	Have learned a signed language	Total
Gender		
Male	1 (50%)	2
Female	9 (60%)	15
Country		
UK	7 (70%)	10
US	3 (43%)	7
Education		
Upper Secondary	0 (0%)	1
Bachelor	5 (50%)	10
Postgraduate	5 (83%)	6

Figure 3.1: Communication methods of all participants (n=25) and severe to profoundly deaf participants (n=17)

3.2.3 Communication methods

A factor which could have a strong influence on the choice to learn a signed language or not is the availability of communication options which support a continued use of English and the satisfaction of the participants with these options. The results showed that 88% (22) indicated that they were able to lipread (Figure 3.1). Only 2 of the participants responded that they do not use a CI or hearing aid. Both of these participants had learned a signed language (Table 3.2). One had profound hearing loss and claimed to use a signed language all the time, whereas the other had only moderate hearing loss and claimed to use a signed language rarely. Both were British females in their forties. 44% (11) of the participants indicated that they could use fingerspelling, the same number that answered that they had learned a signed language. Signed English and Makaton were known by very few participants, which was to be expected since they are artificially created communication systems used by few people. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show the frequency with which the participants claimed to use each communication method. The frequency was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'Never' to 'Always'. As can be seen, the most common answer for all of the participants including those with severe to profound hearing loss is that spoken language is 'always' used, followed by text. For 'sign language' in the severe to profound group the modal answers given were 'never' and 'rarely'.

An open question asked if the participants were satisfied with the communication methods available to them and what changes they would make if they could. The most commonly given answers were that loop systems for hearing aid users need to be improved and used more (5), and a general desire for greater use of open or closed captioning and technology in general (5) (see Appendix 3 for comments). Two participants wrote that signed languages should be taught to everyone from early childhood. One was particularly adamant that cued speech should be better known as it is their main method of communication and very easy to learn. When asked
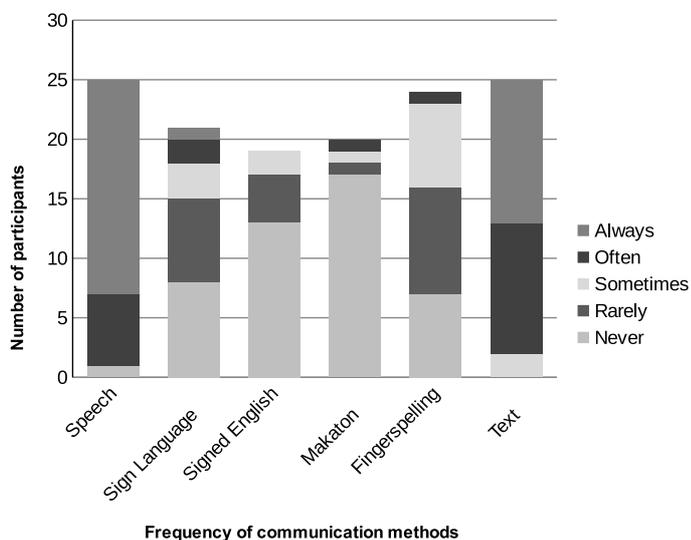
Figure 3.2: Frequency of communication methods by all participants n=25
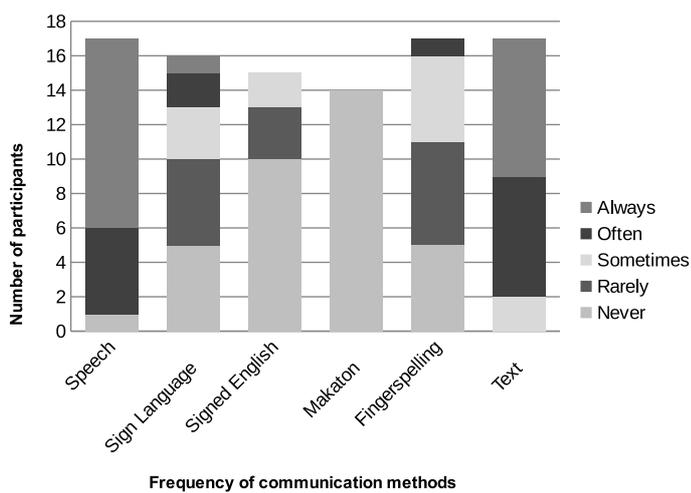

Figure 3.3: Frequency of communication methods by severe to profoundly deaf participants n=17

about the biggest changes made after hearing loss, most answers given concerned having cochlear implants or hearing aids fitted (8), or learning to lipread (4).

3.2.4 Opportunity to learn

A factor which could have a strong influence on the choice to learn a signed language is the availability of classes. It was mentioned by several participants that classes were lacking in availability either because there were none in the local area or because they were too expensive. Four comments made by participants mentioned these difficulties. Three stated that learning signed languages is extremely expensive and one that she lived in a rural area where no classes were available.

> *It costs a lot of money to learn sign language which is a barrier*
>
> *- 55-year-old British Female*

Along with availability of classes it is important for people to have the opportunity to learn. Only 35% of the participants with severe to profound hearing loss and none of those with mild to moderate hearing loss answered that they were offered the opportunity to learn a signed language. As could be expected, a larger percentage (67%) of those who claimed they were given the opportunity had learned a signed language than those who were not offered the opportunity (55%).

> *I wasn't "given the opportunity" to learn it, I paid for it at great expense myself.*
>
> *- 61-year-old British Female*

3.2.5 Attitude towards signed languages

A possible factor that could affect a late deafened person's interest in learning a signed language is whether their attitude towards the language is positive or negative. One question included in the survey asked participants what they thought the public attitude was towards signed languages. This was given on a five-point Likert scale ranging from very negative to very positive. The answers given by the participants are weighted more towards the positive than the negative (Figure 3.4). The most commonly given answer of those who learned a signed language is 'a little negative' but the answer of 'very negative' was given by a participant who did not know a signed language and the answer 'very positive' was only given by a user of a signed language (see Appendix 3). One participant who believed the public to have a negative attitude wrote the following:

> *I believe if people see others signing they connect somehow with the idea of learning difficulties not hearing loss. They then frequently over enunciate, shout or use 'made up on the spot' signing!*
>
> *- 53-year-old British Female*

Another way to indicate a positive or negative attitude towards a signed language is in how useful a participant believes the language to be. The survey asked participants to indicate on
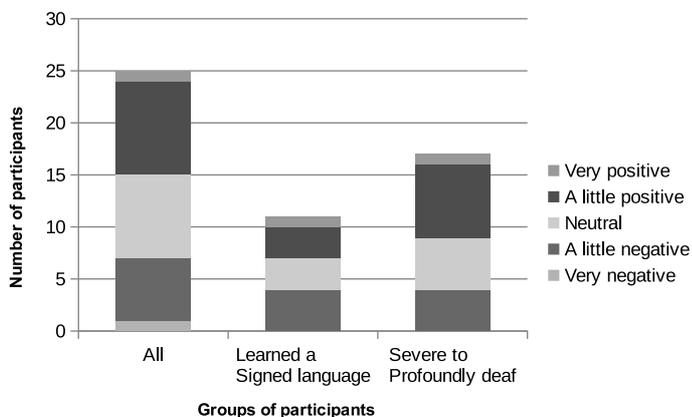
Figure 3.4: Perceived public attitude towards signed languages by all participants (n=25), severe to profoundly deaf participants (n=17), and participants who learned a signed language (n=11)
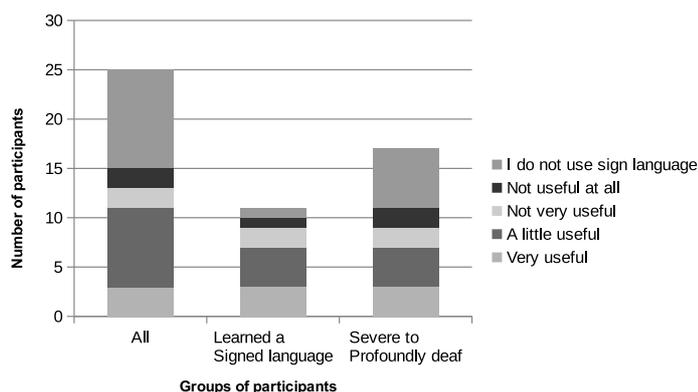

Figure 3.5: How useful signed languages are to all participants (n=25), severe to profoundly deaf participants (n=17) and participants who learned a signed language (n=11)

a five-point Likert scale how useful they believed signed languages to be. The most common answer given by both the participants who had learned a signed language and the participants with severe to profound hearing loss was that signed languages are 'a little useful' (Figure 3.5). One of the participants who answered that signed languages are 'very useful' commented that she is a BSL interpreter and one who answered that it is 'a little useful' claims to work with deaf people. Therefore it could only be useful in terms of their jobs rather than for personal communication.

> *It is useful when communicating with other deaf people, but otherwise limited.*
>
> *- 46-year-old British Female*

3.2.6 Deaf community and identity

Along with attitudes towards signed languages the survey also considered the level of each participant's involvement with the Deaf community. This was asked in a question rated on a five-point Likert scale. The expectation was that those who felt more a part of a community would be more likely to have learned a signed language. Comments such as this one given on the survey add to this expectation:

> *I feel that sign language would only be useful if I was prepared to move my social life to be more included in the "deaf community"*
>
> *– 55-year-old British Female*

As can be seen in Figure 3.6 more participants did not feel a part of a Deaf community than those who did and the most common answer given by all three groups is 'not really'. Nobody who answered with 'maybe' had learned a signed language; if this neutral answer is not taken into account the answers show a positive association between feeling part of a Deaf community and knowing a signed language. One participant - a 65-year-old British female who began to lose her hearing between the ages of 13 and 18 - was particularly against the idea of learning a signed language claiming that she is *"a hearing person whose ears don't work!."*

> *I'm not deaf enough and I'm not hearing enough. I fit neither place.*
> *- 30-year-old American Female*

3.2.7 Reasons to learn or not

In answer to the open questions on the survey several participants provided reasons why they learned signed languages or why they might choose to in the future. Three participants wrote that they work with deaf people and that is the reason they know a signed language. Two more stated that they would like to learn it in order to work with deaf people as a teacher or counsellor (see Appendix 3 for comments). Along with job related reasons family and friends appear to be a key influencing factor in terms of learning signed languages. Far more of the participants who had learned a signed language than those who had not had friends or family who also knew one, either from before or after they went deaf (Figure 3.7). Amongst those who had learned
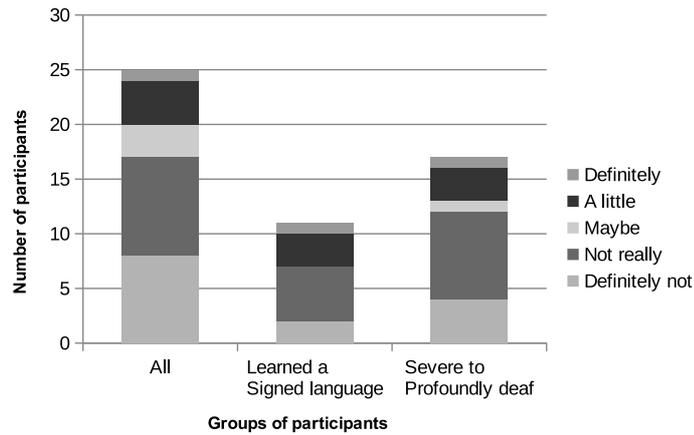
Figure 3.6: Level of integration with Deaf community felt by all participants (n=25), severe to profound participants (n=17) and those who learned a signed language (n=11)
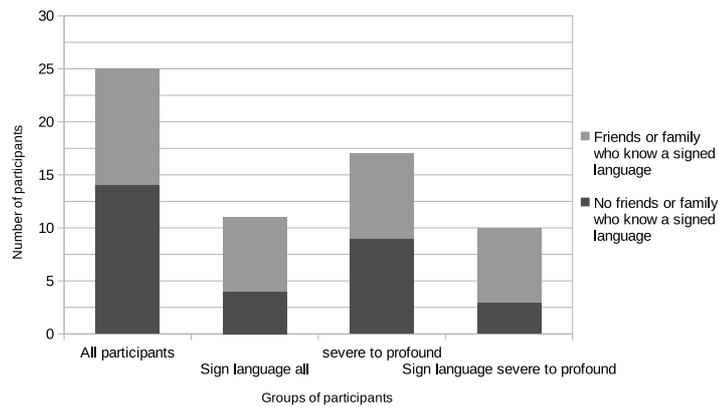
Figure 3.7: Friends and family who know a signed language for all participants (n=25), participants who learned a signed language (n=11), severe to profound participants (n=17) and severe to profound participants who learned a signed language (n=10)

Table 3.5: *Details of Friends and Family who Know a Signed Language*

Question	Have learned a signed language	Have not learned a signed language
"I had family and friends who used sign language before I lost my hearing"	3	2
"Some of my friends or family learned sign language after I lost my hearing"	4	1
"I made friends with people who use sign language after I lost my hearing"	7	1

26

a signed language it was more frequent that they made friends with people who knew a signed language after they had lost their hearing, rather than having friends or family from before they lost their hearing who either knew or learned one (Table 3.5).

