

The influence of British Sign Language on Deaf English: a corpus-based study

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Abstract

This research uses computer-based corpora to examine the notion that Deaf English (DE) in Britain is influenced by British Sign Language (BSL). Testing this notion may help determine how DE should be classified. After current theories of DE as an interlanguage and as code-blending are considered, two corpora are created and presented for use: a five-million-word corpus of egroup messages, primarily by deaf people, and a one-million-word corpus of egroup messages by self-identified Deaf BSL users. The written and spoken sections of the British National Corpus are also employed for comparative purposes. Using these corpora, frequencies of selected function words with and without rough BSL equivalents are

discovered, and positioning of time adverbials is determined. A subsequent qualitative analysis of selections from email communication, egroup messages and blog entries by self-identified Deaf BSL users examines how these function words are used. Quantitative results indicate that in terms of copula omission and time adverbial placement, there is a strong case for BSL influence on DE. In terms of prepositions, conjunctions and modals, the BSL influence was not as clear but further testing is required to confirm this. Qualitatively, DE reveals trends toward the non-standard use of prepositions, conjunctions and modals, particularly have, including omission, addition and replacement. These phenomena can be viewed and explained with reference to BSL structure. Other possible BSL influences are also noted, such as the use of a BSL-like past perfective marker in DE. These findings lead to a discussion of whether DE might be developing into a New English. Ideas for further study to control for factors such as age of BSL and English acquisition are considered.

1. Introduction

This study has collected the first known corpus of English email and egroup messages written by Deaf¹ adults to carry out an analysis of the salient grammatical features of (British) Deaf English (DE). This is essential in adding to the understanding of the way Deaf people use the English language, in particular gaining a clearer understanding of how to classify DE, and whether it is influenced by British Sign Language (BSL). This area of research has implications

¹ For those not familiar with the area of Deaf studies, it has become convention to capitalise Deaf to denote Deafness as a distinct cultural and linguistic identity. Lower case deaf is reserved for the medical state of being unable to hear, and D/deaf signifies both. Where I have not used Deaf, I have followed the usage of the specific previous researcher being discussed.

for D/deaf people, BSL/English interpreters, teachers, educators, and policy makers.

Though the term “Deaf English” is relatively recent, having been first used by Charrow (1974), DE has been a topic of academic interest since at least Sibscota’s *The Deaf and Dumb Man’s Discourse* (1670). However, much research on Deaf people’s use of English has focussed on testing educational methods and contemplating the “inferiority” of Deaf people’s English skills (see e.g. Berent et al 2006; Schley and Albertini 2005; Bochner and Walter 2005; Yoshinaga 1983). Few studies have analysed the precise features of DE and considered where they come from, despite suggestions to determine the nature and causes of the differences between the English of hearing and Deaf people (by e.g. Maxwell and Falick 1992: 350; Kempt and Maxwell 1989: 80), and despite some recognition that DE is influenced by sign languages (e.g. Flood 2002: 111). As yet, no research has functionally investigated the influences of BSL on DE. To this end, the present study will address the following questions: do the salient grammatical features of DE reflect features of BSL, and are there enough reflective features amongst a large enough group of people to justify DE as a sociolinguistic entity?

Answering these questions will involve both qualitative analysis of selected computer-mediated messages by Deaf BSL users, and a quantitative analysis of a ~six million word corpus of DE, from the Deaf-UK discussion group on Yahoo!. The analyses will be informed by a functional view of grammar and current research on Deaf people’s use of English, sign languages (SLs), interlanguages, and code blending.

2. Background

Due to the seismic shift in thinking about deafness over the past 40 years, as well as the bitter controversies in the field of Deaf studies, this paper must begin with a warning about previous research in this area.² Until relatively recently, Deaf people were frequently described as linguistically deviant or defective (Kempton and Maxwell 1989: 68; Denmark 1973; Furness 1972), having a “syntactic deficit” and being “inferior to...and slower than normals” in learning language (Scholes et al 1978: 528). This terminology highlights the so-called “medical model of deafness” which has since been considered oppressive to deaf people as it emphasises the medical state of being unable to hear. Under this model, deaf people are “hearing-handicapped” (Ivimey 1976: 103), “acoustically handicapped” (Pugh 1945), and/or “hearing impaired” (Yashinago-Itano and Snyder 1985). Thus, the medical model frames DE as an inferior version of hearing people’s English (see Webster 1986: 10; 50; 88; 165).

In contrast, modern research increasingly highlights the “social model”, in which Deaf people constitute a cultural and linguistic minority, largely due to their use of SLs. The present study aims to join other contemporary studies (e.g. Erman 2004: 38) which have taken the view that Deaf people, particularly SL users, proudly define themselves as Deaf due to their distinct culture. Because the social model views Deaf people as proactive designers and keepers of a unique culture and language, it has implications for a study of

² This is also often necessary in SL research (see e.g. Johnston and Schembri 2007: 11).

DE; for example, it is entirely possible under this model that some Deaf people will consciously choose to use DE as a cultural construct and an overt signifier of their Deafness.

Another problem in the literature is the near-exclusive emphasis on deaf education at the expense of purely linguistic or even cross-disciplinary enquiry (Berent et al 2005: 21). This is because of the long-running battle over how to teach deaf pupils, which has placed deaf education researchers into a number of defensive camps, and infused their research with bias (Ivimey 1976: 104). Thus, though the present topic is linguistic rather than educational, most extant sources relating to it are educational in nature and perhaps likely to be tainted by this controversy.

Finally, myths about sign language, particularly that it isn't a 'real' language (see Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999: 9-13)³ have also thwarted detailed examination of DE (Maxwell and Falick 1992: 348), and of the possible influences of SLs on DE (but see Schmitz and Keenan 2005; Kempt and Maxwell 1989). For example, many researchers discuss deaf people's grasp of "language" without mentioning sign language at all⁴ (e.g. Ivimey 1976; Dale 1974), or refer to SLs as 'manual communication' rather than languages (e.g. Scholes et al 1978: 529, 534). Research by Stokoe (1960) established that ASL, BSL and other SLs are full, natural languages. Therefore English is often a second language for Deaf people (see

³ It is widely accepted that much of the 20th century prejudice against sign languages was instituted at the 1880 Milan Conference (see WheiPing Lou 1988 for a summary).

⁴ This philosophy is epitomised by Dale's (1974) *Language development in Deaf and partially hearing children*, which, despite its title, devotes just two pages to sign language.

e.g. Charrow 1975: 140). However, Stokoe's findings have only recently gained acceptance.⁵

Fortunately, the medical model, educational emphasis and myths about SLs affect the literature less now (see summary in Webster 1986: 2-3; 50-1). Two overarching themes can be found in the current literature pertaining to DE: first, that English is often not the L1 of congenitally deaf people, and second, that DE has many similarities to English as a Second Language (ESL). The reason that Standard English is often difficult for Deaf people to produce (Schmitz and Keenan 2005; Lichtenstein 1993; Kempt and Maxwell 1989; Webster 1986; Yashinago-Itano and Snyder 1985; Heider and Heider 1940) is because the vast majority (about 90%) are born to hearing parents who do not know a SL (Schmitz and Keenan 2005: 370), thereby depriving them of a fully accessible L1 (ibid: 371; Berent 1988: 134). As the early development of a strong L1 improves general language skills (Scholes et al 1978: 535), it is perhaps unsurprising that the 10% of Deaf children who are born to signing parents are frequently more skilled in written English than those of non-signing parents (Singleton et al 2004; Lichtenstein 1993: 124; Maxwell and Falick 1992: 350; Kempt and Maxwell 1989; Meadow 1968; Stuckless and Birch 1966). For the majority of deaf children, native SL acquisition is not possible, and any English discernable to them is quite different in tone, loudness, and structure than the English absorbed by fully hearing children (Maxwell and Falick 1992: 347), making the acquisition of Standard English doubly arduous. Researchers have also noted that the English production and comprehension of Deaf SL users, particularly

⁵ E.g. BSL was only recognised as a language by the UK government in 2002, and American Sign Language (ASL) has yet to be recognised as a language by the US government.

those with Deaf parents, tends to be similar to that of hearing ESL students (Bochner and Walter 2005: 233; Singleton et al 2004: 89; Supalla et al 2001: 178; Langston and Maxwell 1988; Quigley and King 1980; Scholes et al 1978: 535; Charrow 1975; Charrow and Fletcher 1974), which is perhaps remarkable since written English refers to sound but Deaf students have limited access to phonology (Supalla et al 2001: 178; Sutcliffe et al 1999), unlike most ESL students. Because of the similarities between DE and ESL, recent literature has tended to classify DE as an interlanguage.

3. Deaf English as an interlanguage

The recent recognition that SL users are bilingual has led to the notion that DE can be understood using Selinker's (1972) concept of interlanguage, i.e. a constantly changing language construction between L1 and L2 that exists within the language learner (e.g. Maxwell and Falick 1992; Berent 1988: 133; 154-6). Thus, British DE could be considered an interlanguage between British English (BrE) and BSL.

The line of research that led to this idea began with Heider and Heider (1940), who found that deaf children's English conveyed not just different language skills but an entirely different thought structure (in Ivimey 1976: 104-5). Following this, Myklebust (1960) and Brannon (1968) found "deafisms" in deaf writing, such as more repetition, more content words, fewer function words such as connectives and auxiliaries, and less varied vocabulary (summarised in Ivimey 1976: 104-5; see also Webster 1986: 95-7; 185; Charrow

1975: 140). Charrow (1975: 141) hypothesised that DE is a pidgin.⁶ Ivimey's (1976: 112) observation that a deaf person's English is "rule-based" seemed to support Charrow's theory.

