Constructed Action & Constructed Dialogue
and
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I. Introduction

Black ASL project by Lucas et al.

The topic under discussion in this paper is one small piece of a large-scale, on-going project concerned with a unique sociolinguistic variation of American Sign Language (ASL) used by African American signers; what is commonly referred to as Black ASL. The study (headed by Lucas et al.) is the first of its kind seeking to formally characterize this variation in terms of phonological, morphological, syntactic, discourse and lexical features that make it distinguishable from other varieties. As set forth in these researchers' proposal, "the project aims to demonstrate the specific linguistic and sociolinguistic features that qualify Black ASL as a variety of ASL, in the same way that Tactile ASL has been shown to be a variety of ASL" (Lucas et al., 2008, p. 4).

These researchers have hypothesized that this distinct variety of ASL was made possible by the historical circumstances of educating Black deaf children and White deaf children in separate schools and via separate modes of communication (i.e. manual as opposed to oral). Furthermore, Black Deaf and White Deaf communities have continued to remain isolated from each other in certain areas of the country, thus permitting this distinct variety of ASL to flourish. These factors were taken into account, informing the participant groupings for the study as well as the design of their methods. Those methods pertaining to the focus of this particular study will be explained in greater detail in the methods section of this paper. For a more complete description of the Black ASL project, see Lucas et al. (2008).

Focus of present study

This particular study focused on analyzing two linguistic features: one discourse feature and one lexical feature. In terms of discourse, constructed dialogue and constructed action (Tannen 1989, Metzger 1995), and body partitioning (Dudis 2004) were analyzed to determine whether they are drawn upon more or less by Black Deaf versus White Deaf signers. Narrations given by signers of both of these ethnic groups were analyzed and compared for their use of constructed action and dialogue. Lucas et al. (2008) cite an analysis presented by Metzger and Mather (2004) in which it was suggested that Black ASL employs constructed action and dialogue more extensively than standard ASL used by White Deaf signers (p.13). In the spirit of this common assertion, this part of the present research study aims to provide data-based evidence that may or may not substantiate such claims.

The lexical feature under focus was lexical variation in Black ASL. Free conversations and interviews of Black Deaf signers were examined for sign variation produced naturally or in response to direct questions from the researcher. Both research and anecdotal accounts have

recognized differences in the sign vocabulary of Black ASL. For instance, Lucas, Bayley, and Valli (2001) found that "for twenty-eight of thirty-four stimuli, Black signers used signs that White signers did not" during a "vocabulary elicitation task" (Lucas et al., 2008). Woodward (2005) found corresponding evidence that "Black Southern signing differs from White signing on the lexical and phonological levels (p.215).

The methods of this study were devised by Lucas et al. and therefore carried out according to their design. Likewise, the data were analyzed and interpreted through a sociolinguistic lens. Our findings aimed to provide humble responses to the greater questions asked by the overarching project. With that said, however, the researchers of this narrowed study were especially concerned with the application of these findings to the field of sign language interpreting. The benefits of their project's potential findings to the field of interpreting are also noted by Lucas et al. (2008), but these will be given pointed attention in the implications section of this paper.

II. Literature Review

Sociolinguistic variation in ASL

Varieties of language are defined "in terms of a specific set of 'linguistic items' or 'human speech patterns' (presumably sounds, words, grammatical features, etc.) which we can uniquely associate with some external factor (presumably, a geographical area or a social group) (Hudson 1996 and Ferguson 1972, in Wardhaugh 2006, p. 25).

'Linguistic items' in a variety of ASL include lexical variation, phonological variation, morphological and syntactic variation, alternation of fingerspelling and lexicalized signs, and discourse

Lexical variation was seen in a study by Woodward (1976) between African American signers and Caucasian signers. His data suggested that African Americans tended to use the older forms of the signs, i.e. those that do not show evidence of phonological processes such as assimilation (in Lucas et al. 2001a).

Phonological variation was seen in a study by Battison et al (1975) that examined thumb extension in signs such as FUNNY, BLACK, BORING, and CUTE. All these signs may be produced with the thumb closed or extended to the side (in Lucas et al 2001b, p. 80-81).

A morphological and syntactic variation study by Woodward and DeSantis (1977) explored three morphosyntactic rules: negative incorporation, agent-beneficiary directionality, and verb reduplication. Negative incorporation includes an outward movement after the form of the original sign indicating negation as seen in KNOW and DON'T-KNOW. Agent-beneficiary directionality occurs when a sign such as GIVE changes when the signer indicates that he or she is giving something to another person, or has been given something from another person.

A study of alternation of fingerspelling and lexicalized signs by Blattberg et. al (1995) found that groups of young people used fingerspelling for proper nouns and English terms without an ASL equivalent sign, used lexicalized forms, and the location for fingerspelling was below the shoulder. Adults also used fingerspelling, but their use resembles the use of locative signs. Signers in Frederick, Maryland used fingerspelling more frequently than those studied in Boston, Massachusetts (in Lucas 2001, p. 85-86).