In response to the question which asked whether participants would be interested to learn a signed language several answers mentioned family and friends as a preventing factor (see Appendix 3 for comments). The reason most frequently given by the participants against learning a signed language (7 responses) was that they did not know anyone else able to use it. Some stated it in a positive way writing that they would want to learn if their family also did but others were negative writing that they would not want to learn a signed language because they don't know anyone else who knows one.

> *Yes if my family were able to be taught alongside me otherwise I would only be able to talk to other deaf people that I do not know.*
>
> *- 56-year-old British Female*

3.2.8 Summary

Due to the small sample size of those with severe to profound hearing loss the data cannot be seen as representative but the study shows that over half of the severe to profoundly deaf participants had learned a signed language. In terms of demographic factors there appears to be an association between level of education and learning signed languages. There also appears to be a link between both severity of hearing loss and how gradual the decline in hearing loss was and learning signed languages. So the more severe and the more sudden the loss of hearing, the more people learned signed languages. The majority of participants had the use of either hearing aids or cochlear implants and many were satisfied with these to help them hear, though there were several comments which stated the need for a better use of the loop system to improve the capabilities of the devices. A few factors which could prevent late deafened people from learning signed languages are the expense of classes and lack of opportunity. A very important reason, however, appears to be related to the social circles of the participants. They did not feel a part of the Deaf community and several mentioned that they would not learn a signed language because their friends and family do not know one and they would be unwilling to change their social circle.

4 Blog analysis

In order to gain a better idea of what factors influence late deafened people's choice to learn a signed language it is important to understand their attitudes towards signed languages and to their hearing loss. To gain information about these attitudes and opinions it is valuable to collect qualitative data to supplement the quantitative data from the survey. This type of information is often gathered from individual or personal accounts such as may be given in direct interviews (De Graaf & Bijl, 2002; Hallberg & Carlsson, 1991; Luey et al., 1995). However, with the rise in popularity of the internet for communication via social networking sites and other social media researchers have begun to look online for information. Many people, deafened and deaf people included, have begun to make use of the internet to express themselves in online blogs. Blogs - a shortening of the phrase 'web logs' - are discussions written by individuals online. There are several different types of internet blog. One common type is a personal blog which is written in a diary-like format in reverse date order usually by just one blogger. Another type is a topical blog which acts like a community forum on which posters can discuss a particular topic. Each of these are usually written on a single topic directed towards others with similar experiences or interests, usually in an informal style by people who are frequently not professional authors.

> Blogs are a mirror of a society, and many different parties have an interest in monitoring their content. Businesses, lawyers, sociologists and politicians want to know the topics that are of most concern to citizens. (Moens, 2009:469-470)

In the words of Moens (2009:469) blogs are "creative forms of human expression" and have a larger impact on society than is commonly thought. They can provide insight into the attitudes of the authors without the effect of priming from interview questions, making it more likely that the opinions given are honest ones. The information from blogs is also extremely accessible since the blogs are publicly available online. Therefore, data may be gathered from a far wider range of locations than would be possible with personal interviews, given the geographic limitations and time constraints.

Blogs have been analysed in research across many disciplines as they are a rich source of views, opinions and attitudes (Mishne & De Rijke, 2006:145). In linguistics they have been used for studies on various topics. One example is a study on the language of emotions (Gill et al., 2008). This study used a content analysis tool (LIWC) to analyse linguistic features of emotions in blog posts. Another linguistic study researched how certain linguistic features can show the subjectivity and polarity of topic-independent blog posts by looking at verb classes and how they can categorise sentiment (Chelsey et al., 2006). Blogs have also been mined to gather information from the large online Deaf community to study Deaf culture and empowerment.

One such study analysed blog posts by 9 Deaf bloggers to investigate certain aspects of Deaf culture. The results of the study highlighted topics such as the value placed on ASL and equal treatment of deaf people by society (Hamill & Stein, 2011). This part of the research was not done to add quantitative data to the survey results but to gain a greater insight into why late deafened people might make the choice to learn a signed language or not. Therefore, the focus of the study is on the second research question: what factors affect the choice to learn a signed language? It will mainly focus on the attitudes of the bloggers towards signed languages, their identities related to hearing loss and the reasons they give for learning a signed language.

4.1 Methodology

4.1.1 Sources

One of the blog posts used as a part of the study was written as a direct response to the placement of my survey link on an *Action on Hearing Loss* forum requesting participants. The highly emotive descriptions of being deafened and the attitudes towards signed languages contained within this blog post were the inspiration for using blogs written by late deafened people to gather information for my research. Therefore, to expand on the data received from the online survey, I selected blog posts from a number of different sources to gain insight on the opinions and experiences of the bloggers. Due to the nature of blogs, each post does not cover exactly the same topics and the self-selection bias of the bloggers may mean that they do not represent the opinions of the late deafened population overall. However, they do still provide some useful insight.

Along with the first post found on the *Action on Hearing Loss* forum four other blog posts were chosen which represented the views of late deafened people from various backgrounds. The selection criteria for these posts was that they were written in English by a late deafened person, written from a first person perspective, and contained some sort of narrative on their feelings towards hearing loss and signed languages or communication methods. The search for additional blogs to review was carried out over the space of one week using the Google search engine by entering key words such as "late deafened", "hearing loss" and "blog". Based on the fairly narrow selection criteria only five blogs in total were found because, although there is a large online Deaf blogging community, posts written by late deafened people about their experiences of hearing loss are less common. Although this number is low, and hence not representative of the late deafened population as a whole, it is still enough to gain an insight into the possible reasons why late deafened people may or may not choose to learn signed languages.

A brief outline of each blog post (numbered 1 to 5) is given below. The numbers will be used to refer to each blog throughout the analysis. All these blog posts were publicly available online at the time of writing in May 2015 (see appendix for full text of each blog post).

1. *Late Deafened: Incompatible with Culture* is a post in two parts on the blog *At the Rim.* This is the blog post mentioned in the previous section as the inspiration for this study. The post was written in 2014 by a British man who regularly updates his blog and often comments

on online forums for deaf and hard of hearing people. It is a personal blog with an overall focus on deafness.

2. *A Woman with a Hearing Loss: The Inner Struggle*, was written in 2011 by a late deafened, American woman. It was posted on the blog *A Hearing loss & late deafened blog* which is a topical blog run by *Say What Club*, a global forum for people with hearing loss.

3. *Deafened and Deaf*, written in 2013, is a blog post written by an American man, a practicing Zen priest, who went from hard of hearing to profoundly deaf in 2009. The blog is called *Zen and the Deafened Adult*, which is a personal blog run by the same poster. This post discusses the blog-poster's views on signed languages and integrating with the Deaf community that will be used for this study.

4. *You're Deaf – Now What?* Is a blog post written in 2014 by an American woman on her own personal blog called *Sudden Silence* which is entirely about her experiences of being deafened. The post used for this study gives details about the lack of support provided by the healthcare system when the blogger lost her hearing and how she coped with this. She gives a view of hearing loss from the more medical perspective, discussing steroids, hearing aids and cochlear implants. She only makes a passing mention to signed languages.

5. *Deafened Adults: Fallen through the Cracks* was written on the blog *Deafened People Page* by a Canadian woman with progressive hearing loss. The post included in this study discusses what it is like to be late deafened, with reference to her own experiences. This post is written by a published author and has a much more formal style than the others.

4.1.2 Procedure

Extracting key phrases from text and categorising them into themes in order to be analysed is a standard technique of qualitative data analysis which can be applied to any text, including blogs (Dey, 2003). This method of qualitative analysis was applied to this study. The first step of the analysis process was to read through each of the five blogs closely to gain an impression of the information which could be gathered. Three key themes came to light which were then used to categorise the data to focus on the second research question of this thesis: what factors motivate the choice to learn a signed language? These three themes were: attitude towards signed languages, deaf identity and reason for learning a signed language. Since all but one of the bloggers knew a signed language, knowledge of a signed language was not used as a factor in the analysis. For large corpora, opinion mining is often performed using computer algorithms to extract data. However, these are complicated and often unreliable since blogs are notorious for spelling mistakes, ungrammatical sentences and unusual use of punctuation (Chau et al., 2009:36). Therefore, it is difficult for an algorithm to accurately extract qualitative data from such examples of unstructured, natural language. As the data set for this study is small it was possible to manually extract information from the blogs. Therefore, the categorisation into themes was performed manually by extracting each phrase or sentence which fell into the three themes. The result of this can be seen in Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.

When mining blogs for attitudes sentences can be marked with polarities of positive, negative

or neutral in order to generate an overall classification of a blog post (Balahur et al., 2009; Chelsey et al., 2006). This approach was used in the present study to explore attitudes towards signed languages. Each extracted phrase in this theme was given a score of +1 for positive, -1 for negative or 0 for neutral. An example of a phrase given a negative score is "It is absolutely no use at all someone learning another language if nobody else can speak it". An example of one with a positive score is "this makes me long with joyful anticipation the day when I can sign fluently". Sentences which did not have a clear positive or negative polarity were rated as neutral. By calculating the total positive or negative score given to each blogger an idea could be gained of their overall attitude. Any blog with a score higher than +1 were marked as positive, and any lower than -1 were marked as negative. On this basis each blog was given the general label of positive, negative or neutral.

For the second theme of deaf identity each blogger was assigned a label of either Deaf or hard-of-hearing. This is based on previous research which has shown that late deafened feel that they do not have an identity of their own but are lost somewhere between Deaf and hard-of-hearing (Howe, 1994:26). These two groups are also divided by reasons other than hearing loss and could be classed in terms of social identity. One group represents those who identify with a hearing community and the other a deaf community (Bat-Chava, 2000:420-421). For this reason, although all of the bloggers are late deafened, a label of either hard-of-hearing or Deaf has been assigned to each blogger based on their own assertions, for example "if I'm asked if I'm Deaf - I indicate YES. If they need to know, I sign that I am also Deafened". In the case where neither deaf identity was explicitly stated, and it was not obvious from the extracted phrases, neither label was assigned.

The final theme of reasons for learning a signed language merely used any explicitly given reason from each of the bloggers about why they chose to learn a signed language or not. The data extracted for each of the blogs for each theme are given in the results section below. These data were then analysed to investigate if there is a link between the three different themes which could show the possible reasons why late deafened people choose to learn signed languages or not.

4.2 Results

Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 contain the key phrases extracted from the blogs which relate to the three themes: attitudes towards signed languages, Deaf identity and reasons for learning a signed language. The numbers used in the tables correspond to the blog numbers.