The theory that DE is an interlanguage is supported by findings that some DE phenomena are similar to those found in many ESL interlanguages. These features include double tense marking (e.g. of a modal and main verb such as in wouldn't bought); random tense marking; shorter sentences with fewer words and clauses; more content words; problems with relativisation, be and get passives, double-object constructions,⁷ past participles and plural markers; fewer discourse markers, adverbials, articles, prepositions and conjunctions; generalising rules (e.g. geese for geese); and inverting word order in questions (e.g. Where you are going?) (Webster 1986: 171; 194; Dulay et al 1982: 138-9 in Schmitz and Keenan 2005: 374; Scholes et al 1978: 528-9; Ivimey 1976: 103; 109-11; Charrow 1975: 143; Heider and Heider 1940: 64 in Lichtenstein 1993: 81). More lexical observations such as fewer collocatives, synonyms and superordinates (Yashinago-Itano and Snyder 1985: 84) also seem to equate DE with other ESL interlanguages. It is therefore fairly clear that DE and ESL interlanguages have much in common. However, to be considered an interlanguage based on Selinker's (1972) definition – a construction between L1 and L2 – some L1 (i.e. SL) features must

⁶ Charrow was also one of the first researchers to approach Deaf people's English from something other than a perspective of impairment, error, or sub-normality.

⁷ Though double-object constructions are problematic generally (Truscott 2001: 97), there is a possible SL influence here. Deaf people may mix up double-object constructions because in ASL and BSL, direct objects often come before verbs, e.g. PRESENT YOU GIVE ME (Supalla et al 2001: 185).

be present, and this is a difficult criteria to fulfil as SLs and spoken languages exist in two different modalities.

Some researchers have indeed noted that fundamental differences in structure and modality between sign languages and English create interference for Deaf readers and writers (Supalla et al 2001: 178; Langston and Maxwell 1988: 296), that some recode English into a SL when reading (Chen 1976; Treiman and Hirsh-Pasek 1983 in Webster 1986: 177 and Lichtenstein 1993: 84), and finally that specific SL elements may influence Deaf writing:

...although sign language is a very different channel of communication...we cannot entirely rule out the possibility that there is interference from [sign language] ...that morpho-syntactic features which are absent in [sign language] will also sometimes be absent in...deaf students' English (e.g. articles, prepositions, tense markers, etc)

(Erman 2004: 46).

Knowledge of BSL structure, which is very similar to the structure of other SLs, including American Sign Language, or ASL (Johnston and Schembri 2007: 12; Newport and Supalla 2000; Johnston 1989) may assist in determining which DE features mentioned in the literature may come from a SL. Characteristics that appear to be specific to DE, and thus are more likely to stem from SL interference,⁸ include marked or non-standard usage of prepositions, be and have, negatives, connective devices, fixed grammatical constructions, time adverbials and adjectives. It is worth considering each of these in turn.

⁸ Interference refers to the use of features from one language while speaking or writing the other (Mackey 1968 in Grosjean 2001: 13).

First, DE often contains unexpected, overgeneralised and/or omitted prepositions, e.g. That's what I like with this poem...; I'm interested of that (Erman 2004: 43-4; Kempt and Maxwell 1989; Yashinago-Itano and Snyder 1985; Charrow 1975; Brannon 1968). The fact that SLs use prepositions on a very limited basis (Charrow 1975; Quigley and King 1980 in Lichtenstein 1993: 124) may help to explain this phenomenon. Though "citation" lexical preposition signs exist in ASL and BSL, they are rarely employed in typical discourse (Kempt and Maxwell 1989: 70). Furthermore, in ASL and BSL, locative relations are expressed spatially with near-simultaneous articulation of subject and predicate (Kempt and Maxwell 1989: 70), as in TABLE BOOK-ON where TABLE is signed first, then BOOK, and then the BOOK classifier is placed where TABLE was indicated. This use of signing space means that signers need not employ linear prepositional phrases (Emmorey and Tversky 2002: 4). Related to this is the finding that DE may use more concrete prepositions such as under than grammatical ones such as to (Ivimey 1976: 111). This also seems to reveal BSL influence, as signs exist for more spatial or concrete prepositions (e.g. BETWEEN, OVER, IN), but not for grammatical prepositions (e.g. FOR, TO, BY), which are fingerspelled if used at all and may not be considered as part of BSL (Lilley 2006; Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999).

Secondly, DE writers often mix up be and have and put negatives outside the sentence (e.g. Lichtenstein 1993: 81; Maxwell and Falick 1992: 363; Langston and Maxwell 1988: 295; Quigley and King 1980). Be and have may become confused because in ASL and BSL, the sign HAVE can be used as a marker of both existentials and possessives (Bochner and Albertini 1988: 34), and negatives may be placed outside the sentence because in many SLs, negation of most

verbs is non-manual and non-lexical, indicated for example by a headshake (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999: 72-78).

Thirdly, DE also features greater and near-exclusive use of *then* and *because* as syntactic connectors (Arfe and Boscolo 2006; Schmitz and Keenan 2005: 374-5; Maxwell and Falick 1992: 357-9; Webster 1986: 97; Yashinago-Itano and Snyder 1985: 84). This may be due to the fact that *because* and *then* have roughly equivalent signs in BSL.

Fourthly, DE exhibits reduced use of grammatical “prefabricated constructions”, units of two or more words such as *in order to*, but standard or greater use of semantic or pragmatic prefabricated constructions such as *a level playing field* (Erman 2004: 31-35; 39; Erman and Warren 2000: 30). This could be because BSL and other SLs have a spatial rather than linear grammar, and thus do not require prefabricated constructions based on purely linear syntax.⁹

Fifthly, DE has shown tenses often marked by time adverbials such as *last week* rather than by morphemes (Laugesen 1993: 56-61). This is perhaps the most probable instance of SL influence, as time is indeed normally marked by adverbials rather than morphemes in BSL. Other research has also shown DE to include mainly “external time markers, applied to the beginnings or ends of sentences” (Ivimey 1976: 108; see also Supalla et al 2001: 185), which mirrors BSL structure. In fact, the time references commonly used by the

⁹ It may be worthwhile to note here that sign linguistics is a field still in its infancy, and as yet there are no readily searchable computer corpora with which to rigorously test these observations.

writer in Ivimey's (1976) study were ones commonly used in BSL: now, tomorrow, before and especially finished.¹⁰

Finally, DE often contains fewer adjectives:

...while a [Deaf] child...[wrote] that the child in a picture was hit by the car, further description on the child, car, or driver of the car seem unnecessary or possibly taken for granted and are not included..."

(Yashinago-Itano and Snyder 1985: 83-4)

This may also imply SL influence. In BSL and other SLs, descriptors of the car, driver and child may form part of the action (e.g. the proform for CAR would be shown speeding from left to right in the signing space, and 'hitting' the proform for CHILD which would then fly over the car, etc). Further characteristics of the participants of the sentence may be indicated by non-manual features (e.g. raised eyebrows, puffed cheeks and roaming eye-gaze for CARELESS DRIVER). Laugesen (1993: 77) confirms that for SL users, non-manual features (e.g. facial expression), repetition, speed and duration take the place of English adjectives, and thus writers whose L1 is a SL may be relatively unaccustomed to using lexically separate descriptors.

However, the notion that BSL influences DE is problematic because DE, and interference presumed to be from SLs, also occurs in the English of non-signing deaf writers (Lichtenstein 1993: 124-5; Maxwell and Falick 1992: 364; Strong 1985). This could be partly because the non-stressed (i.e. difficult to hear or lip read)

¹⁰ FINISHED is a central grammatical feature of BSL and ASL, having grammaticalised into the clause-final past and perfective tense marker FINISHED in ASL (see e.g. Pfau and Steinbach 2005: 3) and BEEN in BSL.

features of English coincide with those elements of English that are conspicuously absent from, or used less in, BSL (e.g. articles and prepositions; see Ivimey 1976: 111). As Deaf people created and nurtured BSL in an environment dominated by English, it is of course probable that features of English which were redundant or cumbersome in a spatial and visual language (such as grammatical prepositions) were abolished. And research has shown that Deaf children who receive input in manually coded English, rather than ASL, still produce forms resembling ASL (Gee and Goodhart 1988: 49), eliminating signs for English inflections, determiners and copulas in favour of ASL features such as classifiers and directionality (Strong 1988: 120; Strong 1985).

Another problem with DE as an interlanguage is that interferences tend to occur for form-related pairs, not meaning-related pairs (Kroll and Tokowicz 2001: 51), but for an DE user, form-related pairs are unlikely because BSL and English take place in two different modalities. It is possible that form-related interference could involve similar lip patterns, because lip patterns are integral parts of BSL signs and of course are also used in English. Examples of potentially interfering form-related pairs are the lip pattern for BSL's existential HAVE and the English perfective marker have, and the BSL lip pattern 'woof' (used with the sign FURIOUS) and the English onomatopoeic word woof.

Therefore, there are several phenomena that lend support to the notion of DE as an interlanguage between BrE and BSL, and current research tends to frame DE in this way. However, the concept of DE as an interlanguage places the Deaf writer in a rather passive position, trapped in a purgatory between their L1 and L2, and in an

isolated position because an interlanguage exists on a variable basis within the individual only (Selinker 1972), without reference to larger sociolinguistic or cultural significance. To counterbalance this, the following section will consider DE as code-switching or blending, which emphasises the socio-cultural significance of DE, casts Deaf writers in more active, creative roles, and attends even more closely to the influences of SLs.