Variations in discourse were studied in Tactile ASL by Collins and Petronio (1998). Their study found that for yes-no questions, non-manual signals that in sighted ASL include the raising of the eyebrows, are conveyed manually in Deaf-Blind signing as either an outward movement of the signs or the drawn question mark (in Lucas 2001, p. 86).

External factors associated with the linguistic items can include location, separation, language policies, group identity, and settings. Just as regional location can influence the development of spoken language varieties, it can also influence ASL. Spoken English has different varieties such as British English, Canadian English, and African American Vernacular English. Varieties of ASL result from regional separation of the East Coast, West Coast, South, and Midwest, or even in isolated communities.

Separation of language users can influence the development of varieties of ASL. The Irish Deaf community is considered to use a single national sign language, Irish Sign Language. However, up until the 1950s, two very lexically distinct forms of language were used in the girls' school and boys' school, to the extent of mutual unintelligibility (Matthews 1996, in Lucas 2001, p. 15).

Changes occurred in language policies have also influenced the development of varieties of ASL when there were shifts such as oralism to total communication, or total communication to the bilingual-bicultural approach. These language policies affected the language used in the classroom as well as the language fluency of the teachers. Educators shifted from native ASL users to hearing teachers that did not know ASL (Lucas 2001, p. 95). Differences can be seen between older signers that use more fingerspelling and had less clear mouthing patterns than the young singers who also show more influence from English in their signing (Lucas 2001, p. 87).

Varieties can develop to establish group identity. A study of spoken language variation found that island families on Martha's Vineyard heightened their usage of certain unusual vowel sounds in order to distinguish themselves from the increasing number of tourists on the island (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2005, p. 41). This is also seen in Black Deaf youth. It is easier to assimilate into hearing Black culture than White culture because the core culture is the same. Just as Black hearing youth have created their own language and culture, Black Deaf youth use gestures or body movements that are staples of street behavior that are apparent in the way they use sign language (Dunn 1992, p. 57).

Conversational settings have also related to forming varieties of ASL. Mallison and Child's study (2005) of women in small African American community in Appalachia found linguistic

differences related to the different communities of practices that the women participated. Women who were in the "church ladies" group were engaged in attending church and other activities associated with cultural conservatism and "propriety". Other women were recognized as "porch sitters", engaged in socializing on porches to listen to music and enjoy activities indicative of the more widespread African American culture, especially that of the youth culture (in Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 2005, p. 38).

Linguists agree that no variety of a language is inherently better than any other. They insist that all languages and all varieties of particular languages are equal in that they adequately serve the needs of those who use them (Wardhaugh 2006, p. 335). However, many people believe that some languages or varieties are better than others. It is widely believed that you can be advantaged or disadvantaged socially, esthetically, and cognitively by which language or variety of a language that you use (Wardhaugh 2006, p. 335-6).

A study by Preston (2004) showed Michigan participants a U.S. map and asked them to mention any characteristics of speech of different regions that came to mind. The most frequently mentioned responses included characteristics such as smart, dumb, polite, rude, educated, uneducated, snobbish, down-to-earth, friendly, unfriendly, good English and bad English. These responses represent language attitudes towards different regions' varieties and dialects of English. Preston further reports that speakers of "correct" dialects do not believe that speak dialects. Also, speakers of prejudice-against varieties (like prejudiced groups in general) derive solidarity from their distinct cultural behaviors-in this case, linguistic ones (p. 489).

Black ASL

The long history of the separation of Black and White communities may have led to the development of a distinct variety of ASL, starting with the segregation of children in schools. Not only were Black and White Deaf children taught in separate schools, they also had very different experiences. Education of Black Deaf children did not begin until the mid-1850s with separate schools or separate departments in established schools, even though the first school for the Deaf was established in 1817.

The Conference of Milan of 1880 impacted the education of Deaf children by enforcing oral education and forbidding the use of sign language. However, this was not always enforced in the Black schools. Baynton (1996) reports that at the 1882 convention of American Instructors of the Deaf, the superintendent of the North Carolina Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind was asked about the establishment of the oral program at the school for the black children, he responded, "in a separate building, one mile from the main institution, there are thirty colored children... with a separate teacher in charge. No instruction has been given in articulation, and none will be given at present" (p. 45). In 1940, a survey in the American Annals of the Deaf reported that of sixteen segregated schools or departments for black deaf children, eleven were still entirely manual (Baynton 1996, p. 46).

Some schools required Black children to be taught only by Black teachers. Many vocational and academic teachers, and dormitory personnel were recruited from predominantly Black colleges, which were located near the schools for the Negro deaf and blind in most of the Southern states (Hairston & Smith 1983, p. 17). However, many of the hearing teachers recruited from these historically Black colleges did not know how to sign and did not sign in the classroom beyond the use of fingerspelling (Doctor 1948, in Lucas et al. 2008, p. 8).