4.2.1 Attitude towards signed languages

Blog 1 gives the most negative attitude of all the bloggers, with a score of -5, about the idea of signed languages being taught to late deafened people. He does not think signed languages are useful to late deafened people, who do not interact with the Deaf community. Blog 2 and 4, with scores of +1 and 0 respectively, were both marked as neutral. The author of blog 2 did learn

Table 4.1: *Attitudes towards signed languages (spellings as found in original blog posts)*

Blog no.	Phrases related to attitude towards signed languages	Polarity	Attitude
1	"sign labels.... so to reject the label is to reject the means"	-1	Negative
	"It is absolutely no use at all someone learning another language if nobody else can speak it."	-1	(-5)
	"BSL ISN'T a 'language' to US, but simply,a visual COMMUNICATION 'tool'"	-1	
	"The real difficulties of BSL use in many social areas is a negative"	-1	
	"BSL is not an option unless you have the access to fellow USERS"	-1	
	"if you take the trouble to investigate their actual communication use and effective means, sign is just ONE of those means they use"	0	
	"The solution here is lipreading, hearing aids, a CI or other hearing related means, not signing."	0	
2	"ASL taught me to be very aware of body language, facial expressions, the movements of the mouth and of course, the eyes tell me a great deal about a person"	0	Neutral
	"ASL was not my first language but I am happy to have the skills to explore the culture and ethnicity of the Deaf community"	+1	(+1)
3	"the Deaf do it just as well, if not better, with sign, than we did, with voice, as hearing folks."	+1	Positive
	"Signing is the best way that I can think of."	+1	(+5)
	"this makes me long with joyful anticipation the day when I can sign fluently"	+1	
	"Communication! Not just this written word, either. I mean face to face warm communication. I cannot see any other way that gets deeper than sign language"	+1	
	"even with beginning sign, the connection begins right away - and that means the isolation begins to thaw."	+1	
4	"I didn't know sign language, and neither did any of my family or friends."	0	Neutral (0)
5	"my years of visual compensation for not hearing made it extremely easy to learn how to sign"	+1	Positive
	"When you learn sign language, you meet people who do sign. They understand you a lot better than the people who are trying to convince you not to learn to sign because it is more convenient for them that you don't change."	+1	(+3)
	"When you become deaf as an adult, you have already changed. Learning to sign is just a way to adapt to that change."	0	
	"Signing is my way to declare that I am not hearing and I expect other people to do their share."	0	
	"Sign language for me has been a gift."	+1	

ASL when she first became deaf and does accept that it helped her in some ways but once she discovered CART and captioning she stopped using ASL as a main means of communicating. Blog 4 only briefly mentions signed languages to say that she did not know one and neither did any of her friends or family. Blog 3 is extremely positive towards both signed languages and the Deaf community, with a score of +5. This blogger thinks that signed languages are by far the best way for anyone with hearing loss to communicate even if they only know a little. Blog 5 is also very positive, with a score of +3, and the blogger claimed that learning a signed language was a gift to her. She says that learning is a positive way to adapt to the change of becoming deaf that gives her an excellent way to communicate which doesn't depend on her putting in a lot of effort to not get much out like with lipreading.

4.2.2 Deaf identity

Although each of the bloggers is late deafened, it is often stated that late deafened people are a forgotten group and that they identify either with the Deaf community or with hard-of-hearing people. Bearing in mind this dual system of categorisations for deaf people a label of either Deaf or hard-of-hearing has been given to each blogger. Table 4.2 shows the key phrases extracted from the blogs which relate to a deaf identity. The author of blog 1 adamantly rejects being labelled along with the culturally Deaf saying that deafened people have no use for Deaf culture and still see themselves as "hearing, but without the means to". Despite this, he also claims that late deafened people cannot be categorised with the hard-of-hearing either and that late deafened people need their own system of support outside of that offered for Deaf or hard-of-hearing people. Therefore, blog 1 was given neither the label of Deaf or of hard-of-hearing. The author of blog 2 was given the label of hard-of-hearing, as she stated that she did try to integrate with the Deaf community but did not feel like she belonged there, and instead she found that she had a lot more in common with hard-of-hearing people. When she realised that she stopped using ASL with an interpreter as a way to understand meetings and began to use CART instead. She explicitly states that she feels comfortable with hard-of-hearing people and that she is a woman with hearing loss. The author of blog 4 was also given the label of hearing-impaired. She did not try to integrate with Deaf culture but instead found support groups for people with hearing loss which she found extremely helpful. Since she is part of hearing loss support groups and not with the Deaf community her identity fits with hard-of-hearing even though she does not explicitly state that. Blogs 3 and 5 were both given the label of Deaf. The author of blog 3 felt as though he was able to integrate easily with the Deaf community, since he found that a lot of members of were actually deafened. He readily admits that he identifies himself as Deaf as well as deafened. The author of blog 5 states that she identifies as Deaf because this is a positive attitude towards herself, rather than thinking that she is "defective" or lacking in something because of her hearing loss. Although she identifies herself with the Deaf community she claims that late deafened people often get forgotten because of the way deaf people are divided into Deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Table 4.2: *Deaf identity (spellings as found in original blog posts)*

Blog no.	Phrases related to the theme of Deaf identity	Identity
1	"Late deafened have no interest par se in a deaf culture" "unable to understand how many can see a major sensory loss, as no issue at all or even a positive." "The whole approach of 'Introducing' us to a deaf world is so pointless and amateur" "late deafened despite their issue, still see themselves as that. Hearing, but without the means to." "Even those of us who go deaf later, still want separation from those born with it." "As a late deafened person I do not believe we can be categorised with the 'HI' or with the cultural deaf"	Neither
2	"I just did not fit in with the deaf/Deaf community. I wasn't comfortable. It wasn't my world" "I was trying hard to be a deaf person, not a hard of hearing woman when in truth, I was and am a woman with a hearing loss who lives in a hearing world" "between these two major groups, hearing impaired individuals really do have a culture of their own." "Hearing impaired and late deafened people share so much common ground" "I do not belong to the Deaf community" "The Deaf community is a wonderful place but its not my home. I was not born into it" "I am who I am, a woman with hearing loss."	Hard of hearing
3	"many of the "Deaf" I met were really Deafened people with a lot of time accrued as having embraced their Deafness." "We are a vast crowd in the Deaf Community!" "The best advice I've gotten so far, is to not be afraid to identify as Deaf." "I like to think of "Deafened", as a subculture of Deaf" "Deaf friends and colleagues encouraging me to identify as Deaf, and it felt "right"" "if I'm asked if I'm Deaf - I indicate YES. If they need to know, I sign that I am also Deafened. It's easer if you can accept them both." "So there it is... I'm Deaf, by way of being Deafened, and "hard of hearing" (hard of signing) in the Deaf Community"	Deaf
4	"I started searching for hearing loss support groups, hoping to meet other people like me." "If you're dealing with hearing loss, whether it's recent or not, it can really help to be part of an online support group." "Being part of a support group means that these people know what it's like to have a hearing loss"	Hard of hearing
5	"you don't have to live in total silence to be deaf [. . .] And you don't need to be born deaf to be deaf. That being the case, I decided that I must be deaf." "I was not unique or defective. I was normal: a normal deafened person." "having a deaf identity is a positive attitude. It is not an identity that something is missing." "the system has two categories: deaf and hard of hearing [. . .] With assumptions like these, deafened people fall through the cracks" "deafened adults are deaf and not hard of hearing" "The time to recognize the special needs of deafened adults is now."	Deaf

Table 4.3: *Reasons for learning (spellings as found in original blog posts)*

Blog no.	Reasons for learning signed languages or not
1	"I learnt it for one reason, my partner is a dedicated user"
2	"I learned to sign because it was the only "thing" available to help me communicate with other "deaf/Deaf" people"
3	N/A
4	"I didn't know sign language, and neither did any of my family or friends."
5	"if anyone knows how to cope with not hearing, it's the born-deaf people, so I decided to learn their language"

4.2.3 Reason for learning

Table 4.3 contains phrases extracted from the blogs which explain why each of them chose to learn a signed language or not.

One of the bloggers (3) does not specify the reason he chose to learn a signed language. Of the other four bloggers one (4) did not learn a signed language and only mentions that she did not know one and neither did her family or friends. The remaining three all specified reasons for learning a signed language which are all different. Blog 1 claims that the only reason he learned a signed language was for his partner who is a dedicated user. Blog 2 learned because she thought it was the only method of communication available for deaf people. Neither of these reasons are very positive. It is only blog 5 who gives a positive reason for choosing to learn a signed language and that is so that she could learn how to better come to terms with her hearing loss by learning the language of the Deaf community to communicate with them.

4.2.4 Analysis

From the data there appears to be a clear link between the themes of identity and attitude. The two bloggers (3 & 5) who identify with the culturally Deaf have an extremely positive attitude towards signed languages. Both wish to interact more with the Deaf community and one (5) even explicitly states this as her reason for learning a signed language. This is an example of integrative motivation, since those who wish to integrate with the culturally Deaf are those who are most positive about the language. These two bloggers speak much more about communicating using a signed language than the others and negatively discuss the downsides of lipreading or text-based methods of communicating.

The two bloggers who identify as hard-of-hearing (2 & 4) give a rather neutral, though not negative view of signed languages. Both mention using CART and spoken English as their main means of communication. One of these (4) did not learn a signed language because she did not know anybody else who could use one. The other (2) only learned because she thought it was the only thing available at the time to help her communicate with others. This is an example of instrumental motivation because she only learned a signed language as she thought it was necessary and gives no indication of being interested in integrating with the Deaf community. As discussed in Chapter 2 instrumental motivation is thought to be less useful for language learning

than integrative motivation. Indeed, once she found a means to continue communicating in English she stopped using ASL.

The blogger (1) who claims that he belongs neither with Deaf nor with hard-of-hearing is the one who gives the most negative opinion of signed languages. In a way he makes himself a deliberate outcast by rejecting both the Deaf and the hard-of-hearing identities and their means of communicating. He stated that late deafened people need their own identity and their own system of communication. It is also important to note that the only reason he chose to learn a signed language is because his partner is Deaf and a sign language user. This means that he did not learn the language for himself but in order to accommodate somebody else and he presumably would not have learned if it was not for this reason. The findings of this study indicate that the hearing loss identity of late deafened people has an effect on how positive their attitude is towards signed languages. Consequently, this might affect how willing they would be to learn one. This analysis of the opinions and attitudes of late deafened people in this study supports the assumption that the more positive an attitude late deafened people have towards signed languages, and the more they identify as deaf, the more likely they will be to learn a signed language.

5 Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the choice made by late deafened people about whether to learn a signed language or not, after they have developed a severe to profound hearing loss, which makes it difficult for them to communicate using spoken language. In the past, it has been claimed that late deafened people do not choose to learn signed languages since this would be too difficult, they feel it would make them lose their connection to the hearing world and they would rather continue to use speech as a primary means of communication (Cowie & Douglas-Cowie, 1992:2). Since late deafened people have a lot to gain from learning a signed language I investigated whether this claim is valid and, in doing so, also learned the possible motivations behind the choice to learn or not. This thesis addressed two key research questions: 1) How frequently do late deafened people choose to learn a signed language? 2) What are the motivating factors behind this choice? In order to find answers to these research questions I performed two separate studies: an anonymous online survey and an analysis of blog posts written by late deafened people. The rest of this chapter puts forth the findings of these two studies and how they answered the two research questions. It then provides limitations of the studies and how they could be improved if the same topic was to be researched in the future. The chapter ends with a discussion of some topics of interest which this thesis brought to light.

5.1 Do late deafened people learn signed languages?

How frequently do late deafened people to choose to learn signed languages? It was found that over half the survey participants with severe to profound hearing loss reported having learned a signed language. This finding opposes the claim made by Cowie and Douglas-Cowie (1992:2) that late deafened adults will not learn signed languages. The participants in the study even learned a signed language despite most of them not being offered the opportunity. Therefore, they actively sought out classes and chose to learn on their own initiative, despite comments in both the survey and blogs indicating that classes are not widely available and are expensive. However, the results showed that most of the participants did not often use the signed language they had learned or consider it to be very useful to them. They continued to use mainly speech for communication, a finding which does fit with Cowie and Douglas-Cowie's claim. Some of the participants who considered signed languages to be the most useful were those who worked with deaf people as teachers or counsellors and utilised it for their job. Therefore, they may only have learned the signed language for career purposes, rather than for personal communication. It was also found that a larger percentage of the survey participants with a higher level of education answered that they had learned a signed language than those with a lower level. This is not

entirely surprising, since individuals who have spent a longer time in further education are more likely to be interested in learning in general.