4. Deaf English as code-blending

When unintentional interference occurs, DE can be considered an interlanguage. However, intentionality is difficult to determine, and it is thus possible that some DE users are deliberately code-blending, i.e. mixing BSL features into their written English, as this Deaf-UK member explains:

I used to do 'good English' with few errors. I am now being more true to myself, allowing Deaf English to 'intrude' in my texts and messages even to hearing people, using metaphors and illustrations plus being very pragmatic.

Notions of code-blending and interlanguage are not mutually exclusive; code-blending is involved in some, but not all, interlanguages. But generally, interlanguages contain mainly unintentional interferences, and code-blending involves conscious, deliberate and often creative addition of lexical items, language structures from the other language (OL) to the base language (BL). Changing a word, phrase or sentence from the BL into one from the OL is known as code-switching (Grosjean 2001: 6). Because it does not involve morphosyntactic and/or phonological adaptation, code-

switching is distinct from borrowing¹¹ (ibid). Code-blending involves mixing languages at the structural level (Grosjean 2001: 1), and is a more accurate way to describe bimodal bilingualism such as that involved in DE (Bishop and Hicks 2005). In a text-based format such as an egroup, it is impossible to use the lexicon of BSL but it is feasible for Deaf writers to use some of its structural features.

Before examples of this phenomenon are discussed, some problems with the notion of DE as code-blending should be explained. First, intentional code-blending occurs more when the bilingual individual is more proficient in their L2 (Poullisse and Bongaerts 1994 in Grosjean 2001: 20), and as mentioned above, it has been found in several studies that gaining full proficiency in English is extremely challenging and often impossible for many Deaf people. Second, unintentional interferences are problematic to differentiate from conscious borrowings or deliberately mixed structures (Poplack 1985 in Grosjean 2001: 14), especially in written language. In spoken language, intentional switches can sometimes be distinguished from unintentional interference by salient clues such as hesitation, repetition, intonation, metalinguistic commentary (ibid). In the case of writing, these clues are often not available, though it is possible that asterisks, quotes, italics, etc could be used to signal intentionality.

Despite these problems, it is worth considering whether some DE users might be producing interferences intentionally, particularly in light of the social model of Deafness. Though no instances of

¹¹ Actual borrowings from a SL into a spoken language seem to be rare; however, an ASL mouth gesture 'pah', associated with the ASL sign FINALLY/SUCCESS has been used in American English (Bickford 2006).

BSL/English code-blending could be found in the literature, two examples of ASL/English code-blending can be discussed.

The first example is from a member of Gallaudet University, Deaf Throat, who employs code-blending in his email texts, structuring much of the English according to ASL rules and describing ASL signs in English, “turning the tables on those who think it is useful to sign ASL signs in English order” (Hafer 2006; see Appendix 11.3).

Deaf Throat wait for answer. Waiting, waiting, waiting.
Deaf Throat check and check e-mail, check email
again. Deaf Throat ask, check, ask many people on
campus. Deaf Throat finish ask people who are Deaf
and who are Hearing...Deaf Throat done ask
people... Deaf Throat feel puzzled, but mind pop and
can see [the board] is just a token committee... What
matter with [X] and [Y]... That enough for making up
about more excuses...

Though the code-blends here are quite deliberate, this text has features similar to those of general (presumably unintentional) DE use such as missing copulas (What matter with...) and missing tense markers (Deaf Throat ask, check...). The code-blends here also involve idiomatic language consistent with ASL and Deaf culture (Hopkins 2006) such as the repetition of Waiting, waiting, waiting and the sign description mind pop. In short, much of Deaf Throat’s writing could be considered a gloss, i.e. a “hybridisation” of ASL and English (Supalla et al 2001: 185).

The “state of activation” of a given language at a given time by a bilingual is their language mode (Grosjean 2001: 2), so perhaps Deaf Throat could be said to be in something like ‘English bilingual mode’, where English is the base language and BSL features are interspersed (see Grosjean 2001: 2-3). However, a true bilingual

mode would require the ability to use the lexicon, which is impossible as BSL is not generally considered an orthographic language. BSL-English code switching can be much richer in face-to-face or video communication, e.g. when BSL signs are used with an English structure or to represent English idioms (for instance, using the BSL signs JUMP and GUN to produce the English idiomatic phrase jump the gun).

Another example of code-blending can be found in the speech and writing of hearing children of Deaf adults, or CODAs (Bishop and Hicks 2005). CODAs often self-identify as Deaf (ibid: 189-91) and may code-blend by copying their Deaf parents' or siblings' ways of speaking (ibid: 195-6; 201-2). Their speech and writing had many similarities to DE. Like Deaf Throat's DE, CODA-talk was found to feature missing copulas, determiners and prepositions, dropped subjects, omission of do or will, infinitives without to, and description of ASL signs in English such as orange mouth ('keep it to yourself') (Bishop and Hicks 2005: 204-6; 208-10). This sign description feature, a mixture of glossing and English words, notably included the gloss "big" being used for emphasis (to suggest the intensity and often increased use of the signing space of an equivalent expression in ASL) in a sentence like I am big excite, or He big sick (ibid: 207). Interestingly, a similar use of big by a 9-year-old Deaf boy ('The man is car at the looking big') was noted by Webster (1986: 192), who did not explain it as code-blending but conjectured that the boy was using his own "unique grammatical rule". This raises the question of how much DE that was formerly construed as incorrect or insufficient English was actually code-blending. As Hafer (2006) suggested, the converse of written or spoken DE is English-influenced signing, which is known as "contact

signing" and includes mouthing or whispering English words and using prepositions like ON, more connectives like BECAUSE, English word order and English morphology (Lucas and Valli 1992 in Bishop and Hicks 2005: 199). As this is normally recognised as some kind of code-mixing or blending, it seems likely that code-blending is an appropriate way to describe DE as well.

The fact that code-blending has rarely been considered in studies of DE is perhaps partly due to the influence of language status in notions of BSL/English bilingualism. The belief that sign language is inferior to spoken language has persisted due partly to the fact that written BSL requires an English orthographic system (Bishop and Hicks 2005: 195), and that any BSL discourse almost always includes a substantial number of fingerspelled loanwords from English. Because of this large status differential, BSL users may not only "deactivate" their language in the English monolingual mode, but completely "inhibit" it (see Grosjean 2001: 5; Green 1998) due to its perceived inferiority.

5. Data and methodology

Notions of DE as interlanguage and code-blending can form the foundation for an investigation of how much the salient grammatical features of DE reflect features of BSL, and whether there are there enough reflective features amongst a large enough group of DE writers to justify DE as a sociolinguistic entity. Addressing these questions will involve both qualitative and quantitative analyses using a corpus of egroup and email messages.

The nature of DE cannot be determined adequately without the use of a corpus (Ivimey 1976: 112). Recent studies of DE and CODA-talk (e.g. Erman 2004 and Bishop and Hicks 2005) have used egroup corpora, suggesting that these are fruitful sources of data. For example, code-switching occurs more in informal settings (Grosjean 2001: 8), like egroups. Specially-created Web corpora constitute relatively homogenous and easily accessible data sets (Hoffmann 2007: 152) that would be incredibly costly to create in any other way, particularly in the case of DE, where interpreters and/or translators may be needed, or the data may need to be collected by inviting participants to attend writing sessions (as in Laugesen 1993).

For the quantitative analysis, messages were downloaded from the Deaf-UK discussion group on Yahoo! after gaining permission from its founder and moderator John Savva. The 32,500 messages downloaded were written by at least 2,500 different people, and spanned 102 months from the group's inception in August 1998 to January 2007. After elimination of a large number of repeat and/or quoted messages with a Perl program, and automated¹² messages with a text editor, the corpus contained about six million words.¹³ It was not possible to remove all of the irrelevant material due to the size of the corpus and the time available. Additionally, because not all members were Deaf BSL users, and because newspapers and other outside texts were quoted in many messages, the corpus was not all Deaf UK English. To deal with this problem, a list of Deaf BSL

¹² Text like "Free Web-based e-mail groups -- <http://www.eGroups.com>" appeared at the bottom of many messages.

¹³ The mechanics of creating a modern, dedicated corpus of Web material are explained in Hoffmann (2007).

users who self-identified as such on Deaf-UK was created, and a smaller, one-million-word corpus of messages from these members was generated from the larger corpus. This smaller corpus was compared with the five-million-word remainder of the Deaf-UK corpus¹⁴ and with both the written (90 million word) and spoken (10 million word) sections of the British National Corpus, or BNC (Leech et al 1994). Features of BSL whose rough equivalents could occur in English were chosen from Sutton-Spence and Woll (1999), Deuchar (1984), Lilley (2006) and my own knowledge. These aspects were all grammatical and structural in nature, because the different modalities of BSL and English substantially reduce the probability of lexical or phonological similarities. Selected features included quantities and types of copulas, modals, prepositions and conjunctions, as well as positioning of time adverbials.

This quantitative analysis has a few limitations. Firstly, issues of age of language acquisition and levels of SL or English abilities, though illuminative, could not be considered in this study due to practical reasons and space limitation. Secondly, no large-scale BSL corpus yet exists,¹⁵ which makes a firm determination of BSL grammatical features impossible. Third, given the time restraints for this study, it was not feasible to create a directly matching or equivalent corpus of Standard British English egroup messages for comparative purposes, and there were no such corpora readily available to my knowledge, which necessitated the use of the BNC. Like many Web forums, Deaf-UK has traits of both written and spoken language

¹⁴ Unfortunately, this remainder undoubtedly contained some BSL users as well, as all the BSL users in the Deaf-UK corpus could not be isolated.