Gallaudet University did not accept black deaf people until almost a hundred years after its founding in 1864 (Dunn 1995, p. 37), making college education out of the question for black students. Instead, most schools placed strong emphasis on vocational training and skills, and made certain most of their graduates were employed. Students were placed in training programs according to grade, age, and mental ability rather than by aptitude and each student, not matter what his or her intelligence level, was allowed to try and become proficient in at least two vocations. Training was offered in home economics, typing, tailoring, dry cleaning, hairdressing, barbering, and shoe repair (Baynton 1995, p. 16). These types of jobs led to differences in socioeconomic status, which was another factor of separation in Black and White communities. While on the job, Black deaf people mainly socialized with other Blacks, whether hearing or deaf (Aramburo & McAllister 1986, p. 77).

Between the founding of the first schools for Black deaf children in 1856 and the time when schools for the deaf were finally desegregated in the late 1970s, Black deaf children and adults did not interact with White deaf children and adults on a regular basis (Lucas et al. 2008, p. 8). When the schools were desegregated, Blacks began to interact with White peers. For some, change came easy. For others, it meant frustration and failure (Aramburo & McAllister 1986, p. 78).

Hairston and Smith (1983) suggest that Black children began to sign "white" or "the Gallaudet way". This was more of a survival than a social adaptation, in order to better themselves, succeed in the new schools, and to not appear different. However, among themselves, they retained their signed dialect and signed Black (p. 56). For older Black Deaf who were not in school when the change occurred, learning new signs has come through socializing with the younger Deaf (Aramburo & McAllister 1986, p. 78).

Southern people used signs that were common to their respective schools, but as Black deaf people migrated from the South, they found that many of their signs were not widely used or known except among other Southern Black deaf persons who used them or had been exposed to them (Hairston & Smith 1983, p. 55).

In some areas, Black and White children and adults still do not interact today (Lucas et al. 2008, p. 8). This has allowed what is believed to be Black ASL to continue to thrive today. There is clear evidence of lexical variation. Claims that there is also syntactical variation, phonological variation, and variations in discourse have only recently been subject to research.

Constructed dialogue and constructed action

Much research has been conducted that acknowledges the existence in ASL of what Tannen (1989) refers to as constructed action and constructed dialogue (Liddell 1980, Metzger 1995, Roy 1989, Winston 1991, 1992). Metzger (1995) loosely explains these as the way signers "use their body, head, and eye gaze to report the actions, thoughts, words, and expressions of characters within a discourse" (p.256). Her study revealed that constructed action and constructed dialogue are produced quite similarly in ASL. It also demonstrated that constructed action may be more common than constructed dialogue, and that these features may sometimes happen simultaneously (supporting Winston's (1991) claim). The present study is concerned with these same observations; how action and dialogue are constructed in ASL as isolated features, but also as co-occurring features of discourse.

Dudis (2004) describes the same phenomenon as one type of what he refers to as "real-space blends." This discourse act "involves the projection of a signer's body into [a] blend, producing a visible blended element, typically a human actor" (p. 223). The "blend" refers to a cognitive merging of elements from "two separate mental spaces, some of which are mapped onto a third space, resulting in a blend" (Dudis, 2002, p. 53). This is essentially what happens when a signer constructs action or dialogue. Although this phenomenon is often observed as part of a narration, when it occurs in isolation a signer is, in a sense, momentarily stepping out of the narrator role to "become" a character.

Dudis (2004) also explores a signer's ability to create another type of real-space blend that involves the "partitioning off" of body parts. In these types of blends, "different parts of [a] signer's body [are] projected as separate visible real-space elements into their respective blends" (Dudis, 2004, p. 225). Dudis (2002, 2004) concedes that blends of various nature have the potential to be produced concurrently, as other researchers have previously observed. His work, however, has given more thorough analysis to the numerous options (and combinations of these) that are available to signers. His findings have demonstrated that "even though [a] signer's body, as a single unit, may be projected into a blend to create visible |actors|, other visible elements are possible as well" (Dudis, 2004, p.237). Dudis' (2002, 2004) work supports this notion that such blends may happen independently or concomitantly. He explains that signers "may establish single blends that involve their bodies in the blend construction" (an act which we will refer to as constructed action and constructed dialogue for the purposes of our study), or "establish simultaneous blends by assigning different body parts to separate blends" (which we will refer to as body partitioning) (Dudis, 2002, p.71).

Lexical variation

Woodward (1976) explains there are two types of lexical variation in Southern Black signing: historical and synchronic. Historical variation means means forms that were present in the past in other lectal varieties of ASL, but now remain in Black Southern signing (p. 211). An example of this is the sign PREGNANT produced by touching a 5-handshape twice on the chin. This sign

was used in Georgia. Black Deaf people continue to use this sign, but White Deaf people now use the sign more commonly produced with interlocking hands (Woodward 1976, p. 211).