5.2 What factors affect their choice?

The second research question aimed to investigate the factors that may contribute to the choice made by late deafened individuals to learn a signed language or not. Below is a discussion of the factors which the study highlighted as possible answers to this question.

5.2.1 Degree of hearing loss and satisfaction with available communication methods

If late deafened people feel they are able to communicate well and are satisfied with the methods available to them to continue communicating in English, they will be less likely to learn a signed language. The results of the survey show that severity of hearing loss is important in this regard, as only one participant with mild to moderate hearing loss had learned a signed language. Individuals with less severe hearing loss have more residual hearing and are often able to communicate adequately with the use of hearing assistive technology. This is also in line with the results of the participants who use a CI or hearing aid, since these devices help to compensate for hearing loss. Although these results are limited, the survey showed that each participant in the survey who did not use a CI or hearing aid had learned a signed language. This conforms to expectations since late deafened people who do not have the use of a CI would be more likely to learn a signed language, as they would have very limited ability to understand spoken language, even if they were skilled in lipreading. On the other hand, a deafened individual who can benefit from a CI would have much less reason to learn a signed language as they would be able to continue using their native, spoken language to a much greater extent. Despite this, the participants who did not use a hearing assistive device also answered that they very often use speech for communication and are able to lipread.

Lipreading has already been stated to have a very low rate of understanding by those with no residual hearing (Samuelsson & Ronnberg, 1991:134). Therefore, in order to achieve a full level of understanding in conversation, late deafened people would need to adopt a visual means of communicating in addition, whether it is gestural or text based. Despite this, the survey showed that lipreading and speech were the most frequently used forms of communication for the participants. Possibly because almost all of the participants had use of a CI or hearing aid, thus being provided with a greater hearing ability. Indeed, many of the survey participants appeared to rely on hearing assistive technology to aid them in communication. When asked if they were satisfied with the communication options available to them several participants commented that improvement could come through a better use of the loop system. This is a system which can be set up in a location that allows sound to be directly transmitted to hearing aids and CIs without interference from background noise. There was also a desire for improvement of captioning and other technology. Signed language classes were thought to be

prohibitively expensive and several of the survey participants believed that signed languages should be taught to children at school. Therefore, the results show that the participants of the survey are not entirely satisfied with the resources available to them and it is likely that more late deafened people would learn a signed language if the classes were offered more widely and at a lower cost.

In the blog study, the bloggers with the most positive attitude towards signed languages gave a very negative view of communicating using methods such as lipreading. These bloggers were very unsatisfied with the communication methods available to them and viewed signed languages as a way to gain a deeper level of communication. The two bloggers who identified mostly as hard-of-hearing and did not use signed languages very frequently, if at all, were very satisfied with CART to help them understand what was being said. Therefore, this fits with the supposition that the more satisfied a late deafened person is with the communication options available, the less likely they will be to learn a signed language.

5.2.2 Attitude towards signed languages and the Deaf community

Although some late deafened people may choose not to learn signed languages because they are satisfied with their ability to hear and communicate in English, others may have more personal reasons for choosing to learn or not. Holding a negative attitude towards a language and its users can have a negative impact on both the desire to learn that language and the success at learning it (Gardner, 1985:50). If late deafened people do not want to be associated with the Deaf community they may reject their language. Whereas, if late deafened people wish to integrate with the Deaf community they will be more accepting of their language. It was my supposition that the more positive an attitude a late deafened person has towards signed languages, and the more they identify as deaf, the more likely they will be to learn a signed language.

The results of both the survey and the blog study were in line with this supposition as they indicated a positive relationship between learning a signed language and feeling part of a Deaf community. One of the participants commented on an open question on the survey that they would only consider signed languages to be useful if they changed their social life and integrated themselves with the Deaf community. This idea was encouraged by the blog posts since those who identified most strongly with the Deaf community gave the most positive views on signed languages. This follows the theory of integrative motivation for second language learning, explained in Chapter 2. This theory suggests that a wish to integrate with a cultural group is a strong motivating factor for wishing to learn a second language (Dörnyei, 2003:5). However, it could also be considered a factor which prevents people from choosing to learn a language if they do not wish to integrate with the culture, as is the case for some of the participants in this study who believed signed languages to be languages of the culturally Deaf and did not wish to become a part of that society. A reason given by some of the participants in the study for not choosing to learn a signed language is that they do not want to change their social circle to be part of a Deaf community. With this in mind it follows that those who do

not feel part of a Deaf community, and who have no wish to, would not choose to learn one, whereas those who do wish to integrate with a Deaf community would have more reason to. The participants who used a signed language most frequently are those who used it for career purposes as they worked as teachers or counsellors for deaf people. This shows an instrumental motivation for acquiring the language as they learned it for a practical purpose.

5.2.3 Family and friends

It is not always the case that people with a negative attitude towards a language will not learn it. One of the blogs analysed for the study gave an extremely negative view of signed languages but had still learned one because his partner was a BSL user. This shows that some people would be willing to learn the language for a friend or family member. Integration with the Deaf community is not necessary for using a signed language if there are people within one's own social circle with whom to communicate in that language. It is evident from the comments made on the survey that many late deafened people wished to maintain the social circles they had before losing their hearing. The blog posts, on the other hand, indicated that the bloggers were more than happy to associate with new groups of people in order to have a chance to communicate more easily, whether the Deaf community or a group specifically for late deafened people such as the *Association of Late Deafened Adults*. Several of the participants in the survey study stated that they would be very happy to learn a signed language if their friends and family learned alongside them. Others stated that they would have no interest in learning if none of their friends or family knew the language. This suggests that if someone went to classes with them, they would consider the language to be more beneficial, even if they could only use it to communicate with that one person.

5.3 Limitations and future studies

The main limitation of the survey is in the small number of participants which means the study cannot be representative of all late deafened people and made it impossible to perform statistical analysis on the data in order to find clear patterns. While extensive efforts were made to reach as many late deafened groups as possible it was difficult to elicit a large number of responses. There are several possible reasons for this which should be considered in future studies. One is the limited time the survey was left open for; a time restriction of four weeks appeared insufficient for collecting large quantities of data. Another reason for the small number of participants could be the means of distributing the survey, the method used made it impossible to know exactly how many late deafened people received a link to the survey. Although great effort was made into distributing the survey link to as many places as possible it was sent primarily to organisations rather than individuals and may not have been passed on. It is also the case that large groups of late deafened people are not common and deaf communities are fairly over-researched. Therefore, they are less likely to be amenable to answering surveys, especially without an incentive. There is also no personal contact in online surveys, participants may feel a

stronger sense of commitment to answering the survey if I had had personal contact with them.

The use of the term 'late deafened' included in the survey heading may have had an impact on the low number of responses. This term may not be widely known and people who are late deafened may not identify themselves as such but rather as deaf, hard-of-hearing or hearing-impaired. Despite effort being made to explain the criteria in the survey header, the use of the term 'late deafened' could have had a negative effect. In future studies more descriptive criteria should be used both in an effort to receive more responses and also to help to ensure that only those with severe or profound hearing loss are included.

On the basis of the data obtained and further consideration of the approach used certain improvements are apparent. The survey itself showed limitations in the lack of clarity of some of the questions. More effort could be made to separate signed languages from the communication methods by including separate questions to ask if the participants had ever learned a signed language, how well they knew it and why they had chosen to learn it. Changing the communication options provided in the survey to remove Makaton, which turns out not to be relevant for late deafened people, to add cued speech, and an option for 'other methods' would be beneficial. These changes should ensure that all communication options available to, and used by, late deafened people are covered. Careful consideration of wording is also important, since one participant was offended by the use of the term "the late deafened" which was used by mistake instead of "late deafened people".

Limitations of the blog study are that the content is highly subjective and the number used is small due to the low quantity of blog posts which fit the selection criteria. Although the small number of blogs cannot be representative of all late deafened people they did raise a number of experiences and opinions relevant to the topic of this thesis. It is also highly likely that individuals who choose to write about their experience on public blogs feel more strongly about being deafened than other late deafened people. In order to adjust for this in future studies, a group of late deafened people could be gathered to rate each blog post and decide if the content is in line with their own attitudes and opinions.

Despite the limitations, useful information was nonetheless collected which could be a good grounding for future studies to gain a clearer picture of how many late deafened people choose to learn a signed language and the reasons behind this. This is important to identify since, if a large percentage of people are shown to learn one and find it useful, it could indicate that signed languages are considered beneficial even by those who grew up hearing, are fluent in a spoken language and who had no prior knowledge of the language. This may indicate that it is not too difficult a language for parents of deaf children to learn and that a greater awareness of and access to signed languages could be of benefit to those who become deafened and even those with less severe hearing loss.

Since my research only focused on native English speakers it would be interesting to discover how commonly late deafened people learn a signed language in countries which are not predominantly monolingual or English speaking since they may be more open to the idea of learning new languages in general. The English language can be said to hold some sort of linguistic imperialism and is recognised as the international language of science and business. Therefore,

there is not a strong emphasis on second language acquisition in predominantly English speaking countries such as the USA or the UK (Cook, 2013:200).

5.4 A late deafened identity

Howe (1994:26) explained that the late deafened are unique amongst deaf people as their hearing loss carries no cultural identity. It was mentioned several times in both the survey and the blog posts that late deafened people are neither hearing enough to fit in with the hard-of-hearing nor deaf enough to fit in with the Deaf, so they must either choose one of these identities or become lost somewhere between the hearing and Deaf worlds. Mine is not the only research which has found late deafened people to feel lost between worlds. Barlow et al. (2007) conducted an interview study of late deafened people in which they found that the onset of deafness had left them in a "twilight zone" between the hearing and deaf worlds. This lack of identity could have an impact on the linguistic choices late deafened people make after losing their hearing because they may identify either as hard-of-hearing or Deaf. The blog analysis showed a correlation between identifying as Deaf and having a positive attitude towards signed languages and that those who wish to reject the idea of a hearing loss identity will also have a negative attitude towards signed languages.

Associations specifically for late deafened people have been formed in order to provide a community of people with a shared background and to help discover coping strategies and new ways to communicate. My research has shown that many late deafened people would be resistant to joining these groups, since they wish to retain their social circle and not feel that they need to make new friends because of their hearing loss. However, it has been found that people who join these groups feel instantly comfortable since there is a common understanding of shared experiences and there is a willingness to use any means necessary to communicate (Howe, 1994:29).

5.5 A close comparison

Although late deafened people have a very different experience than people who were born deaf, there is a group that could be said to face the same difficulties. The struggles faced by late deafened people in terms of communication after hearing loss are much the same as those faced by hearing parents of deaf children. A parent grieves when they discover their child is deaf in much the same way that late deafened people grieve the loss of their hearing. Both must accept the hearing loss and find a solution to the communication barrier (Christiansen & Leigh, 2002:73-75). Hearing parents of deaf children are attracted to the idea of cochlear implants because these offer them a chance to continue life as normal. They wish to raise their child in the way they know, with the ability to hear and speak and without abandoning the familiar. In a study performed by Christiansen and Leigh (2002) it was found that the most common course of action for parents of deaf children to take was to have them fitted with hearing aids, but many also did choose to learn a signed language to communicate with their children. Therefore,

the solution for them is much the same as it is for late deafened people.