¹⁵ A national BSL corpus is currently being planned by researchers at University College London.

because the communication is “asynchronous”, i.e. minutes, hours or days may pass before writers respond to messages (Hoffmann 2007: 153). Thus, the written and spoken BNC were both used for comparison. However, it is possible that egroup DE is closer to spoken language because it approximates spontaneous spoken DE as much as is reasonable (Erman 2004: 37; 46). Finally, as with most computer-mediated communication, in Deaf-UK most specific personal information on age, gender or nationality is somewhat unreliable (see Hoffmann 2007: 162). Authorship may also be spurious, because posters may have copied and pasted messages from elsewhere, such as from online newspapers, which dilutes the likeness of the egroup to spoken language (ibid: 162-3).

For the qualitative analysis, I evaluated email messages sent to me by several Deaf BSL users in response to personal queries and appeals on Deaf-UK, other egroups, and a webpage I set up at <http://jmbwebster.bimserver.com>, asking Deaf people from the UK to send me an email they wrote. The page contained the English text as well as a BSL translation that was checked by native BSL users, as my signing skills are not advanced. It was made clear that all data provided would be anonymised and confidential. This BSL translation was also posted on YouTube, as was a later study update detailing the specific questions for my analysis. Because only a limited number of emails could be collected, qualitative analysis was also performed on two blog entries by self-identified BSL users (Phillips 2007 and Gaughan 2007), as well as on Deaf-UK messages written by Deaf participants who gave consent.

Qualitative analysis could help to reveal whether there is agreement amongst DE users that they will use English in a particular way. If

DE writers are employing of similar features across the variety, then DE can be considered as perhaps a dialect or a New English: something more uniform than an imprecise interlanguage existing mainly within the individual learner. Provision of qualitative evidence can also shed further light on the quantitative findings. This is particularly important because the quantitative analysis is concerned mainly with frequencies, and thus cannot determine how the words are used and thus how they might reflect BSL influence (e.g. maybe from and by have similar frequencies, but from is used in a standard way more often than by). Furthermore, this qualitative analysis will help to fill a gap left by some previous analyses of DE which have lacked such scrutiny, for example simply calling DE "bland" (e.g. Maxwell and Falick 1992: 359), or identifying DE as similar to ESL English, but providing no grammatical or structural evidence (e.g. Langston and Maxwell 1988: 309).

The qualitative analysis is limited in that educational levels are not known. In sentence evaluation, educational levels are often significant factors, but due to time and resource restraints and the nature of the corpora, these are not possible to determine or control for. However, generally Deaf people must be highly educated in order to produce readable English, as the bulk of their exposure to the language occurs at school. Unlike hearing people, often they cannot become proficient in English simply by living in an English-speaking country. As all of the posters on Deaf-UK produce understandable English, it is reasonable to assume that they are all reasonably well-educated and that the education levels amongst the BNC and Deaf-UK writers are sufficiently similar for my purposes. Eschewing educational and psychological information in this study may actually help to balance over-concern with these factors in

previous DE research, in which somewhat excessive attention has been paid to the intelligence levels of Deaf participants (e.g. Langston and Maxwell 1988; Yashinago-Itano and Snyder 1985). There seem to be significantly fewer equivalent concerns about hearing participants' education and/or intelligence in linguistic research.

6. Analyses

The quantitative and qualitative analyses below will test the hypothesis that BSL does influence DE structurally, and that DE has consistent features across users that may warrant classifying it as something more uniform than an individual-specific interlanguage.

6.1 Quantitative analysis

Examination of the literature suggested that the corpora searches should focus on four areas: prepositions and conjunctions; copulas; modals; and time adverbials.¹⁶ Copulas, prepositions and time descriptors in DE have been examined previously by Yashinago-Itano and Snyder (1985: 78-9) and Ivimey (1976: 107; 109-11), but not with the intention of testing for BSL influence.

Modals, copulas, prepositions and conjunctions were selected because they are all fundamental building blocks of English and will thus appear in copious amounts in most corpora, allowing for increased reliability and validity. They were also suitable because BSL has lexical (manual) signs equivalent to some English prepositions, conjunctions, copulas and modals, but not others. The

¹⁶ Prepositions and conjunctions were grouped together for the sake of ease because they are function words with similar usage.

BSL literature and my rudimentary BSL knowledge was sufficient to determine which English copulas, modals and conjunctions have rough BSL equivalents, but for the prepositions I relied on an expert native¹⁷ BSL user and instructor (Lilley 2006), whose comments are in bold in Appendix 11.2.

Frequencies per million were then found for the selected words and phrases from each category (e.g. will, have, can, etc for modals) in all four corpora (BSL users, Other Deaf-UK members, written BNC and spoken BNC). The words were then put into groups depending on whether they have rough BSL equivalents. Frequencies per million for each group were then averaged and presented in a table to determine any significant quantitative disparities in their usage amongst BSL users, Other Deaf-UK members and Standard English users (i.e. the BNC corpora).

The examination of time adverbials differed slightly, because the objective was to find the proportion of time adverbials that were sentence-initial, rather than the total occurrences as was the case with the modals, copulas, prepositions and conjunctions. In BSL, time is usually established clause-initially because its verbs do not have morphological tense (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999: 181-82). To find whether the proportion of sentence-initial time adverbials was higher in BSL users' English, ten time adverbials were selected (e.g. now, tomorrow, last week). For each one, the frequencies per million of capitalised instances and total instances in each corpus were found. Sentences in which the time word was used as a subject rather than an adverbial (e.g. "Yesterday was great news for BSL

¹⁷ Deaf 'native' BSL users are very rare, because to be considered 'native' a BSL user must have learned the language from her/his parents, and only 10% of Deaf children are born to Deaf parents.

users”) were discounted. This captured most sentence-initial occurrences; fortunately, total frequencies for these items were low enough to allow a quick scan of the BSL users and Other Deaf-UK members concordances to eliminate any time adverbials that were capitalised but not sentence-initial, or sentence-initial but not capitalised. The proportion of sentence-initial time adverbials was found by dividing the number of capitalised instances per million for each word by the total frequencies per million. The resulting numbers were then added together for each corpus, and multiplied by 10 to create whole numbers, which generated an impression of the overall proportion of sentence-initial time adverbials in each corpus (see Table 5 on page 31).

Because many of the words chosen for quantitative analysis have large differences in relative frequencies (e.g. copulas be and become), all of the tables below except Table 5 display proportions between categories instead of simple frequencies, because this more clearly shows where one category stands out. To create these tables, frequencies per million were entered into the PowerPoint charts and the charts were then automatically converted to show proportional relationships.

In the text above and the tables below, the phrase ‘roughly equivalent’ has been used to describe the relationships between various BSL signs and English words. ‘Roughly equivalent’ is intended to suggest that BSL signs are entities unto themselves and have no intrinsic link to English words, but that mouth pattern, fingerspelling, and/or semantics may indicate a parallel between a word and sign, and they may thus be considered roughly equivalent. My knowledge of BSL is incomplete, and systematic study of this

language is relatively new, so some of these judgements may be questioned.

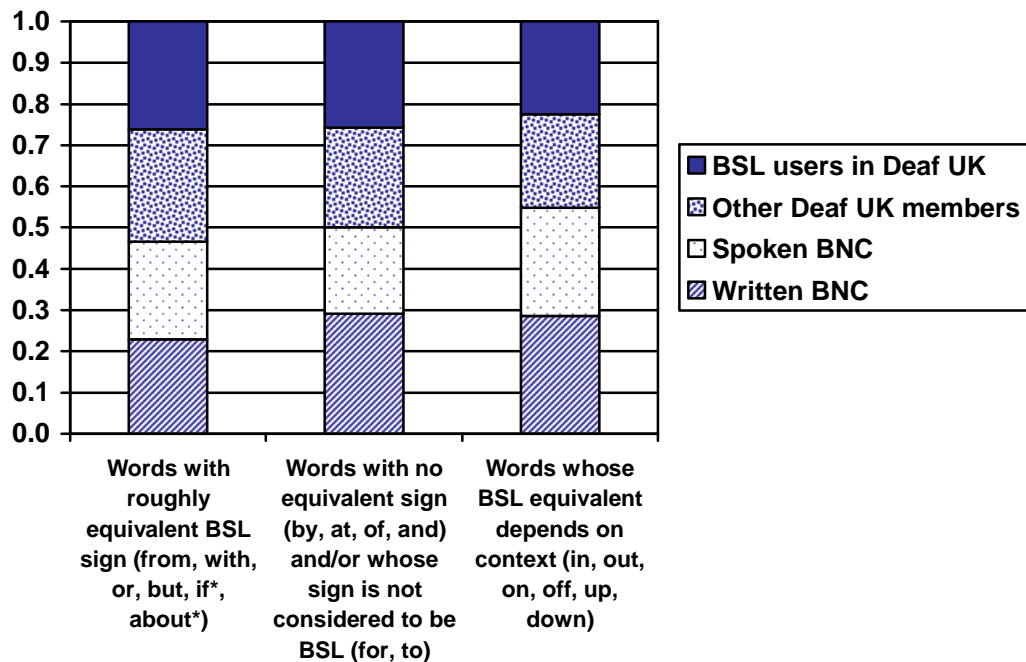


Table 1: Proportions of average frequencies per million for prepositions and conjunctions in each corpus with roughly equivalent BSL signs, no corresponding BSL signs, and BSL signs that vary depending on context. See Appendix 11.1 for a breakdown of the prepositions and conjunctions. *The signs IF and ABOUT are based on fingerspellings, though ABOUT has been reduced over time so that now only A and T are apparent.