Synchronic variation is more common than historical variation. It compares phonologically unrelated signs, which most likely occurred as a result of the isolation of Black and White schools in the South (Woodward 1976, p. 211). An example of this is the sign for CORNBREAD that has only been used by Black Deaf, and never by White Deaf. It is produced by placing both hands in the B-handshape together and moving them side to side (Woodward 1976, p. 211). This sign is rarely seen today, except when occasionally signed by older deaf persons at Black deaf clubs. In fact, it is rarely seen in any of the recent sign language books (Hairston & Smith 1983, p. 56).

Other signs claimed to fall into the category of synchronic variation include MOVIE, COLOR, RABBIT, PEANUT, PEACH, and LEMON (Woodward, Erting and Oliver 1976, in Lucas et al. 2008, p. 14). Also COTTON, TOBACCO, WHITES, TRACTOR, and BISCUIT which are variations particular to the region the Black Deaf person came from (Hairston & Smith 1983, p. 55).

Constructed action/dialogue and lexical variation as used by interpreters

There is no information yet published on the use of constructed action and dialogue by interpreters. The authors of this present study recognize its importance for the field of interpretation as discussed in further depth later in this paper.

A study by Branson et al (1989) of a village in Bali, Indonesia, found that an interpreter appearing on the televised news was unintelligible to the Deaf village people. The interpreter not only included a lot of fingerspelling and lacked facial expressions, but did not include many signs that related to the village way of life relating to agricultural production, market transactions, family life, religious ceremonies or village affairs (p. 42-43). As these varied lexical signs were possibly unknown to the interpreter, s/he was unable to interpret effectively and as a result did not match the lexical signs the village used and understood.

According to the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Code of Professional Conduct, an interpreter must "assess consumer needs and the interpreting situation before and during the assignment and make adjustments as needed" and "render the message faithfully... using language most readily understood by consumers..." (2005). This includes using constructed action to represent a person's actions, using constructed dialogue to convey conversations, and to vary one's lexical signs to match those of the consumer.

II. Methodology

Data collection

Segregation is believed to have had a major influence on the development of what may be a separate variety of Black ASL, so participants were divided into groups of those over the age of 55 and those under the age of 35. Lucas et al. (2008) hypothesized that the kind of school attended by the signers would have a direct bearing on their use of language, so signers were recruited according to whether they attended segregated or desegregated programs. On average, this will mean a group of signers who are over the age of 50 and a group who are under the age of 35 (p. 9).

The data collected for this project was from Raleigh, North Carolina; Houston, Texas; Talladega, Alabama; Little Rock, Arkansas, New Orleans, Louisiana and Hampton, Virginia. These six locations are the sites of former schools for Black deaf children, as well as the sites of integrated schools for deaf children today (Lucas et al. 2008, p. 10). Informal conversations were also recorded between attendees of the regional 2007 National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) conference. Representatives from these locations contacted and recruited participants for recording.

The researchers sought to capture naturally produced Southern Black ASL. Recordings took place during community events with attendees recruited by the representatives. The representatives asked the participants to engage in free conversation with the other participants for 30-40 minutes without any researchers present. The participants were not prompted with any topics to discuss, but simply told to talk to each other.

Following the recordings of free conversation, researchers conducted interviews. It was still their desire to capture naturally produced language, and not that produced with consideration to the audiological status or ethnicity of the audience. Giles' Accommodation Theory explains (1973) explains how deaf people adjust their signing to bring it closer to what they perceive to be the preference of their interlocutor (Lucas et al. 2008, p. 9). For this reason, a Black deaf interviewer conducted the interviews, and White researchers were not present. These interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and focused on the signers' experiences with education, school, and language use, as well as their perspectives on Black and White signing styles. The elderly participants also provided information about language use, history of the schools during segregation, language use, teachers, and a basis for contrast from the younger signers (Lucas et al. 2008, p. 10).

The researchers also wanted to examine narrative styles. During the re-telling of stories or events, constructed dialogue and constructed action occur in the form of reiterating conversations and performing the roles of other individuals or entities in the interaction. Participants were asked to view a portion of one of two wordless cartoons, and then re-tell it. It was recognized that narration would occur in the free conversation and interviews, but these recordings would provide additional data for analysis.

The technology used is explained below, as summarized in Lucas et al (2008):

"The conversations and interviews were filmed using two Canon GL2 digital video cameras. The cameras were positioned in such a manner as to capture every nuance of the signing. The conversations and interviews were transferred to a computer for editing. Editing consisted primarily of trimming unneeded frames and compressing the final footage to comply with available technology. The primary means of video distribution will be CD and DVD; archiving will be accomplished using mini-DV tapes" (p. 11).