5.6 To sign or not to sign

My research has shown that for those individuals who are unwilling to change their social circle after losing their hearing the desired solution is a communication method that will enable them to converse with their family and friends in a way that is as deep and meaningful as speech is for hearing people. This leads to many of them maintaining speech as their primary means of communicating, a fact which may have been the reasoning behind the assumption that late deafened people will not learn signed languages, as claimed by Cowie and Douglas-Cowie (1992:2). However, it is clear that continuing with speech is not sufficient for many late deafened people, many of whom require other means to assist them such as CIs, lipreading, cued speech and text-based forms of communication. This study showed that participants were even willing to learn a new language in order to find a solution to the communication barrier caused by their hearing loss.

Some late deafened people may be unable to achieve fluency in signed languages and thus feel that there is no use in learning them but, as one of the bloggers in the present study wrote, complete fluency in a signed language is not required to begin to experience the benefits. The important matter is that there is some level of understanding and connection between people (Woodcock & Aguayo, 2000). A late deafened individual who learns a small amount of a signed language may not be able to converse fully with a Deaf person but they could use it to ease communication with those who also have some knowledge of the same language.

A project is currently being undertaken in the UK by the deaf charity Signature which is aiming to make BSL into a language option at British secondary schools (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2013). If this comes about it could be an important breakthrough in terms of how many people in the UK have access to and an awareness of signed languages. This could have a huge impact on the number of late deafened people who choose to learn them since there will be a greater public interest in signed languages which would raise awareness and have a positive effect on attitudes towards them. There will also be more people learning which may increase the availability of classes and cause them to become less expensive, consequently eliminating one of the reasons preventing late deafened people from learning them.

6 Conclusion

To sign or not to sign. That is the question for which this thesis aimed to find an answer. Should a late deafened person suffer their fate in silence by withdrawing from society and continuing to communicate at a lower level of capability with the use of technology and techniques such as lipreading, or can they end their troubles by learning a signed language which offers them the chance to communicate fully despite hearing loss, provided they are willing to change their social circle or persuade their friends to learn with them? The answer is not a straightforward one and is deeply rooted in history, cultural identity and social stigma. The results of the online survey did show that over half of the late deafened participants had indeed learned a signed language, although many of these admitted that they only knew a little bit and did not use it frequently for communication. Many of those who did not choose to learn a signed language believed it to be a language of the Deaf community, with whom they did not feel they belonged. Language is very strongly associated with culture and this connection between signed languages and Deaf culture appears to be a compelling reason why late deafened people choose not to learn a signed language. Ideally, since most late deafened people have a preference for oral communication, progress in hearing technology would offer the best long term prospect for them. However, in the meantime signed languages clearly are of some benefit to late deafened people. If signed languages were taught to hearing children in mainstream schools and classes made cheaper and more available to adults with hearing loss there would be more users of signed languages. This would mean more people would know signed languages and there would be more resources available for others to learn. This work indicates that developments such as these could facilitate a change in the culture surrounding signed languages, providing room for more integrativeness, and hence greater motivation for signed language acquisition by late deafened people.

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Appendix 1

Complete survey questions

Q1 At what age did you lose your hearing?
13-18
19-25
26-30
31-40
41-50
51-60
60+

Q2 What is the level of your hearing loss?
Mild. Soft noises cannot be heard and understanding speech is difficult in a loud environment
Moderate. Soft and moderately loud noises cannot be heard and understanding speech is difficult when there is background noise
Severe. Only loud speech can be heard and group conversations are very difficult
Profound. Some very loud noises can be heard but it is impossible to hear speech

Q3 Was the onset of your hearing loss sudden or did it decrease gradually over time?
Very sudden, immediate hearing loss
Somewhat sudden, declining rapidly over a few weeks or months
Slightly gradual, declining over a year or two
Somewhat gradual, declining over a few years
Extremely gradual, declining over many years

Q4 Do you use a hearing aid or cochlear implant?
Yes
No

Q5 Please indicate which of the following methods of communication you are able to use?(Please select all that apply)
Lip reading
Sign Language (BSL/ASL)
Signed English
Makaton
Fingerspelling

Q6 Please indicate how frequently you use the following communication methods.
Spoken Language
Sign Language
Signed English
Makaton

Fingerspelling
Text (e-mail, SMS, instant messaging etc.)

Q7 Were you given the opportunity to learn sign language when you lost your hearing?
Yes
No

Q8 How useful is Sign Language to you?
Very useful
A little useful
Not very useful
Not useful at all
I do not use Sign Language

Q9 If you do not already use Sign Language would you be interested to learn it? Please explain your reasons

Q10 Do you have friends or family who are able to use Sign Language? Please select all the options which apply to you
I have friends or family who used Sign Language before I lost my hearing
Some of my friends or family learned Sign Language after I lost my hearing
I made friends with people who use Sign Language after I lost my hearing
I have no friends or family who use Sign Language

Q11 Do you think that the view of the general public towards users of Sign Language is negative or positive?
Very negative
A little negative
Neutral
A little positive
Very positive

Q12 If you have any further comments regarding Sign Language please write them in the box below

Q13 Are you satisfied with the methods of communication available for you? What changes would you like to see which would make communication easier for the deafened?

Q14 Do you consider yourself to be part of a Deaf community?
Definitely not
Not really
Maybe
A little
Definitely yes

Q15 What was the biggest change you made in regards to communication after your hearing loss?

Q16 This is the final part of the survey which just contains a few demographic questions to put your answers into context.

Q17 How old are you?

Q18 What is your gender?
Male
Female

Q19 In which country did you grow up?

Q20 Please indicate your highest level of education
Lower Secondary
Upper Secondary - High School
Bachelor Degree or equivalent
Master Degree or equivalent
Doctorate

Appendix 2

Demographic details for individual participants

Person	Age	Gender	Education	Country	Age at onset	Degree of loss
1	61	Female	Master	UK		Profound
2	43	Male	Bachelor	UK	31-40	Severe
3	30	Female	Doctorate	US	19-25	Severe
4	40	Female	Bachelor	US		Profound
5	37	Female	Bachelor	US	31-40	Severe
6	34	Female	Bachelor	US		Severe
7	31	Female	Bachelor	UK	19-25	Severe
8	36	Female	Doctorate	Sweden	26-30	Moderate
9	49	Female	Bachelor	UK		Moderate
10	60	Female	Upper secondary	US	13-18	Profound
11	65	Female	Bachelor	US	13-18	Profound
12	60	Female	Master	US	19-25	Profound
13	60	Male	Bachelor	UK	31-40	Profound
14	46	Female	Master	UK		Severe
15	51	Female	Upper secondary	UK	41-50	Moderate
16	42	Female	Master	UK		Profound
17	53	Female	Bachelor	UK	19-25	Profound
18	55	Female	Upper secondary	UK	31-40	Moderate
19	56	Female	Bachelor	UK	26-30	Moderate
20	47	Male	Upper secondary	UK	41-50	Moderate
21	55	Female	Bachelor	UK	31-40	Moderate
22	46	Female	Doctorate	UK	31-40	Profound
23	30	Female	Bachelor	UK	26-30	Mild
24	65	Female	Bachelor	UK	13-18	Profound
25	57	Female	Bachelor	UK	31-40	Profound

Appendix 3

Answers to open questions

If you do not already use Sign Language would you be interested to learn it? Please explain your reasons

Person 1. *I have level one BSL, but don't practise it and have forgotten most of it. I wasn't "given the opportunity" to learn it, I paid for it at great expense myself.*

Person 3. *I use sign language because my family has a progressive, genetic loss. There was sign in my life before my hearing loss. I sign fluently because I'm a teacher of the deaf.*

Person 5. *I would be interested in learning but living in a rural area it is very hard to find a class that is near me.*

Person 7. *In case of further hearing loss. Also to work with deaf children (teacher).*

Person 8. *If my hearing deteriorated further I would definitely explore sign language.*

Person 9. *I use it as I work with some deaf people*

Person 10. *I don't know anyone who knows sign language.*

Person 11. *No - I hear quite well with my cochlear implants, so there's no need to sign. And very few people that I know use sign language anyway, so it would be pretty useless.*

Person 12. *I really don't have anyone I could converse with in sign language. I know one person who signs but I see her very rarely.*

Person 13. *Learned BSL to stage 2. Very rarely use it,don't meet any people how use BSL*

Person 14. *I learned sign language due to my job rather than my own circumstances. It is useful when communicating with other deaf people, but otherwise limited.*

Person 15. *Yes, but unfortunately my family & friends don't know how to use it!*

Person 17. *Yes. I have learned BSL Stage I and would like to learn more. I am a counsellor and would like to be able to counsel people who use BSL.*

Person 18. *I would like to learn sign language because if my hearing continues to worsen it may prove useful but only if my family and friends also learn it too!*

Person 19. *Yes if my family were able to be taught alongside me otherwise I would only be able to talk to other deaf people that I do not know.*

Person 20. *have learned a little bit of Makaton by working in special schools but find out side of these settings not many people use or understand it*

Person 21. *No. I have no interest in learning sign language as my communication needs centre around existing friends and family who can only communicate with speech. I feel that sign language would only be useful if I was prepared to move my social life to be more included in the "deaf community"*

Person 24. *NO as it holds no interest. I am a hearing person whose ears don't work!*

If you have any further comments regarding Sign Language please write them in the box below

Person 1. *I do now have some signing friends but they are people who also learned it as adult deafened people rather than native BSL users, so we tend to still use voice and Lipreading*

Person 3. *I think the public believes that deaf=must sign. It's wrong. "I'm going deaf, I have to sign now." Untrue. Most of your family is never going to learn. Technology is a necessity if you plan to continue to communicate with your existing support group.*

Person 10. *I think it should be taught to all students starting with preschool. They should include it in their curriculum with spelling, English grammar, etc.*

Person 11. *The general public I've met think that sign language is "oh so beautiful" - and tend to think that all people with hearing loss know and use sign language, when the reality is that the vast majority of people with hearing loss don't use sign language. They use residual hearing, hearing aids, cochlear implants, and use assistive listening devices and captioning.*

Person 17. *I believe if people see others signing they connect somehow with the idea of learning difficulties not hearing loss. They then frequently over enunciate, shout or use 'made up on the spot' signing!*

Person 18. *It costs a lot of money to learn sign language which is a barrier*

Person 19. *Too expensive generally, time consuming and complex to learn BSL through all the stages*

Are you satisfied with the methods of communication available for you? What changes would you like to see which would make communication easier for the deafened?

Person 1. *Only now that I have a cochlear implant. Before then it was really hard, I was becoming isolated and struggling at work. Still have problems on the phone. - can make simple calls but not confident enough to answer the phone unless I know who is ringing.*

Person 3. *Yes. I wish that more people knew about cued speech. NOTHING was mentioned about that in this survey and it's my most frequently used communication mode because it took my family only 8 hours to learn.*

Person 5. *more social awareness*

Person 6. *No. An app that would work effectively to caption casual conversations. Teach sign language as an option in schools.*

Person 7. *More use of the loop system in public places.*

Person 8. *Better use of technology (microphones, subtitles, hearing loops...).*

Person 10. *I would like to see more closed captioning on public TV's and at the movie theaters. Currently cc is only available at a select number of theaters and even then only certain movies.*

Person 11. *Open captioning as universal access should be routinely provided at all public events. All too often sign language interpreters are provided with the erroneous perception that all people with hearing loss use sign language when the vast majority do not. All public places should also be looped, so those with cochlear implants and hearing aids could simply switch on the t-coil feature of these devices.*

Person 12. *I would like to see more public places have loops installed. There are also no accommodations for deaf people where I work and to that end, it would be nice to have loops installed and also caption phone.*

Person 13. *More people deaf aware, especially people who are in customer facing jobs, were they may meet deaf people.*

Person 14. *Better use of technology for telecommunications and subtitles.*

Person 15. *Better hearing aids*

Person 16. *BSL interpreter Everyone should learn BSL from baby*

Person 17. *Improved standards of subtitling on TV and every programme should have subtitles on offer.*

Person 18. *Not sure*

Person 19. *To make the public more aware national media advertising etc.*

Person 20. *fairly satisfied find the loop doesn't work very often*

Person 21. *Apart from cochlea implants which are not suitable for everyone I think there should be more help available to rehabilitate people who have lost their hearing so that they do not feel so excluded.*

Person 24. *I won't answer this because we are deafened PEOPLE! We are not a homogenous group and I dislike being categorised by my deafness*

What was the biggest change you made in regards to communication after your hearing loss?