Table 1 shows that both Deaf-UK corpora have proportionally higher frequencies of words with equivalent BSL signs than words without, when compared to the written and spoken BNC. However, the BSL users corpus contains very similar amounts of words with and without equivalent BSL signs, suggesting that BSL is not a major influence here. The Deaf-UK corpora contain even fewer words whose BSL signs depend on context, but again the BSL users corpus and the Other Deaf-UK members corpus do not differ significantly. These context-dependent prepositions usually do not have a purely lexical equivalent sign in BSL, and usually are not accompanied by a

lip pattern. They all have idiomatic uses in Standard English (e.g. up the creek, worn out, off the wall), most of which are not part of BSL.

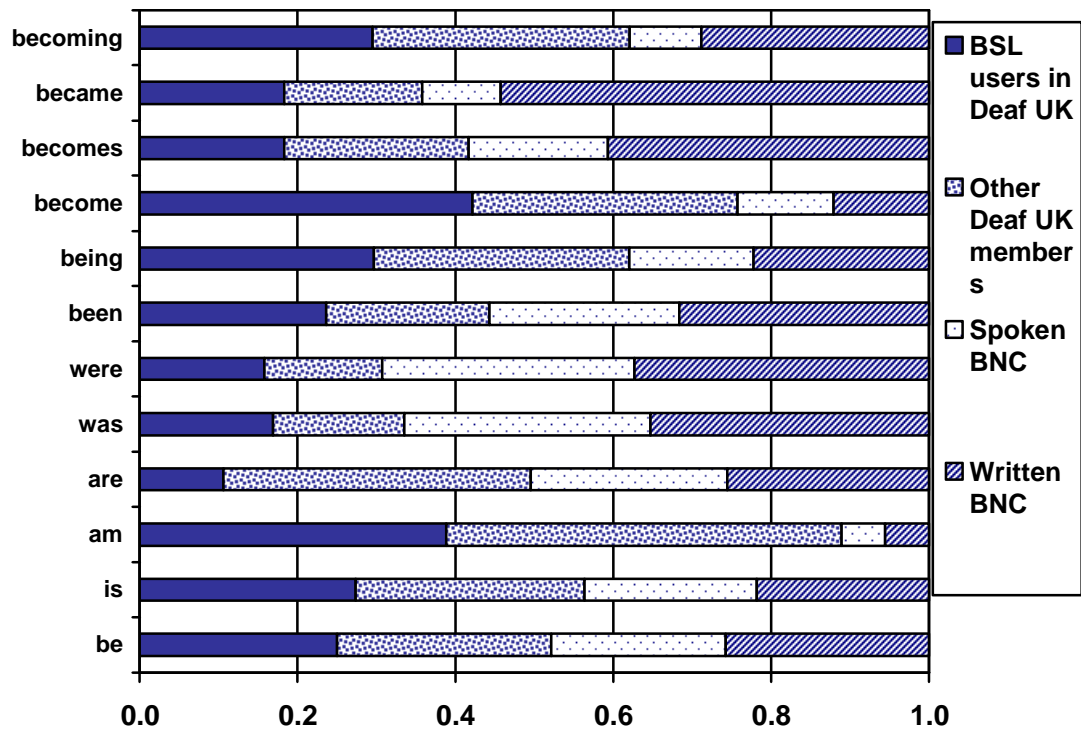


Table 2: Proportions of frequencies per million for the tenses of copulas be (which has no roughly equivalent BSL sign) and become (which does have a roughly equivalent BSL sign).

Table 2 shows the proportional frequencies for tenses of be, which has no rough BSL equivalent, and become, which does. Firstly it is important to note the high incidence for am in the two Deaf-UK corpora, even after all interfering phenomena (notably the unpunctuated abbreviation am meaning ‘morning’) were discounted. This high frequency may be a result of the personal nature of egroup communication, but also might correspond to Petch-Tyson’s (1998) observation that learners tend to use more I pronouns, showing high involvement. The frequency for become is also very high for the two Deaf-UK corpora, and contributes to the higher average frequency for the tenses of become (see Table 3 below).

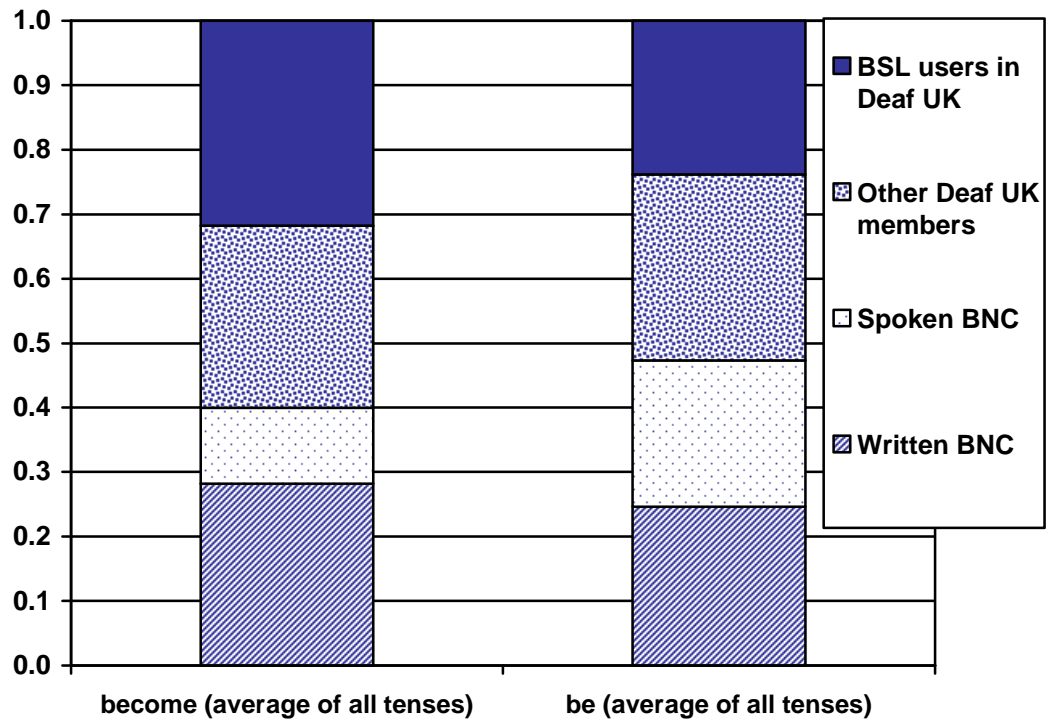


Table 3: Proportions of average frequencies per million for the tenses of copulas be and become.

Table 3 shows that there is an appreciable difference between occurrences of be and become for BSL users versus the Other Deaf-UK members: be and its tenses occur less in BSL users' writing. When the raw frequencies for the be tenses are averaged in each corpus, and these averages are entered into a log likelihood calculator (Rayson 2005), the resulting log likelihood value is 7.25, which is significant at the level of $p < 0.01$; in other words, there is a 99% certainty that this difference is not due to chance. Since the higher number of BSL users is the only difference between the BSL users corpus and the Other Deaf-UK members corpus, it is possible that BSL may be the influence behind the reduced use of be. BSL lacks a typical be-like copula, and has been called a creole for that reason (Johnston and Schembri 2007: 72; Deuchar 1984; Fischer 1978). Other interlanguages, pidgins and creoles may also lack a copula, so this phenomenon alone may not prove BSL influence, but

the fact that become, which has a roughly equivalent lexical BSL sign, is used proportionally more than be amongst self-identified BSL users (but not Deaf-UK members as a whole) also suggests the possibility of BSL influence.

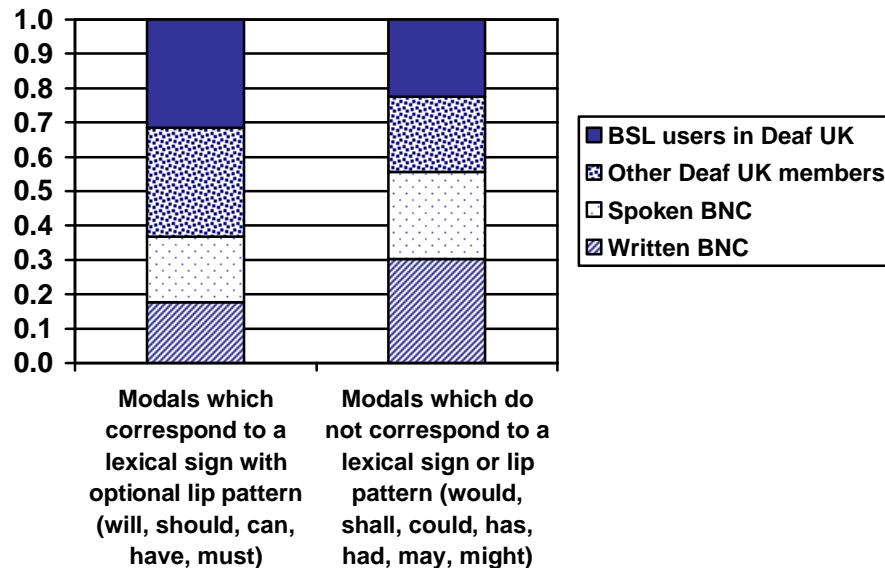


Table 4: Proportions of average frequencies (per million) of modals in each corpus. See Appendix 11.1 for a breakdown of the modals.

Table 4 shows that modals with roughly equivalent BSL signs have higher incidences in the Deaf-UK corpora than in the spoken and written BNC, and the opposite is true for modals with no roughly equivalent BSL signs. The largest difference can be seen with the modals shall and had (see Table 7 in Appendix 11.1). However, there is no significant difference between the BSL users corpus and the Other Deaf-UK members corpus; in fact, the Other Deaf-UK members corpus reveals a larger gap in usage of modals with and without a corresponding sign than the BSL users corpus. This perhaps hints that BSL is not the major influence, but the fact that the two Deaf-UK corpora have much greater frequencies per million of the modals with corresponding signs should prompt further

enquiry, particularly since these two groups of modals are rather random apart from the fact that some are roughly equivalent to BSL signs and some are not.