Methods of analysis

Constructed action and constructed dialogue

This analysis was concerned with both types of the blends depicted by Dudis (2004) which will be referred to as constructed action and constructed dialogue, and body partitioning. Several combinations of these features were analyzed. To begin, instances of full constructed action and full constructed dialogue occurring in isolation were counted, and instances of constructed action and constructed dialogue produced simultaneously were also noted.

Another focus of data collection was documenting instances of constructed action and/or dialogue co-occurring with body partitioning. Dudis (2004) explains the function of this co-occurrence phenomenon: "information accessible from blends is increased when the signer produces other visible elements in addition to the actor. This increase depends, among other things, on the partitionability of the manual articulators and the face" (Dudis, 2004, p.223).

Of final interest was the construction of action or dialogue with narration. This type of simultaneous blend occurs when a signer takes on the role of a character (either to perform an action or relay dialogue) while signing a "plain sign." In this case the signer remains in the "actor" role by way of torso/posture shifts, non-manual articulators or other ways of exhibiting constructed action/dialogue, but chooses to sign a regular sign that can not be distinguished as a classifier or manual articulator. The following table depicts the features under analysis for this study and their corresponding codes.

Discourse feature	Code used
Constructed action	CA
Constructed dialogue	CD
Combination of constructed action & constructed dialogue	CACD
Combination of constructed action & body partitioning	CABP

Combination of constructed dialogue & body partitioning	CDBP
Combination of constructed action & narration	CANA
Combination of constructed dialogue & narration	CDNA

Figure 1: Features and their codes used in analysis

As part of the larger study headed by Lucas et al., recruited participants viewed one of two possible short, wordless cartoons. They were then asked to re-tell the cartoon to another study participant. For this study, the cartoon re-tellings of 6 Black Deaf signers were analyzed. 3 of these participants were female and 3 were male. All were from the under-35-years-of-age category of participants. In addition, the cartoon re-tellings of 5 White Deaf signers (also from the under 35 age group) were analyzed for occurrences of the same features. Of these 5 participants 3 were female and 2 were male.

Before analysis could commence, each re-telling was transcribed using a system of glossing. The transcribed data was then entered into a computer program (ELAN Linguistic Annotator version 3.7.1) where the discourse features (identified above) were inputted using the annotation codes given above (see figure 1). The program then calculated the specific number of occurrences of each feature and calculations were performed by the researcher to quantify results into average raw scores and percentages for comparison.

The raw scores depict, separately, the number of times that each analyzed feature occurred in the individual narratives of each participant. Totals are also provided that represent the number of occurrences for each feature for all Black Deaf narratives combined, as well as for all White Deaf narratives combined. Lastly, the total number of all features combined (CA, CD, CACD, CABP, CDBP, CANA, and CDNA) is given for both the Black Deaf and the White Deaf groups.

It was important (perhaps even more so) to determine how often the features of interest were used in relation to the total length of a narrative. The capabilities of the ELAN software were such that the total length of all features combined in each separate narrative were provided. Using this number, the total length of time that these features were used (in each narrative, separately) was divided by the total length of the narrative to find the percent of time in which the feature occurred. The percent was calculated in this way for each narration, and the average percent of time spent using all features during narration was then figured for both the Black Deaf and White Deaf groups.

Lexical variation

Videotapes of free conversation and interviews were analyzed for discussed lexical variation.

During the free conversation, no researchers were present. The videos were later examined and Each lexical variation that occurred was documented and time coded. Patterns of when and why these occurred was also subject to analysis.

During interviews, participants were interviewed by Black researchers without any White researchers present. They posed questions specifically related to Black and White signing differences, including lexical variations. These variations were also documented and time coded.

III. Results

Constructed dialogue and constructed action

The results of this study were unable to substantiate the claims that Black Deaf signers employ constructed action or dialogue (in addition to body partitioning) more than White Deaf signers. If raw scores are focused on, it appears that Black Deaf signers use more constructed action/ dialogue/body partitioning (including combinations of these features) than White Deaf signers, as the raw scores indicate 159 total occurrences in the Black Deaf narrations and 139 in the White Deaf narrations (see figure 2 below). (Of all features viewed separately, the more numerous occurrence of full constructed action in the Black Deaf versus the White Deaf group is of especially noted interest). However, a closer look at the average percentage of time spent on these features reveals quite different results (see figure 3).

	Black Deaf	White Deaf
CA	70	47
CD	16	18
CACD	4	3
CABP	41	49
CDBP	2	0
CANA	26	22
CDNA	0	0
TOTAL	159	139

Figure 2: Raw scores for occurrences of CA/CD forms

According to this data, when the time spent on constructed action/dialogue/body partitioning (and combinations of these) is taken into consideration, it appears that White Deaf signers, on average, spend a greater percentage of time on constructing and co-constructing these features. White Deaf signers, on average, used constructed action/dialogue/body partitioning 46.37% of

the time, and Black Deaf signers incorporated these features 39.29% of the time. More weight should be given to these latter results, since the percent of time spent on these features yields a better understanding of how often these features (on average) are employed in the total scope of a narration.