Person 1. *Learning to Lipreading. Not going out in groups of friends. Not enjoying music.*

Person 3. *I'm not deaf enough and I'm not hearing enough. I fit neither place.*

Person 4. *Self acceptance*

Person 5. *My family needed to know what my needs are- some family members still don't understand*

Person 6. *Getting hearing aids. Relying heavily on texting and email rather than phone calls. Educating family on how to talk to me. Choosing the best places to sit in a room for my best hearing*

Person 7. *Making people more aware of how to communicate with me more effectively.*

Person 8. *Deaf with capital D is for me a cultural identity, mostly available to those who grow up in a context of other Deaf (including CODAs). Even if I'd go deaf one day (my hearing is currently mild to profound, ski-slopping) it would be highly unlikely that I would become so immersed in Deaf culture that I would consider my self Deaf.*

Person 10. *Bilateral cochlear implants.*

Person 11. *When my hearing reached the profound level, I got a cochlear implant, and then several years later, opted for a second one, giving me bilateral hearing. I've had to advocate for captioning in the theater and other public places, and also use communication strategies in more challenging listening environments. My current CIs have an incredible noise setting that allows me to function very well in very noisy situations. So becoming knowledgable about current technology was essential - plus coping strategies as well.*

Person 12. *Got a hearing aid and then a cochlear implant to help me hear.*

Person 13. *Not to join on conversation, to be left out of conversation completely.*

Person 14. *Learning the conditions I need to be able to lip read effectively, I.e. Lighting, distracting movements, seat positioning. Recognising you need quieter environments to use hearing aids is fairly easy, recognising what makes it easier to lip read is less obvious.*

Person 15. *wearing hearing aids*

Person 16. *None*

Person 17. *I had to change my job. Fortunately the company I worked for moved me sideways but it required lots of adjustment from me physically and emotionally. I would now describe myself as more insular than I was pre hearing loss.*

Person 18. *Hearing aids and learning to lip read (ongoing)*

Person 19. *Getting hearing aids and to make sure I am facing the person I am speaking to.*

Person 20. *got hearing aids*

Person 21. *I went to lipreading lessons which was not a cure all but it did help me to regain some of the confidence I had lost.*

Person 22. *Learning BSL/signed English.*

Person 24. *Becoming an expert lip reader*

Appendix 4

Text of the blog posts

Late Deafened: Incompatible with culture? - At the Rim.

Written October 2014. Retrieved from http://attherimmm.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/late-deafened-incompatible-with-culture.html

A post I just came across, and thought, this deserves an honest answer.

I'm interested in finding out how many late deafened people learn sign language and the reasons behind their choice. There seems to be a common belief that adults who lose their hearing will not learn sign language either because they don't know anyone else who uses it or because it would be too difficult to learn a new language. Is this true? I would love to hear people's comments. I am researching late deafness for my Masters and am trying to learn as much as I possibly can so if anyone who is late deafened and between 18 and 65 would like to further help me with my research I would be really grateful if you take my short survey.

I learnt it for one reason, my partner is a dedicated user, but basically when out and about on my own, no, never use it, there is no-one with miles who knows sign language so I'd be signing to myself. I am profoundly deaf in both ears, totally, ENT dept said my 'Deaf' partner had more use of her ears than I do !

I suspect 9 out of 10 with late deafness will have little interest in sign use either, and treat it with some sceptisism, even prejudice. It's a subject of some debate, some look on it as a novelty or may hope it is some 'assist' if we struggle, I never found that to be true. But for my voice I'd be 10 times worse off than my signing partner.

There are very sobering facts people ignore when promoting sign use,

(1) Where are you going to use it ? (We don't grow up with, or know the deaf world).

(2) Are you prepared to abandon your old/present social approaches ? (A big issue, we say we will try, but often fail and abandon the idea after.)

(3) Would you readily accept you cannot use it without an Interpreter, can you accept that dependency ? (Many can't, loss of independence despite the isolation it brings, still seems a preferable option to many, or simply the means and support isn't there.)

People tend to confuse 'deaf language' with effective communication, when you talk about sign. It is relative to your social circles and upbringing. Late deafened have no interest par se in a deaf culture, our interests are with effective communications, alleviations, better hearing aids, medical interventions, CI's etc. We are the medical models of deafness in practice. Sooner or later we will clash with those who see deafness as no problem, or issues created by others. We also are unable to understand how many can see a major sensory loss, as no issue at all or even a positive.

I think the whole approach of 'Introducing' us to a deaf world is so pointless and amateur, mostly it has no hope of working, and can well stress people more than they are already. Unless you can think through properly those 3 vital questions put to you, issues remain a real problem to overcome, there is no effective or thought-through system to inform, or ease people into some sort of ease after going deaf,systems appear blinded to cultural approaches, unaware or uninterested in how we see those things, if its horses for courses, we are handicapped unduly at the race start.

Personally, I'm fed up with wild claims about the signing/cultural area and promises they cannot keep to us, who incidentally they still view as hearing not deaf and an hindrance to their social modelling approaches.

Their lifestyles are dependency from cradle to grave as we can see it, if they are solely sign using, it doesn't bother them, they accept it from day one and do not even see it AS a form of co-dependency, but simply an empowerment of what they use. Of course, and as they encounter with hearing interactions later, it is not as mainstream seems it, and late deafened despite their issue, still see themselves as that. Hearing, but without the means to.

For those of us not growing up that way, and maybe wanting 'real' independence, then, 'support' can be a challenge and an issue we find unacceptable, even if such professional approaches existed, age has a bearing on this, but mostly all revolved around the specific age we go deaf. Most of us just do not know what happens after we go deaf, until it happens. Not an issue if you never had useful hearing obviously, then, hearing could be a problem for those.

There is no way to approach the issue unless we accept there are two very very different types of deaf people who in the end may be unable to accept the 'Deaf' way ever, sadly for those late deafened, this means considerable Isolation, we should be asking why we find deafness so horrifying an issue, even those of us who go deaf later, still want separation from those born with it. of course sign labels.... so to reject the label is to reject the means.

Late Deafened: Incompatible with culture? (II)

More late deaf views on BSL/lip-reading:

(1) As we get older we are less likely to change really. If you have spent most of your life in a hearing-speaking environment, then no point in learning sign language.

By and large the tuition is pants and directed at people who want to work in the field of interpreting or care, hearing families etc, although why on earth they are charged a fee to learn is criminal. But BSL classes aren't for us anyway, lip-reading is mooted as our preference although again the classes are poor badly run,short-term,and with no attainment to achieve and also require useful hearing to make the most of. No matter how many times I say this people won't listen and it isn't because of hearing loss (!) we need an alternative to and/or systems of loss communication.

I don't think the current system does anything for late deafened at all. Frankly I am fed up my sector is used as a promo area for a system we will never adopt and aren't part of. The whole communication class systems the UK has is no use to us. WHY are systems trying to push us to communication areas we don't want, by failing to provide us with a system we do? The arrogances of the BSL approaches, and the amateur approaches of the lip-reading system are a disgrace. Who is it for ? not us for sure.

(2) The point about learning BSL, whether one is late deafened or not is that there must be enough signing people around to make it worthwhile. It is absolutely no use at all someone learning another language if nobody else can speak it.

In the case of close family and friends it would probably be worth learning some basic signs just for convenience

but bearing in mind that BSL is a whole language of its own it needs an equivalent length of time to learn as any other language. Namely about 2-3 years. What are people to do in the meantime?

It's a different matter in the case of deaf people whose hearing has got worse. They are already familiar with deaf cultural ways. Technically they are "deafened" by the fact of suffering further hearing loss. If they have already found a place in their signing community, they will hardly notice the difference.

On the other hand if they have hearing family, as I have, an increasing hearing loss means increasing hassle for everyone. Adding sign language lessons to all that is not going to help. The solution here is lipreading, hearing aids, a CI or other hearing related means, not signing.

(3) Yes I agree with both of you, just thought i would reply as the Op seemed to want answers about why people choose not to learn BSL About a year ago I joined a LR class held locally so easy to get to, I did enjoy it, learnt a little and think its still going strong but I didn't join for another session mainly because of the small room, fluorescent lighting and general noise at times. Also MMs bugbear ? i have to pay, I think it was about £30 for 12 weeks , not too expensive but ! I get on fine mostly with my lip reading and subtitles but still walk off sometimes !

(1) But BSL classes aren't for us anyway, lip-reading is mooted as our preference although again the classes are poor badly run,short-term,and with no attainment to achieve and also require useful hearing to make the most of. No matter how many times I say this people won't listen and it isn't because of hearing loss (!) we need an alternative to and/or systems of loss communication. I don't think the current system does anything for late deafened at all.

(4) I'm interested to know what your alternative/preferred method of communication would be? Would you consider BSL if the classes were more available and the language more widely used or do you just want something totally different?

(1) No, I wouldn't entertain BSL or lip-reading in their current modes for late deafened people. we need a proper more structured approach aimed at our need. As regards to BSL it is a bit like teaching someone french when they have no intention of going to france or meeting french people. As was stated we don't have the ACCESS to people who live via that medium, either on the street or in many respects anywhere else except online, there, we use text. even finger spelling is of little practicable use if the person you are communicating with doesn't know it.

Lip-reading there are so many myths re this area I think in our case a whole new approach is needed. The situation is really quite simple, I step outside the door knowing there isn't ANYONE who signs I will meet about my day, also, that those people I do meet, will not adopt the ideal circumstances to enable me to lip-read them, and as I get older so does my ability to lip-read get worse not better. We just tend to withdraw really from it all. Communications is one-way mostly, I talk they listen my speech is designed for the most minimal of answers because I an aware if the engage in lengthy discourse I won't be able to follow.

Many of my peers simply don't bother to engage as a result. As you can read the current communication class hype is a bit of a meaningless joke at our expense re communication support. I did moot a psychological assessment first, as trauma is an obvious barrier,another area was an accurate assessment of what communication you have left that is viable, then an intensive approach of at least a year to be reviewed as per effectiveness. The incomprehensible advice so far given of joining a deaf or HI club or using interpreters is really stupid an approach, sadly people desperate can buy into this and spend years getting nothing much back really from it. Then abandon interaction to near zero. I don't think AOHL is on top of this either. How can people with minimal level of following the spoken word find any level being left with others of the same ilk after their lifetime of hearing ? The situation seems to suggest we adopt an approach used by people, who never had hearing of use, crazy !

(3) I understand what you are saying, I know that lipreading is problematic even to those extremely skilled in

it as there is only so much information you can receive this way and you have to have perfect conditions to be able to use it. I know too that BSL is a completely new language and not many people use it but you shouldn't have to give up on socializing and abandon interaction when you lose your hearing.

Some form of communication is necessary and when you can't rely on sound then it needs to be visual. Communication is something which should be accessible to everybody, the problem comes when you lose full access to the method of communication you were used to. If you can no longer interact in the same way then something will need to change so that you can continue to communicate. You're right that BSL is not ideal but it is an option which some people do choose and what is the alternative other than lipreading or just having everything in writing, neither of which is ideal either.

(1) Here we differ, BSL ISN'T a 'language' to US, but simply,a visual COMMUNICATION 'tool'. one amid a number we might use to varying degrees of success. OUR language base is via spoken/written English, so is our taught grammar, you are making the error of saying we are deaf so the situation is the same as someone born with it, thus endorsing the same approaches will work with us. Of course we shouldn't give up socialsing, indeed our primary aim is exactly the same as anyone else, we are social animals.