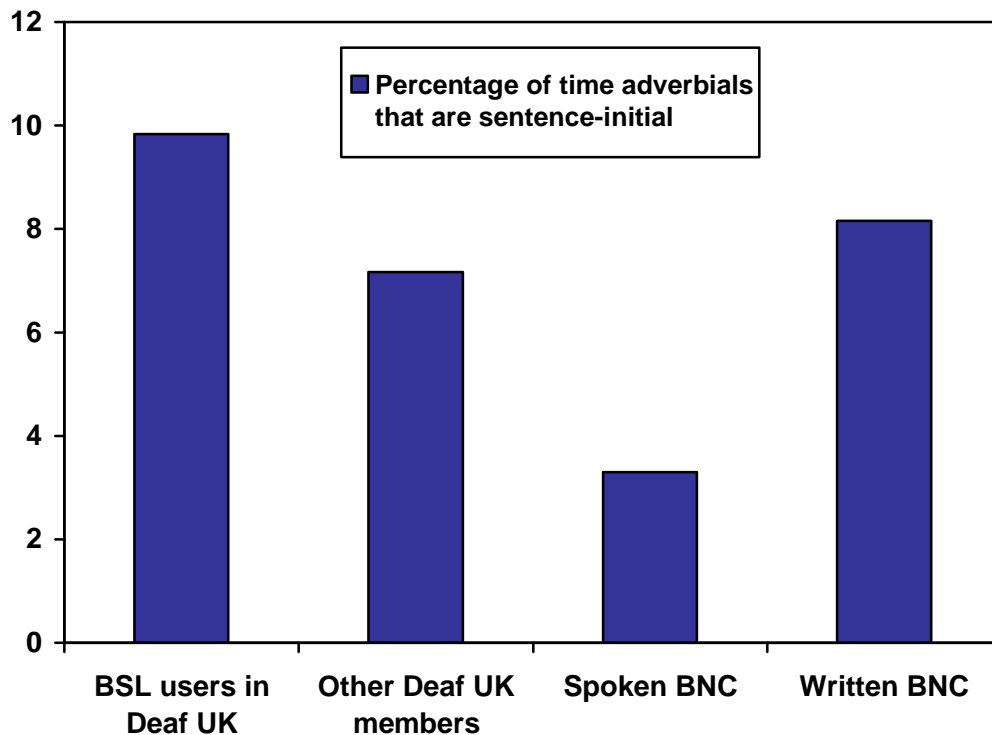


Table 5: Percentages of frequencies per million of time adverbials that are sentence-initial in each corpus. See Appendix 11.1 for a breakdown of these time adverbials.

Table 5 is perhaps most suggestive of BSL influence. It shows that BSL users employ proportionally more sentence-initial adverbials than the other members of Deaf-UK, and far more than English speakers in the spoken BNC, which is noteworthy because egroup communication is as close to spoken English as written DE can get (Erman 2004: 37; 46). Nearly ten per cent of the time adverbials in the BSL users corpus were sentence-initial, compared with around eight per cent in the written BNC, seven per cent for the Other Deaf-UK members, and just over three per cent in the spoken BNC. Further impromptu searches indicate that if more time adverbial

phrases were considered (e.g. last August, next year, in two months), an even more significant difference between BSL users and other writers may be apparent, and the findings may hint even more strongly at BSL influence.

Throughout this quantitative analysis, the general trend of the Deaf-UK corpora versus the BNC has been as hypothesised: toward BSL influence. But the BSL users corpus has only differed from the Other Deaf-UK members corpus in the case of copulas and time adverbials, thus strongly validating BSL influence for these two phenomena only.

6.2 Qualitative analysis

The following analysis will qualitatively scrutinise any features relevant to the quantitative analysis above, including the use of copulas, modals, conjunctions and prepositions. Other possibly BSL-influenced grammatical phenomena with consistent saliency will be briefly considered as well. Time adverbials will not be considered further here because the nature of their use is reasonably clear from the quantitative analysis and a glance at several concordances: they are used more often sentence-initially by BSL users than by other writers and speakers, and concordance examination suggests that they are rarely used in a non-standard manner.

The first aspect of the data worth qualitative examination is the lack of *be* copulas. This is apparent throughout the BSL users corpus and amongst other self-identified BSL users, including blog writers Gaughan (2007) and Phillips (2007). An interesting feature regarding copula omission is that it seems to take place more often toward the end of compound and complex clauses. The following

writers seem to use the verb in the first clause in the standard way, but leave out the copula from the second clause (the relevant areas are bolded):

(1) The only phone number they had was my parent's phone number and that supposed to be for emergencies... The poor victim used to get calls at 5 am in morning asking if Fintan there! ...I should...make sure my vibrating alarm clock battery in working order before bed.

(Gaughan 2007)

(2) ...he will be base in London on project which funded from the council.

(Email communication)

(3) I hope you don't mind me asking - how you know these dancers Deaf?

(Deaf-UK)

(4) I sometime feel like a deaf and dumb as left out from chit-chat.

(Phillips 2007)

(5) ...we have returned back to the UK and settling down well!

(Email communication)

(6) Well, you are hearing and you know whatever being said on TV.

(Deaf-UK)

This may be reflective of BSL structure in that BSL verbs have no morphological tense, and once time, place and subjects are established lexically in a BSL clause, they do not need to be repeated through the tense of a copula or any other verb. Thus, for the last example above, the present tense is established by are and the second person subject is established by you in the first clause, so reinforcement of the present tense through is between whatever and being is perhaps perceived as redundant by the writer, as it would be in BSL.

Another noteworthy feature in the data is the use of been as a past perfective marker. The sign BEEN, which is usually accompanied by a lip pattern similar to that of the English word been, is a past and past perfective tense marker in BSL. In the following example, has been and have been are used in place of had as the third-person singular past perfective tense (cf. Deaf Throat's similar use of finish and done in Appendix 11.3):

(7) ...he has been discussed with president that people from members didn't vote last 2 years ago about rate money that's why he have been protested with white top with group and try to be sensible and peace without violence...

(Phillips 2007)

Example (7) also highlights the non-standard use of have, which can be observed in other parts of the data. The findings on modals are not perhaps as clear or suggestive of BSL influence as those for copulas, but one consistent feature is the non-standard use of have, has, and had, even where most other tense and verb agreements match:

(8) I am writing to inform you all the members that I has been neglecting of the policy regarding to copyright issues...

(Deaf-UK)

(9) While I was a Scout, about 12 years old, I have been bullied by white troops for being black.

(Phillips 2007)

(10) Anne have sent an email saying that nokia is about 359 pounds.

(Deaf-UK)

(11) My poor neighbours living above me has to answer the door...

(Gaughan 2007)

Sometimes, like the be copula, have seems to be left out:

(12) ...my Mum explained something brief as she expected the leader explained to me full information.

(Phillips 2007)

(13) ...you don't forget that they are working class to got little money to unable to attend to X...

(Deaf-UK)

Will and would are also sometimes omitted or given a non-standard replacement:

(14) ...don't worry if you are busy as it always be another time!

(Email communication)

(15) Now we wouldn't want them to come out of their warm offices do we??

(Gaughan 2007)

These modals, have, will, and would, are perhaps non-standard here because they are used very differently in English and BSL. The lexical BSL sign HAVE is normally a main verb (e.g. CAR HE HAVE ~ 'He has a car'), and is also used as an existential verb (e.g. COFFEE HAVE ~ 'There is coffee'). The past perfective tense in BSL is usually marked with the sign BEEN (see above) and not HAVE. Regarding English will, there is a more equivalent BSL lexical sign WILL that is used modally, most often in the deontic sense. WILL is used for all tenses (because BSL tense is established with separate clause-initial signs), and any lip pattern usually appears similar to that of English will. The WILL sign would not be equivalent to English epistemic would, as in example (15) above. In short, modals in BSL are often used differently to English modals in terms of semantics and structure, and this may cause interference sufficient to create omission and non-standard use in DE as in the examples above. This signals that it would be desirable to carry out a more specific and in-depth study of how different modals and their various senses are used in BSL and DE.

Missing or superfluous conjunctions also appear often in the data. Omitted conjunctions, chiefly and, seem to be more numerous than

extraneous ones. And is often omitted for both clause-linking and word-linking purposes, as below:

(16) ...your local colleges or universities students' union will help you but...students' have not sign language you have write note to them back.

(Deaf-UK)

(17) ...different kind of registration types to make easy clear...

(Deaf-UK)

Superfluous conjunctions are rarer but sometimes appear in dependent clauses:

(18) As a postman and if I was late for work or over slept the post office ring you up.

(Gaughan 2007)

This non-standard use of and contrasts with that of but. But seems almost always to be used in the standard way in DE as in example (16). This may be because but has a roughly equivalent lexical sign in BSL, but and does not as BSL structure does not require it. BSL structure is particularly reflected where adjectives or nouns are listed without the use of and as in easy clear in example (17).

Prepositions in the DE data are a much more complicated issue than are conjunctions, modals or copulas. Because space does not allow qualitative analysis encompassing all 15 prepositions from the quantitative analysis above (see Table 6 in Appendix 11.1), this investigation will focus primarily on the prepositions that

concordances suggest are most frequently used in an unusual way, namely to, of, for, and with. These prepositions have in common that they are not usually locative, unlike the contextually-dependent category of prepositions from the quantitative analysis (i.e. on, off, in, out, up and down). Though locative prepositions like on and up are not always used with their concrete meanings (e.g. they may be used idiomatically), it is possible that DE contains more standard use of these than of prepositions like for which are important in linear but not spatial syntax. Indeed, it has been found previously that Deaf children understand locatives better than other prepositions (Kempt and Maxwell 1989).

