

From language broker to professional interpreter: The familial influences of men entering the Sign Language interpreting profession

A child of one or both Deaf parents is referred to within the Deaf and Sign Language interpreting communities as a CODA (Child of Deaf Adults). These children are very often enculturated into the Deaf community but also need to operate within the majority hearing world. As a result, these children will end up acting as a 'language broker' (Napier 2017) because they are 'interpreting' for their parents in social and formal situations. This occurs because Sign Language interpreters are not always available and as Angelelli (2010) highlights in the case of Latino immigrants settling in the US, there is a sense that access to information is important and therefore, young individuals cannot simply stand by and not allow that access to be achieved.

Deaf people are seen by the wider society as disabled and therefore, any hearing child living in a household with one or more Deaf parent would fit into the category of a non-traditional household. It may be this dynamic, and not factors such as class, race or gender, that affect employment and career choices of the children from these non-traditional households. Research has shown that this could be the case in the Sign Language interpreting profession. Mapson (2014) found that in the UK, the instances of a child becoming an interpreter because a parent is Deaf has been identified at around 13% and when another family member such as a sibling is Deaf it is around 5%. Interestingly, the percentage of male interpreters who have one or more Deaf parents is higher at 24%.

Therefore, it can be said that one motivation for men to become sign language interpreters is because of the family they grew up in. This is one area I am exploring within my PhD research, which I am undertaking at Durham University. Through my presentation, I will present the findings of some initial interviews with male interpreters who hail from this family dynamic and give some insights as to how their early experiences of growing up within a Deaf household, have shaped their career choices from language broker to professional interpreter.

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