	Black Deaf	White Deaf
Average length of narrations (sec)	92.17	57.6
Average length of all forms of CA/CD combined in narrations (sec)	36.22	26.71
Average percentage of time spent using CA/CD forms	**39.29%**	**46.37%**

Figure 3: Average time spent using CA/CD forms

Limitations of results and suggestions for future research

The results of this study should be considered in light of assumptions made about the greater use of such features in Black ASL. The data suggests that this may not in fact be the case. Furthermore, they suggest, on the contrary, that it is White Deaf signers who employ greater use of these features. These results, however, should be interpreted with caution. This small-scale study analyzed a very limited sample of both groups of signers and for this reason the results may not be highly reliable representations of the larger populations of both Black Deaf and White Deaf signers. A duplication of this study with a larger sample of participants would be useful in supporting or disputing the findings presented here.

It is important also to note that an analysis of these features with regard to other sociolinguistic factors may yield different results. Currently, an identical analysis examining the narrations of Black Deaf and White Deaf signers over the age of 55 is underway. Those results await to be compared to the data of the younger groups studied in this analysis.

Lastly, when interpreting these results the design of this study deserves attention. It should be acknowledged that the cartoons chosen as the sources for the participants' narrations lend themselves to the use of constructed action/dialogue and body partitioning. It is fair to suggest that it would be difficult to produce narrations of these non-verbal cartoons without incorporating these features to some degree. An analysis of the same features as they occur during free conversations may generate different results. Further research is needed involving different tasks and method design.

Lexical variation

There were significant differences in the number of occurrences and patterns of lexical variation between older and younger signers. Aramburo and McAllister (1986) explain that the older Black Deaf learned the "new" way of signing, but they still remember and use the "old" signs (p.78). As seen in Figure 4, when the older signers discussed lexical variation on tapes #9, #13, #23, they discussed several examples of the "old" signs. In these cases, the conversation shifted completely to the topic of "old" signs, resulting in the high number of occurrences.

For the younger signers, tape #25 has the highest number of occurrences. The entire conversation between the participants was based on the topic of lexical variation of signs for presidents, including prior presidents and those who ran in the most recent election. This recording took place on November 8, 2008, only a few days after the 2008 presidential election occurred.

For both the older and younger signers, in the tapes that indicate fewer than 5 lexical variations there were short discussions of the sign just produced, or a clarification, often for a name sign.

Location	Over 55		Under 35	
North Carolina	#8	2	#11	0
	#9	8	#12A	2
			#12B	0
Lousiana	#13	36	#15	0
	#14	0	#16	5
Alabama	#19/21	0	#17	0
	#20	0	#18	2
Texas	#23	11	#25	14
Arkansas	#27	1	#30	1
	#28	0		
	#29	0		
Virginia	#33	2	#32	0
Total	60		24	

Figure 4: Occurrences of Lexical Variation in Free Conversation

During interviews, it was quite easy for some of the groups of older signers to recall variations in the signs between Black and White people. They would produce the sign for the White school and the sign for the Black school. They would also show the old sign and compare it to the newer sign they have adapted to using because the old sign is no longer used or understood by many people they come in contact with.

Overall, the younger groups had a fewer number of signs that are different between Black and White people. Most of the signs recalled were from those that had learned the signs from older siblings or parents who are Deaf. Tape #12 included a higher number of occurrences; one participant was age 44 but was included in this group as he had experienced integrated education with some White teachers. There was also a high number of occurrences in tape #10 which may have resulted from the influence of one participant with Deaf parents.

Location	Over 55		Under 35	
North Carolina	#7	0	#10	1
	#8	15	#11	5
	#9	15	#12A	1
Lousiana	#13	20	#15	0
	#14	17	#16	7
Alabama	#21	0	#17	12
	#22	0	#18	10
Texas	#23	19	#25A	4
	#24	12		
Arkansas	#28	19	#30	6
	#29	3	#31	4
Virginia	#33A	7	#32A	3
	#33B	13	#32B	5
Total	140		58	

Figure 5: Occurrences of Lexical Variation in Interview

The lexical variations discussed in free conversation and during the interview included food signs, school signs, sports signs, signs for places, signs relating to people, signs relating to personal characteristics and feelings, signs for Black and White people, and miscellaneous signs, as depicted in Figure 6.

The section for food included signs such as cornbread, soda, chicken, and picnic. The topic of school included signs such as school, science, and book. Sports signs included signs such as basketball, win, and beat. Places included the sign for store and name signs for cities. Signs relating to people and relationships included signs such as cousin, friend, boss, Obama, and name signs. Signs relating to personal characteristics and feelings included brave, nosy, fat, tall, bored, and depressed. Signs for Black and White included various signs that both Black and White people used for the other group and themselves. The miscellaneous category included signs such as next, with, year, copy, told, important, see, dream, birthday, and steal.