BUT, socialising needs a common communication approach,and once that breaks down all sorts of things happen. We won't disagree on the social thing. As regards to writing things, many of us STILL rely on this, and indeed utlise as I do online to forward my access that way, NOT sign language, so you see we will all take the path that is most applicable to us. I'd be the first to say get deaf people offline and off social medias and engage with real people in real time, but the online experience gives us a choice, indeed support those f us who use it, when we cannot access about daily lives direct with people, so, online has undermined the real social aspect hasn't it ? The real difficulties of BSL use in many social areas is a negative. You are telling me to accept an alternative, when an cross-over system doesn't really exist to enable me.

I'm willing to bet the technology undermines the visual aspect too to a large degree, how many BSL people use text daily ? mobiles/online ? near ALL of them, so they are socialsing with text anyway not visuals to a total degree. Mobile phones it could be said killed many BSL needs to attend a deaf club at all. BSL is not an option unless you have the access to fellow USERS, and late-deafened often prefer speech to text support, again, NOT visual support, you aren't convincing late-deafened BSL is viable to them. Lip-reading still too much hit and miss to be reliable also.

I still maintain your current appraisal of comm systems is outdated and not even applicable to our area as it doesn't take into account the realities,and, personal choices. You have only to look at current class options to accept the situation as it is, and why, Late-deafened do not show demand, they have found albeit non-social, other means to maintain communications elsewhere.

(Topic poster) I'm not trying to force BSL on anyone, I just wanted to know how common it is for late deafened people to learn it and their reasons. You have given me a lot of reasons and it has been very informative for me. I do know that some late deafened people do learn sign language but I guess it is a matter of personal preference. I am not saying that late deafened are the same as those born deaf, I am just discussing communication options which are available. Would you consider text to be your main alternative to spoken communication? I'm just trying to learn.

(1) Sorry if the response came out like that., obviously I understand anyone wanting to create a paper/thesis whatever on our issues home in automatically on the sign thing. I believe it is simply non-awareness. It's not preference, it's not even choice in many respects, many people as you read 'prefer' sign language, however if you take the trouble to investigate their actual communication use and effective means, sign is just ONE of those means they use, maybe for some the most effective, but all is relative, by decibel, by background, by ability. Preferences do not equal need, that's politics. I may prefer to hear, it won't happen. As a late deafened person I do not believe we can be categorised with the 'HI' or with the cultural deaf. It is others trying to do that. No communication can be effective without free access to the areas where it is used and understood, I would have that a basic truism. As I related I can use sign 24hrs a day,but only in a very restrictive social area I don't

have real access to, so that reflects on the real viability of its use in my case. I don't want restrictions. It tends to look like you ARE 'selling' sign how it reads, maybe try not to do that, because of the real differences that exist, it is impossible to generalise. communication options are 'horses for courses' the horses in this case are all... HEARING or as good as.

Late deafened have no real avenue of expression, we tend to sit in the middle and bat back the various balls the pro-culture, pro hearing aid areas throw at us. As we tend to be a real minority area who cares what we think basically.

A Woman with a Hearing Loss: The Inner Struggle - Say What Club

Written March 2011. Retrieved from http://ahearingloss.com/2011/03/02/a-woman-with-a-hearing-loss-the-inner-struggle/

I've been doing alot of thinking lately about me, who I am, what I want for myself and what my future holds. Without a second thought, what seems to pop up in my mind is my hearing loss. My hearing loss is the first thing I think about when asked "who are you?" My hearing loss shapes almost everything I do in life these days.

Although I grew up in a hearing world, lost my hearing at the age of 19, resisted wearing hearing aids until I was 42, focused working the majority of my professional career in the field of deafness, Deaf, and hearing loss all chosen without really much thought, unconsciously because of my own loss. I learned to sign because it was the only "thing" available to help me communicate with other "deaf/Deaf" people and make an attempt at finding another social life outside my hearing world. A Sign Language Interpreter was also the accomodation I asked for when I needed to know what was being discussed in large staff meetings at work.

My problem was, I just did not fit in with the deaf/Deaf community. I wasn't comfortable. It wasn't my world. I was trying hard to be a deaf person, not a hard of hearing woman when in truth, I was and am a woman with a hearing loss who lives in a hearing world. I was very comfortable in the hearing world and I'm very proud of the fact that I became extremely skilled at reading people. ASL taught me to be very aware of body language, facial expressions, the movements of the mouth and of course, the eyes tell me a great deal about a person as well as what they are saying to me about the individual.

It wasn't until closed captioning and CART came along that I finally stopped to really think about who I am? Most recently, CART and closed captioning has given me a great deal of hope and brought me closer to accepting that I have truly found my comfort zone. I became more involved with SWC (SayWhatClub) and met many people like myself over the years. Then, I recently became involved with CCAC and realized that between these two major groups, hearing impaired individuals really do have a culture of their own.

According to Websters dictionary, the definition of culture is: " the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also : the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life} shared by people in a place or time <popular culture> <southern culture> the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization"

Hearing impaired and late deafened people share so much common ground that we can almost predict what the individuals' experience has been whether it's buying a hearing aid, going out to a restaurant with friends, or feeling isolated and lonely because hearing people don't understand hearing loss.

CART and captioning and the English language are my form of communication (receptively and expressively). My comfort level is with hearing and non hearing people whether Deaf/deaf or hard of hearing. However, I do not belong to the Deaf community and once I accepted that and stopped fighting to be in the community and denying my being a woman with a hearing loss who needs CART or closed captioning for meetings and entertainment purposes, I felt my world opened up. Of course we also need hearing people to understand hearing loss better in order to communicate with us.

The Deaf community is a wonderful place but its not my home. I was not born into it. ASL was not my first language but I am happy to have the skills to explore the culture and ethnicity of the Deaf community. My friends once told me, if I ever lost all my hearing, they would learn sign language for me. I felt so lucky when they told me this. However, I now realize that my friends will do whatever it takes to keep us together and

communicate and I've decided, if I should lose additional hearing, we will do our best with whatever it takes to communicate. Afterall, I am who I am, a woman with hearing loss.

Deafened and Deaf - Zen and the Deafened Adult

Written April 2013. Retrieved from http://deafzen.blogspot.nl/2013/04/deafened-and-deaf.html

Hello out there!
Some time has passed since the Blog name changed. At first, I feared that looking at "Deafened", would in some way, threaten my journey into the Deaf identity.
The Deaf identity was proving difficult. It is my impatience that accounts for it, but despite that, it caused me to turn over a few stones that I was unaware of. I guess I was shying away from information for he Deafened because I had relegated it to the hard of hearing category based on one narrow series of experiences.
Many of the Deafened individuals I met were in the same boat! Here's the kicker... I discovered that many of the "Deaf" I met were really Deafened people with a lot of time accrued as having embraced their Deafness.
That's right! YOU Deafened folks out there! Feeling too Deaf to be hard of hearing? But Deafened late in life, and so not feeling "Deaf enough"? Don't be surprised! There is just not a whole lot of talk about this from the Deafened perspective - but that is changing! And why shouldn't it? We are a vast crowd in the Deaf Community! The best advice I've gotten so far, is to not be afraid to identify as Deaf. It's not by accident that many surveys, applications & questionares do not list Deafened. You're DEAF! Get used to it!
OK, now let's not get careless here, though. I like to think of "Deafened", as a subculture of Deaf when it's needed or appropriate. Sometimes it's needed information! More than once, I've introduced myself as Deaf, only to get lost right away, as the person starts signing way above my current skill level. It was a real dilemma! I had bonafide Deaf friends and colleagues encouraging me to identify as Deaf, and it felt "right"; but then I would seem to commit this faux pas, (among others) and the Deaf person, while largely polite and patient, was also aware that I was not born Deaf.
I got hold of a book: Deafened People: Adjustment and Support by Kathryn Woodcock & Miguel Aguayo. Well written! Lots of the data I was slowly gathering was right there! And many of the conclusions I was entertaining, were addressed as well. I recommend it for those of you out there who either are torn between hard of hearing and Deaf, or Deafened and Deaf. Actually it's a plethora of information for anyone.
Anyway, a short story will tie this up nicely. A long time Deaf colleague and friend was introducing me one time to others in a signing group. This group had a big mix of hearing, deaf and hard of hearing. I caught him describing me to a Deaf person as hard of hearing. Boy did floor me! I have no hearing! He know that! How can I be hard of something I do not have!? I told him this later, but we did not get to discuss much at length, even though we intended too. You know how that can happen... Time passed, and it kind ate at me. I kept meaning to discuss this, and I know I would have to, or it would come between us.
I knew that, from a Deaf perspective, the hard of hearing are sometimes viewed simply as "hearing". They use their ears to some extent, so this is understandable. (This was a clue that I missed.) It was tough during my hard of hearing days, because I did not feel hearing. In the years just before Deafness, what hearing I had was of limited use. I felt more deaf than hearing. (Wish I'd known about little-d deaf earlier. It would have made a great little oasis to rest in!). I told a confidant about my hard of hearing label from a Deaf colleague, and he said that it's common for the deafened to be called that. All he said was that the Deaf see the difference from a different angle. Okay - thanks... I think.
As time passed, I wondered... why? Setting aside the threat, the feeling of rejection.... why is this description of hard of hearing used for the Deafened? Someone, in an online Deaf Culture discussion group said that a person who does not understand Sign Language is "deaf" to sign. This was not said as a "quip", but the discussion was viewing things from the context of Deaf thought. In a signing environment, the Deaf folks are the ones "hearing", and the hearing folks are the deaf ones... (Clue #2 missed!)
I was walking home in the twilight when this unresolved idea of being hard of hearing to the Deaf, suddenly made sense! "No!" I thought, it can't be! If a hearing person is deaf to sign, could a semi-skilled signer be considered

hard of hearing from a Deaf perspective? Wow... that was a mind blower. But now it made more sense.

But was I just rationalizing? Is this true? When I broached the idea with a couple of Deaf friends; is was a sort of "of course - what did you think we were talking about", with laughter following... So now if I'm asked if I'm Deaf - I indicate YES. If they need to know, I sign that I am also Deafened. It's easer if you can accept them both.

So there it is... I'm Deaf, by way of being Deafened, and "hard of hearing" (hard of signing) in the Deaf Community. It ok to choose your identity and get comfortable with it. Listen and know that others from both sides of your experience may not fully understand. It's not a stretch to see that the hearing world, at large, does not have much more than an introductory understanding of Deaf Culture. It's a real shock, however, to see that some of those in Deaf Culture may not understand the Deafened perspective as well you do. It's your experience. They may have been born Deaf - how could they know?

But I do have a secret to offer you Deafened folks what are also struggling with this. Communication! Not just this written word, either. I mean face to face warm communication. I cannot see any other way that gets deeper than sign language. By now, many of you know the scoop about lipreading working 30% or less. Remember when as a hearing person, you sat around the table and chatted? Small talk? Maybe the content was not important, but I bet you remember the bonding. If was fun. Connected! You don't get much of that lipreading. You don't get the quip or the joke that everyone is sharing in the group. Let's face it - we are all concentrating on the notes, the texts, the interpretation, to get the message across. Seldom such effort and energy is used for light and joyful casual bonding conversation. But the Deaf do it just as well, if not better, with sign, than we did, with voice, as hearing folks.

The good news is; you can have that back. Signing is the best way that I can think of. Even those that I am coaching in sign, who could not pass a first level exam to save their lives, have learned enough with me to enjoy the occasional private joke, and lighter signing conversation. Remembering this makes me long with joyful anticipation the day when I can sign fluently. So the second bit of good news, is that even with beginning sign, the connection begins right away - and that means the isolation begins to thaw.

Until next time, friends. Peace and Joy...

You're Deaf - Now What? - Sudden Silence

Written April 2014. Retrieved from http://suddensilence.wordpress.com/2014/04/03/youre-deaf-now-what/

Each time I lost my hearing (1993 for my right ear, 2008 for my left), I was surprised and disappointed by one thing: I was not offered any type of support for dealing with such a monumental loss. And this is not to say anything bad about my audiologists and doctors, because I really like them. But other people have mentioned it too, the lack of resources, information and support for late-deafened adults, or anyone suffering from sudden loss of hearing.