The preposition to appears to be the one most often employed in non-standard ways in DE:

(19) Thanks so much to permission me to use your name!
(Email communication)

(20) Taking subtitles off, could be in serious violation to the Human Rights Act.
(Deaf-UK)

(21) ...dont forget that he came to meet people in the pub to made his realise about people is unable to attend to the meeting...
(Deaf-UK)

(22) I keep saying to myself to email to you for the past few weeks because I know you are back from Australia!!
(Email communication)

(23) I have add your name for my reference to the job I applied last Tuesday.

(Email communication)

(24) [She] would reduce him in tears... in fifth year, we were introduced in biology lessons...

(Deaf-UK)

(25) Oh yeah, Just let you know that we will be coming up to Birmingham tomorrow...

(Email communication)

(26) He was forbidden to approach to the school in few hundred yards and were not allowed to speak or approach to the pupils.

(Deaf-UK)

(27) I also enjoyed to playing any sports.

(Phillips 2007)

(28) It lead the post office getting a letter from solicitors...

(Gaughan 2007)

To is sometimes used as a replacement for other prepositions, particularly for as in examples (19) and (23), and of as in example (20). Example (23) is especially interesting as it reveals confusion with to and for as well as omission of for. These non-standard uses may be a result of BSL influence in that standard BSL has no signs equivalent to for and to as the relations shown by these prepositions in English are shown spatially in BSL, e.g. PRESENT GIVE WHO MY MUM (Lilley 2006). To may also be used superfluously as in (21),

(22), (26) and (27), omitted in favour of another preposition as in (24) or left out completely as in (25) and (28). Example (26) is notable because to is left out of speak (to)...the pupils, and yet an extra to is used in approach to.

Of is also employed superfluously after adjectives and modifiers in DE as in examples (29) to (31) below, and sometimes omitted, as in example (32):

(29) Whatever I was so bored, I often played different of famous characters... there was unnecessary of communication.

(Phillips 2007)

(30) ...he will be starting in the next of couple of weeks.

(Email communication)

(31) I know many of deaf people have subscribed to NTL...

(Deaf-UK)

(32) But I still had the problem them coming round to my place...

(Gaughan 2007)

Like to and for, of has no BSL equivalent, which may contribute to its non-standard use. Of is used less in the Deaf-UK corpora than in the BNC (see Table 6 in Appendix 11.1), but in the qualitative analysis it seemed to be used extraneously more often than it was omitted.

With also tends to be added superfluously, as in (33) and (34) below. It is also used in place of over and on in (35) and about in (36):

(33) ...they came to meet deaf people in the pub or outside the entrance from Centre to want have a good time with chatting with deaf people...

(Deaf-UK)

(34) Unfortunately I was only a Deaf person among with rest of hearing troops and leaders.

(Phillips 2007)

(35) ...that's why he got idea to discuss with them to set up protest with white top about focus with rate money registration fee problem issues

(Deaf-UK)

(36) I am just simply talking about the John who is trying to tell us something so important with the issue that we all need to know.

(Deaf-UK)

This overuse of with could be due to the fact that unlike to and for, with roughly corresponds to a lexical BSL sign.

Other prepositions are also added superfluously or used in place of another word. Examples of this include (37) to (40) below, where out of is used in place of off;¹⁸ from is used in place of by; on is

¹⁸ This echoes the findings of Erman (2004) and Erman and Warren (2000) that DE exhibits non-standard use of grammatical prefabricated structures.

used in place of of or for; at is used superfluously; and for is used in place of to or about:

(37) Sorry...your comments is totally out of the track.

(Deaf-UK)

(38) ...he will be base in London on project which funded from the council.

(Email communication)

(39) Also enjoyed learning the new skills on Swing Dancing!

(Email communication)

(40) Most of them approached at me for learning more BSL.

(Phillips 2007)

In contrast, the conditionals if and though seem to be left out frequently in DE, rather than added or used as replacements, especially when they form part of an adverb clause such as even if or even though as in examples (41) and (42):

(41) I didn't want to put up with them again, even they would offer me to teach BSL.

(Phillips 2007)

(42) ...that is so expensive - more than I expected!!
Even it is without minicom software!

(Deaf-UK)

A few more DE grammatical features, albeit less related to the quantitative analysis above, were also notable in the qualitative analysis, namely non-standard usage of relative clause markers and omission of subjects. Firstly, like prepositions, that and who in relative clauses also seem to be used in a non-standard way in DE. Deaf pupils have previously been found to misunderstand sentences with relative clauses, e.g. The boy who kissed the girl ran away (Webster 1986: 91), so it is perhaps unsurprising that relative clause use in DE differs significantly from that in Standard English, as in examples (43) and (44):

(43) Nowadays, I really hope there are no Deaf have experience like me.

(Phillips 2007)

(44) As you know that we have returned back to the UK ...as you see that I put the 'application' in the subject of the email...

(Email communication)

Unlike many spoken languages, BSL has no rough equivalents to English relative clause markers such as that and who. This may be a factor in the non-standard use of these items in DE.

Another feature in the data is subject omission which has also been found to occur in CODA-talk (Bishop and Hicks 2005). Subjects in BSL are often not explicitly stated if they are obvious from the context or after they are established in discourse. This aspect of BSL structure seems to be echoed in the DE examples below:

(45) Missed so much information.

(Phillips 2007)

(46) ...please do not worry as know it is in the last minutes.

(Email communication)

Finally, though it is not strictly grammatical, the inclusion of BSL-like idiomatic phrases in DE was observed in the data and is felt to be worthy of comment. Examples (48) and (49) typify this finding:

(47) ...they wont intention to discriminated them but only
problem rate fee for registration. that's all.

(Deaf-UK)

(48) ...beautiful BSL IN FRONT OF hearing troops. Most of
them dropped their jaw.

(Phillips 2007)

Two idiomatic BSL signs, THAT'S IT (used to emphasise completion) and JAW DROP (used to signify surprise) are possibly reflected in the examples above. Of course, these phrases are also used in English, but the ways they are used here suggest BSL influence, particularly the non-standard dropped their jaw. British English and BSL exist in the same country, and English has considerable dominance over minority languages like BSL, which means that some BSL idioms have very similar English versions. Use of English glosses for idiomatic ASL signs was a feature of CODA-talk observed by Bishop and Hicks (2005). It would be particularly enlightening to test more rigorously whether rough equivalents of idiomatic SL signs appear in DE as well as in CODA-talk. To investigate this,

frequencies could be found for idiomatic English phrases with and without rough BSL equivalents in a DE corpus, and this process could be repeated with a Standard English corpus for comparative purposes.

7. Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative analyses above suggest that there are several identifiable grammatical differences between BSL users' English and the English used by other deaf people, and that these differences are sometimes reflective of BSL structure. Even more strongly, these analyses point to firm differences between DE and Standard English and sufficient commonality in DE to justify a discussion of whether DE might become a New English.

Firstly, the analyses indicate that in terms of copula use and time adverbials, BSL structure is reflected in the DE of BSL users. To a lesser extent, the qualitative analysis hinted at BSL influence in terms of past perfective marking, the use of *have* and *will*, and the use of *and* and *but* by BSL users, but further research would be necessary to confirm these findings quantitatively. A study of modal use in BSL and DE would be particularly instructive. Preposition use in the DE of BSL users did not seem to differ significantly from that of other DE writers, nor did the use of modals generally. However, these findings are limited by the fact that BSL and English knowledge and/or age of acquisition could not be controlled for. If future research confirms that features of BSL can be observed in the DE of BSL users, this could help to raise the status of BSL as a language, because DE users whose first language is BSL would be understood as very similar to L2 English users whose first language is Spanish, or Urdu, or Russian, etc. Identifying features in the

English of BSL users can also aid understanding of the relationship between the two languages, both sociologically and psychologically.

Secondly, the findings of this study echoes those of other researchers who have suggested that DE is not randomly broken English. The analyses here have revealed that DE has several consistent features and predictable patterns, often indicative of BSL influence, which indicates that DE may have the potential to become a New English dialect. The data presented in this paper has not constituted a sufficiently large foundation for a study of Deaf English as a New English. However, application of the present findings on DE to a New English (NE) framework provided by Schneider (2003) may reveal whether further study of DE as a NE is warranted, and illuminate what is required for DE to develop into a NE.

Because of shared features such as sentence-initial time adverbials, use of a BSL-like past perfective marker, missing be copulas and non-standard use of prepositions (particularly more linear prepositions), it is not unreasonable to suggest that DE could develop into a new, identifiable dialect of English. Schneider (2003) proposes a model in which each NE,¹⁹ such as Pakistani English or Spanish English, goes through stages of identity creations and recreations that culminate in the birth of a new dialect when a social identity is sufficiently perceived (and desired) to be shared amongst a group (ibid: 239). Schneider's model begins at the "foundation" stage, where native and non-native English users start to accommodate to an intermediate version of English (ibid: 244). The model then moves through "exonormative stabilisation", during

¹⁹ New Englishes are also called 'World Englishes' and 'Global Englishes' (Schneider 2003: 234).

which non-English vocabulary items are adopted by speakers of the NE, and “structural nativisation” during which grammatical features begin to form a distinguishable variety through mechanisms such as code-switching, L2 acquisition, and negotiation between the perceived patterns of the two language varieties. The potential NE then moves through “nativisation”, where the NE users can be perceived as a distinct group, new words are formed and more traditionalist language users complain about the new usage (ibid: 248). The final stages in Schneider’s model are “endonormative stabilisation” in which the new variety loses its stigma and gains a more positive status through integration between the interlanguage users and the English-speaking community (ibid: 251), and “differentiation” in which a new dialect is born. These last two stages feature literary creativity in the NE, codification, identity construction and communality, well-known linguistic terminology (e.g. Indian English) and dialect independence (Schneider 2003: 251-3). Applying this model to DE could help to illuminate to where it might fit into the notion of a NE and how likely it is to become a NE.