	Over 55 Free	Over 55 Interview	Under 35 Free	Under 35 Interview
Food	6	25	0	7
School	1	5	2	3
Sports	4	2	0	1
Places	3	11	2	3
People/Relationships	12	9	18	5
Personal Characteristics/ Feelings	9	12	2	4
Black/White	6	6	0	5
Miscellanous	19	70	0	30
Total	60	140	24	58

Figure 6: Lexical variation topics

IV. Conclusion

Significance of results for linguistics

Recognition of a Variety of ASL

There have only been a few studies thus far which support the existence of Black ASL. Lewis (1996) reports that ASL users recognize the existence of what is often referred to as "Black signing", but have difficulty in explaining what it is that makes it Black; second, uniquely Black or "ebonic" (Asante, 1990) kinesic and nonverbal features exist, and these features occur in the communication or both hearing and Deaf African Americans (Lucas et al. 2001a).

These findings, paired with other findings of this project, will provide researchers more information which will enable them to determine and define the exact differences supporting Black ASL as a variety of ASL.

Ideas for Future Research

This research examined the specific age groups of participants that were over the age of 55 and under the age of 35. The youngest participants in this study were of the age of 17. It would be interesting to gather another young group, perhaps 17-21 year olds, in a few years and compare the results to the current results. This would help to determine if Black ASL continues to thrive through its youth, and the influence of teachers, Black and White, who had experienced only integrated education themselves.

Significance of results for interpreting

Meeting the needs of a sub-population of consumers

The results of this data are significant to the field of sign language interpreting because they attest to the existence of a variation of ASL that is unique to a subgroup of the larger Deaf community. Although the results of the constructed action/dialogue portion of this study should be interpreted prudently, they do suggest that there is a difference between Black Deaf and White Deaf signers. Perhaps even more strikingly, the lexical variation portion of this study suggests undeniable differences in the signs used by Black Deaf versus White Deaf signers. This is important for interpreters because the African American population who uses Black ASL partake of interpreting services, and as consumers of these services reserve the right to have their unique linguistic and cultural needs met when doing so. Possessing knowledge of the distinguishing features that define Black ASL is critical for meeting the needs of Black Deaf consumers. As Valli et al. (1992) explain, "the Deaf community is complex and diverse, not monolithic and uniform" (in Fuller et al., 2005, p. 253). It is essential that interpreters begin to incorporate knowledge of Black ASL into their linguistic repertoire. This cannot be achieved if interpreters are not linguistically trained to work with this population.

Interpreter Education

Currently, there are several prevalent models of interpretation being utilized in the training of interpreting students that take into account the assessment of culture as a necessary part of the interpreting process, yet it is commonplace for emphasis to be more strongly placed on such cultural awareness as it relates to Deaf and hearing communities. This can be observed in Russell's (2005) model of interpretation (p.144-145).

Colonomos' (1995) model is an example of one framework that does make a point of including in the explanation of cultural consideration "not only the primary cultural affiliation(s), but also the individual's identification with other cultural groups (e.g. ethnic/racial, gay/lesbian, religious, [etc.]) that may modify behaviors, norms, and values" (p.3). However, an interpreter's competence in culture and language are also defined by Colonomos independent of one another. Culture, according to her definition, "refers to both knowledge about norms, values, rules, traditions, and beliefs held be members of the culture," but there is no mention of knowledge about language as it relates to culture. A sociolinguistic perspective would view language and culture as inextricably linked, and a greater emphasis on this connection would do more to inform the work of professional interpretation.

The Black Deaf community and their unique variety of ASL is an example of such a relationship between culture and language. The work of researchers to date has demonstrated the impact that Black culture has had on the development of a unique variety of ASL, which must be acknowledged. Research findings that have begun to shed light on this (unconfirmed) variety, along with future research that will continue to expand our understanding, should be used to inform and improve the practice. As such, the findings of this research are useful in the pursuit

towards clearly defining what distinguishes Black ASL from standard ASL so that training on these defining characteristics can be incorporated into the curriculum of interpreting students. "Interpreter trainers can use their awareness of the complexity and diversity to prepare interpreters who are able to assess and respond appropriately to any interpreting situation. Likewise, an open awareness of the dual issues could inform curriculum development and teacher training" (Valli et al., 1992, in Fuller et al., 2005, p. 253). Acknowledgement of a Black variety of ASL, among other sociolinguistic varieties, should be addressed in the professional rhetoric of the field, in the education of interpreters, and in practice. Cultural and linguistic knowledge are, after all, integral parts of the interpreter's ethical code.