In 1993, the only thing offered to me was a different type of hearing aid, a bi-CROS that brought in the sounds from my newly-deaf side. I was thrilled with my new hearing aids, so no complaints there. But I had lost so much hearing that I could no longer hear my alarm clock for work each morning. I had NO idea that there were ALDS (assistive listening devices) for hearing loss, beyond an amplifier for the phone. The audiologist didn't tell me about them. My husband at the time was the one who talked to the audiologist and found out about an alarm clock that would shake the bed to wake me up. I mean, they sold them right in the office – why wouldn't she offer that information, knowing I had just lost all the hearing in my right ear and had a profound loss in the left?!

The internet was in its infancy in 1993, so the alarm clock and new hearing aids were the full extent of support I received. In 2008, my loss was much greater because I was now completely and totally deaf. They couldn't offer me hearing aids. I didn't know sign language, and neither did any of my family or friends. Yet again, once I got the hearing test that confirmed I was hearing absolutely nothing, I didn't receive any information on how to deal with being completely deaf. That just blows my mind.

They put me on steroids to see if my hearing would come back; just like in 1993, they didn't help. When I went

back in for the follow-up visit, I was prepared. Thanks to the internet, I had done my own research. I knew I could receive a free TTY if the doctor signed off on it, and I knew about cochlear implants. I was the one who asked if I could get CIs (although hopefully if I hadn't immediately asked, they would have offered it as an option). I was the one who asked if they could help me get the TTY. I found the state lending program that also gave me a flashing light for the phone (not that I was using the phone at that time).

Can you imagine losing all your vision, going to the doctor and having them say, "Well, yep, you're blind," and then sending you on your way? You have to hope they'd give you a list of resources for cane training, a service dog, learning Braille, programs to voice text for you, etc.

I didn't find online sources of support until 1997, when I suffered from a horrific ear infection in my good ear. I spent almost two weeks without my hearing aids, using just the very limited hearing in that ear – it was already profoundly deaf, and I spent much of that time with my ear filled with medicine and covered with a cotton ball. I was a single mom at that time, and I was scared at how close to 'deaf' I really was. I had been able to fool myself into complacency with my hearing aids, and not having them to rely on really scared me. So I started searching for hearing loss support groups, hoping to meet other people like me. I have never interacted on a regular basis with someone that had hearing loss, so I didn't have any real-life support of that type.

I found the Say What Club, and they are still active today. Back then, it was just one or two mailing lists; you signed up and they assigned you to a list, and then you would receive everybody's emails. That was where I first learned of CIs and many of the ALDs I'm familiar with today.

I also joined SHHH, which later became HLAA (Hearing Loss Association of America), and ALDA, the Association of Late Deafened Adults. These are large organizations that have websites with lots of information, newsletters/magazines, and yearly conventions. Nowadays I am also a member of Illinois Cochlear Implant Chapter, which has local meetings every other month.

If you're dealing with hearing loss, whether it's recent or not, it can really help to be part of an online support group. I love email because it eliminates communication barriers; real life meetings are also nice because all the ones I've been to are captioned with CART. Now that I have my CIs, I usually don't need CART to understand at a meeting, but it is still hit or miss whether I'll understand a question from someone in the audience. CART captions everything being said, and it's nice to utilize it for those soft-voiced questions or for a speaker with a heavy accent.

Losing your hearing can really isolate you. It's tempting to want to stay home and avoid social interaction because it's so exhausting, trying to read lips and follow conversations. It can be disheartening to be part of a large group and have no idea why everyone is laughing. Being part of a support group means that these people know what it's like to have a hearing loss, and they don't mind doing whatever needs to be done to be understood. At conventions, you'll see people facing each other and reading lips, signing, writing notes. I still remember our first ALDA convention in 1999, when we joined others for dinner and dancing. We didn't know how those who were deaf could follow the beat, until some friends showed me and Dave that if you hold onto a balloon, you can feel the vibrations of the music. How cool is that?!

Hopefully audiologists will catch on and realize that more needs to be done to support a newly-deafened adult. I would be curious, if anyone out there is a parent of a child who was diagnosed with hearing loss, if they were offered sources of support and help by their audiologist. Is it just adults who are sent off to deal with this on their own?

Deafened adults: fallen through the cracks - Deafened People Page

Written July 2012. Retrieved from http://deafened.org/2012/07/13/deafened-adults-fallen-through-the-cracks/

THE HEARING BEGINNING

There seems to be a lot of assumptions about adult-onset deafness. The first assumption is that adults become hard of hearing due to age, therefore anyone who loses their hearing as an adult becomes hard of hearing. In addition to hearing loss associated with aging, known as presbycusis, there are many other ways adults become deaf. For my convenience, I made up four groups.

Medical – eg. virus, measles, meningitis, drug reaction
Surgical – especially due to neurofibromatosis type 2 (NF-2) removing the auditory nerve
Traumatic – accidental injury
Progressive – noise, hereditary, mystery (probably hereditary), aging

Traumatic and surgical causes typically occur "overnight". Some medical losses can be equally sudden. These are not mild and moderate losses. With surgery and some injuries, damage to the nerves leaves no sound perception at all. With surgery, there may the advantage of some advance warning, but with sudden loss you go from hearing one day to deaf the next. With a sudden severe loss, even though some people with an identical degree of hearing loss may function as oral/hard of hearing, the lack of experience and the emotional reaction may make any residual hearing completely useless.

Progressive losses may be detected at the hard of hearing stage, but either slowly or suddenly cross over the line to become deaf.

With gradual losses, there is less shock and more opportunity to adapt—learn to lipread by instinct, learn to use the residual hearing. But there is also more chance to deny the existence of the hearing loss or the degree of the hearing loss, since the change is so gradual it goes unnoticed. Or the gaps in hearing only seem to happen some of the time.

I know this one well, because I have a progressive hearing loss. No known reason, but its pattern is typical of many hereditary progressive cases.

When your hearing only fails you some of the time, it is hard to break old habits like asking a question when you are not ready to lipread. But little reminders like this are not too intrusive because your habits reinforce your belief that you can hear just fine. For example, you tend to make friends with people you find easy to lipread—I never had many very short friends, and lost touch with a ten-year pen pal after she moved to Toronto because she talked too fast.

You turn up the TV because you can hear the voice better but you don't realize that you aren't understanding any better. But you don't know that you aren't understanding it well, because you have no way to know what other people DO hear. For me, it was the telephone.

You hear the voice and you mm-hmmm along and you really think you're hearing it. Your expectation gradually decreases from being able to understand every word to being able to catch the general concepts. My turning point was a telephone call where I needed the exact words, names, and I couldn't guess them, even though they were a closed set.

I realized then that it didn't matter that I could tell there was a voice there—what was important was what they were saying. I hung up the phone. I saw an audiologist who really reinforced that I had a deaf audiogram. Even though I had lived with a hearing loss for a long time, I learned a couple of important things.

First, you don't have to live in total silence to be deaf. Deaf is when you can't rely on being able to understand the other person when you pick up a ringing phone. And you don't need to be born deaf to be deaf. That being the case, I decided that I must be deaf.

THE MIDDLE

Well, if anyone knows how to cope with not hearing, it's the born-deaf people, so I decided to learn their language. I realized that my years of visual compensation for not hearing made it extremely easy to learn how to sign. In fact, my two hours a week in that classroom was the only time I could relax. From my years in the hearing world, I was used to guessing all the time, so it didn't bother me that I initially only caught a fraction of the signs.

Through The Canadian Hearing Society, I learned of a support group of deafened adults. What I heard of their experiences made me feel that there were still more things about my experience that were not so unique. I met adults deafened from all different causes. Some of them signed and others didn't. Some could read lips, some couldn't. The ones who didn't sign or read lips used computerized notetaking, or pencil and paper, to get by. Some have had cochlear implants, others could not have them (such as the NF-2 cases), and others would not want them.

Another assumption that people make about deafened adults is that they all want to continue to live the exact same hearing lives that they lived all along. This is often the initial reaction, expecially in the sudden cases. But the successful adjustments are often those who give up this idea.

When I went in October 1990 to Chicago to attend the second international conference of deafened adults (ALDA—the Association of Late Deafened Adults), I was shocked to see 300 equally-shocked deafened adults. The first conference the previous year was attended by about 40 people, and I think everyone expected to see maybe 100 people at the reprise.

My first impression was that about 3/4 of these people were signing, at least ineptly. That is to say that the majority of people showed a willingness to do whatever they needed to get a message across, even if they were not fluent signers, they would give it a try. With about three years of signing under my belt, that made the conference very welcoming to me.

For the first time in my life, there no barriers to talking to anybody I wanted to talk to. Strange, though, there was nothing that I needed to say, because all of these people had been through the same experience as I had. In a group of six people, only one needed to talk because the other five could just say, me too, me too, ... Meeting these people made me realize that I was not unique or defective. I was normal: a normal deafened person.

DEAFENED END

Another thing I noticed about the people at ALDA was that most of them were smiling. These were not grieving people, wishing to become hearing again. In the heart-to-heart support-group sessions, it was obvious that people were coping with a great deal of pain because of becoming deaf, but it seemed to me that most of the pain was from the way they were treated by other people at various stages. There was a lot of frustration trying to meet everyone's expectation that your life would just resume the same way as before. One hearing life, minus the hearing.

Laurel Glass, a researcher into adult-onset hearing loss at the University of California, San Francisco, did a survey of people at the conference and asked what was the most helpful thing people did to cope with their deafness. The most common answers related to learning sign language and meeting other deaf people, both born deaf and deafened.

Yet most people there still lived and worked with hearing people. How can this be? Simply that having a deaf identity is a positive attitude. It is not an identity that something is missing.

Using an interpreter—no matter how well or mediocre you can sign—helps you to understand people in the hearing world much better and unobtrusively than trying to lipread during a meeting or class, for example.

People who can't get work successfully with interpreters can demand captioning. In Massachusetts, it is now mandatory to provide real-time captioning for all federally funded services if a deaf person wants that instead of an interpreter. Not notetaking, but computer assisted real time court-reporter captioning.

And yet the system has two categories: deaf and hard of hearing. If you are not born deaf, then you must be hard of hearing, and automatically the system assumes that you prefer to learn to lipread and keep as much of your life unchanged as possible. After all, your family and friends won't learn to sign. Who has any deaf friends when they first become deaf?

With assumptions like these, deafened people fall through the cracks. When you learn sign language, you meet people who do sign. They understand you a lot better than the people who are trying to convince you not to learn to sign because it is more convenient for them that you don't change.

When you become deaf as an adult, you have already changed. Learning to sign is just a way to adapt to that change. I'm a great lipreader, but it's too much stress for me to do everyone else's communicating for them. Because I speak clearly for their convenience, it is easy for them to forget how to speak to make themselves understood. Signing is my way to declare that I am not hearing and I expect other people to do their share.

The theory that lipreading will preserve the old hearing lifestyle is based on hard of hearing experiences. Hard of hearing people can use amplification: hearing aids, assistive listening systems, volume control telephones—to supplement their lipreading. Deaf people cannot. Being able to hear in the past does not change that. Preferring not to become deaf does not change that.

Professionals and deafened people need to realize that deafened adults are deaf and not hard of hearing. For every

deafened adult who succeeds just with lipreading, there are probably ten who feel like such failures that they don't leave their homes. Because everyone is telling them that they should be able to do it, and they can't. On top of the loss of the sense of hearing, this is unfair and unrealistic pressure from family, friends and professionals. Sign language for me has been a gift. It gave me a way to remain active in the hearing world without being a constant interruption, a way to make my deafness visible better than my old red hearing aids ever did. For other people, one course in basic signing gives them a sense of communication by gesturing and a sense of being centred in a different world than before. That gives them the freedom to ask for and get captioning for their work in the hearing world.

The important quality is not whether it is captioning or an interpreter, but that you don't have to do it all yourself just because some system thinks that it is more convenient that way. I know people whose lives have been saved by this very principle, and people who lost their lives because they didn't get it in time. The time to recognize the special needs of deafened adults is now.