The Code of Professional Conduct

Consider tenet #2 ("professionalism") of the current NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct (2005) for interpreters. It states that interpreters should "possess the professional skills and knowledge required for the specific interpreting situation" (p.3) A guiding principle of this tenet is that interpreters "accept assignments using discretion with regard to skill, communication mode, setting, and consumer needs." Underscoring this point, illustrative behavior 2.2 states the need for interpreters to "assess consumer needs and the interpreting situation before and during the assignment" (RID, 2005, p.3).

These guidelines should be interpreted by the professional to encompass such 'consumer needs' as they pertain to racial/ethnic cultural differences. However, it is interesting to note that the Code lacks any direct mention of cultural knowledge that the consumer should be aware, other than that of the American Deaf community. This seems to support the notion proposed by Lewis (1997) of a dichotomy in the field of interpreting, which "seems to only consider the European-American Deaf and hearing community" (p. 257). Lewis exposes the shortcomings of this perspective which "overlooks the fact that there is a wide variety of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals who use interpreting services" (Lewis, J., 1997, in Fuller et al., 2005, p. 257).

It is interesting to note, furthermore, that illustrative behavior 2.1 calls upon interpreters to "provide service delivery *regardless* of race, color, national origin, gender...or any other factor" (RID, 2005, p.3). We posit that it might be added that service be delivered *regardless*, yet *with respect to*, these cultural factors. While this guideline clearly stresses the importance for interpreters to refrain from discriminatory practice, it does not take into account the fact that such cultural differences will have an effect on the interpretation itself.

Interpreters have a responsibility to be able to identify this variety and to linguistically accommodate its users in interpreted situations. In keeping with illustrative behavior 2.3, the interpreter must "[use] language most readily understood by consumers..." (RID, 2005, p.3). Findings from this study, combined with the work of others whose research adds to our understanding of what defines Black ASL, will help interpreters to meet the standards already set

forth and improve those standards for the future so that the needs of Black Deaf consumers are met.

Interpreting in diverse settings

The work of interpreters has the potential to be vast and limitless in terms of the topics one may interpret, the situations one may interpret in, and the people one may interpret for. For example, in one day, an interpreter may work at a high-profile conference for a profoundly Deaf, Black male consumer, then drive to a public school to interpret at the IEP of a fourth grade child who is Middle Eastern by decent, and finish off the day at the doctor appointment of a young white female who is hard of hearing and prefers Contact Sign. As one can easily imagine, each of these situations would be vastly different and would require a wide range of knowledge and skills on the part of the interpreter. Cultural and linguistic competence would be a necessary tool for each of these situations. Lewis (1997) explains that "unlike the type of interpreting miscues that might occur when interpreting technical academic information, miscues which occur due to cultural incompetence is often offensive to the audience receiving the message" (in Fuller et al., 2005, p. 257).

Interpreters often do have the opportunity to assess a situation before agreeing to interpret and therefore do have the right (and responsibility) to decline a particular assignment. Furthermore, if an interpreter is confronted with a situation that s/he is unqualified for while already on-the-job or prior to it, the RID Code states that an interpreter can (and should) "request support (e.g. certified deaf interpreters, team members, language facilitators) when needing to fully convey the message or to address exceptional communication challenges (e.g. cognitive disabilities, foreign sign language, emerging language ability, or lack of formal instruction or language)" (2005). The more knowledge that an interpreter possesses, the more work that s/he will be capable of performing. Thus, training on Black ASL would qualify an interpreter to work with a larger base of consumers by expanding his/her linguistic knowledge to meet the needs of the Black Deaf population.

If there is one setting, however, in which it is (currently) impossible to make a prior assessment of one's work, and where the use of team support is often absolutely critical (although not always called upon), that setting is Video Relay Services. Interpreters that work in this unique environment confront a diverse array of consumers for whom they have no prior knowledge of their linguistic (or other) needs, and for which they have no prior knowledge of the purpose of their call about to be placed or the topic(s) about to be discussed. Correspondingly, the results of this research would immediately and directly apply to the work of interpreters in this setting. The skill level necessary for this type of interpreting work mandates that one possess superior linguistic and cultural knowledge, perhaps even more than in other settings where one can make prior assessments to decline or accept work. A person employed in this setting should have the ability to recognize and comprehend Black ASL when they are presented with it. They must furthermore have the ability to alter their signing to produce messages that embody the features that make Black ASL unique. For instance, an interpreter should be able to identify and

understand the signs used by Black Deaf individuals, several examples of which have been provided in the results of this study.

We have attempted to demonstrate, based on the results of this study, how the findings presented are applicable to the fields of both sociolinguistics and ASL-English interpretation. This study is but one piece of a large body of research interested in Black ASL that should contribute to increasing awareness of this unique variety. Further research is currently being undergone by Lucas et al. (2008). We are honored to have been given the opportunity to be a part of their extensive, groundbreaking project which will, no doubt, pave the way for future research and recognition of Black ASL and other varieties which may exist.

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