NEs are generated in circumstances where two or more languages are in use (Schneider 2003: 240). This typically happens when a group of English speakers settles in a non-English-speaking country, which often forces the colonised people to learn English (Schneider 2003: 244). However, the Web is another place where non-English speakers, particularly those whose preferred mode of communication is impossible to faithfully produce in a text-based format (i.e. signers), are frequently compelled to employ English on

a large scale in the presence of native English speakers.²⁰ This may constitute the creation of an environment in which a NE may flourish, and this is the first stage of NE development: “foundation” (ibid). The nature of Web-based communication is a crucial consideration here for DE. A large gap exists between written English, which tends to be consumed by many people, and spoken English, which is more private (Schneider 2003: 238), so in the past it is likely that most DE was read and judged by hearing people in positions of power (e.g. teachers). This power differential, and the fact that DE is usually limited to writing but written English tends to change more slowly than spoken English, may have hindered the development of DE much more than other varieties of English which did not face these dilemmas. However, with the Web, email, and discussion groups, DE began to be produced faster, in greater quantities, on a more casual and egalitarian basis, and more often for the consumption of other Deaf people and supportive hearing people than previously. This combination of factors has made DE more like spoken communication, i.e. more spontaneous and rapidly developing, than it has ever been in the past. Thus, perhaps DE is now on a more equal footing with other Englishes.

In the foundation stage, native and non-native English users will begin to accommodate to an intermediate variety of English (Schneider 2003: 244). In Deaf-UK, non-standard English (which seems to be perceived as DE) is accepted most readily by the group. Those who have written in more formal Standard English have faced criticism for communicating in a way that is inaccessible to many

²⁰ English text still predominates on the Web, but with the advent of vlogs, Skype, Breeze and YouTube, BSL users can produce their first language on the Web and are no longer limited to English.

egroup members, leading to many rather irate postings (see Appendix 11.5 for more examples):

OK, if any of you don't see me as your friend due to my use of a certain standard of English, do make it clear in the next postings and I'll unsubscribe without qualms.

Contrariwise, several BSL users were recently criticised for eschewing English by posting (links to) BSL video messages without English translations. The demand for users to employ an intermediate form of communication on Deaf-UK suggests that the foundation for DE as a NE exists on the Web, and that accommodation may be taking place as group members decide what constitutes appropriate English.

The second stage of Schneider's (2003) model is "exonormative stabilisation", which involves the use of non-English vocabulary items by speakers of the NE, leading to "isms" such as "Indianisms" and "Ghanianisms" (ibid: 246). Several writers have mentioned "deafisms" (starting with Myklebust 1960), albeit these are usually structural and grammatical. Additionally, SL vocabulary has been used in CODA-talk (Bishop and Hicks 2005) and the present study suggests it may be used in DE (see page 44 above), particularly by people who are very skilled in both English and a SL.²¹

The third stage, "structural nativisation", focuses more on structure than lexicon and it is here that DE seems to best fit Schneider's NE model. In this phase, grammatical features begin to form a distinguishable variety through mechanisms such as code-switching, L2 acquisition, and negotiation between the perceived patterns of

²¹ Myklebust's (1960) recognition of "deafisms" does not apply here because it refers to grammar rather than vocabulary.

the two language varieties (Thomason 2001 in Schneider 2003: 246), which have been witnessed in DE. The structural nativisation stage is similar to pidginisation (Schneider 2003: 246-7), and indeed DE has been called pidgin-like (e.g. Charrow 1975). Like the English of colonised people in Schneider's model, the English used by Deaf people is often characterised by hearing native speakers as "'good' or 'broken' according to its communicative usefulness, but not as something worthy of special attention" (Schneider 2003: 247).

DE seems to fall short of the subsequent stages, "nativisation", "endonormative stabilisation" and "differentiation" because DE users (unlike SL users) have not developed their own linguistic distinction and independence as a group. Writers like Deaf Throat are still quite unusual; generally, DE does not yet contain enough "linguistic idiosyncrasies" to constitute an immediately identifiable variety, and the above qualitative analysis has suggested that rules followed by DE writers are not yet uniform, for example regarding prepositions. However, at least one feature of nativisation, the "complaint tradition" wherein more traditionalist language users decry "corrupt" new usage (Milroy and Milroy 1985 in Schneider 2003: 248), can be seen in DE: hearing native speakers have frequently lamented the perceived misuse of English by Deaf people. Lexically, nativisation involves new word formations like Bhuttocracy in Pakistani English (Schneider 2003: 249), and Deaf people certainly have their own English vocabulary items such as deafie, hearie, terp ('interpreter'), and CODA.

Endonormative stabilisation appears to be a long way off for DE, not least of all because it requires the new variety to lose its stigma and

gain a positive status (ibid: 251). This can come about through integration between the interlanguage users and the target language, i.e. English-speaking, community. If a refusal of the interlanguage users and/or English users prevents this from occurring, the interlanguage users will remain as a separate linguistic group and a NE dialect will not develop (Thomason 2001: 75 in Schneider 2003: 251). Because of the very small number of BSL users and the comparatively low status of BSL, it is difficult to see how the British English community would integrate with BSL users on a large enough scale to enable successful endonormative stabilisation. Other indicators of endonormative stabilisation, and the final stage of dialect birth, "differentiation", do not yet apply to DE. These include literary creativity in the NE, codification, identity construction and communality, well-known linguistic terminology (e.g. Indian English), dialect birth and independence (Schneider 2003: 251-3). Though it is possible that DE may eventually develop these criteria, not all NEs reach the differentiation stage, especially when, like Cameroonian people, they continue to accept an established English (British) over their local variety (ibid: 256). DE's progression to dialect status may be hampered by its utilisation within English-speaking countries where the eminence of Standard English is at its highest.

In sum, a hypothesis can be formed that DE is in the process of becoming a NE, and it is currently at the "structural nativisation" stage. The notion of DE as a NE could be explored by a rigorous sociolinguistic study. The methodology for this research could involve contacting a selection of D/deaf British adults and asking them fill out a questionnaire about socially and linguistically relevant factors such as their age, place of birth, and exposure to, experience

of and attitude toward English and BSL. They could then be asked to have two online instant-message conversations in English: one with a hearing native English speaker, and another with a Deaf BSL/English bilingual, both identified as such prior to the conversations, to determine if the participants use DE features more with the bilingual.²² If so, this would suggest that they are accommodating to a shared interlanguage, and if consent could be obtained, these instant message conversations could then be analysed to outline the grammatical and lexical features of their writing and investigate their consistency. Such a study may be able to establish whether DE is a sociolinguistic entity capable of becoming a NE dialect.

9. Conclusion

Overall, this research has suggested that there is scope to perceive DE as more than broken or error-laden English, and more than an interlanguage existing solely within the individual. Some features of DE, particularly time adverbial placement and copula omission, are reflective of BSL structure, indicating that DE could constitute code-switching or accommodation between BSL and English amongst Deaf writers. Because a significant number of salient shared grammatical features such as preposition-adding appear across DE, some of which (like copula omission) reflect or suggest BSL structure, it is possible that DE is a burgeoning sociolinguistic entity that could develop into a New English.

²² A third conversation with a deaf person who does not use BSL may be a useful addition to this study.

Unfortunately, factors such as age of BSL or English acquisition and levels of BSL or English abilities could not be considered due to time and space limitations. Furthermore, no large-scale BSL corpus is yet in existence, so discussion of BSL elements, and thus the comparison of BSL and DE features, cannot be as rigorous, exact or extensive as discussions of English phenomena. A directly equivalent corpus of Standard British English egroup messages would have been ideal for comparing with the Deaf-UK egroup messages, but construction of such a corpus was impractical due to time restrictions. This research was also hindered by the usual problems faced when using a corpus of computer-mediated communication, such as uncertain authorship (see Hoffmann 2007).

Future studies would benefit from accounting for sociolinguistic factors such as the age of acquisition of BSL and/or English. Research on this topic should also further investigate code-switching and blending, both lexical and structural, and both deliberate and unconscious. Structure-switching or blending is likely to be a less conscious phenomenon and could therefore reveal a great deal about BSL/English bilingual cognition. One aspect of structure-switching or blending that could be investigated is cohesion, specifically the reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction devices outlined by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Examining these clause connecting devices in BSL, English and DE could provide a useful starting point for a study of structure-switching. Another useful expansion of this study would be to examine the DE produced

by ASL users, to see if any features of ASL are apparent and can be contrasted with features of BSL in British DE.²³

Expansion of this research on the influence of BSL on DE, and on DE's potential to become a New English just as recognised and respected as Spanish English or Indian English, could be a welcome supplement to the recent acknowledgement in 2002 that BSL is a full language that has equal status with English, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and other indigenous UK languages.

Word count – 12,493

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²³ These differences may be mainly lexical, because the structures of ASL and BSL are quite similar (Johnston and Schembri 2007: 12; Newport and Supalla 2000; Johnston 1989).

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11. Appendices

11.1 Quantitative data: individual item frequencies

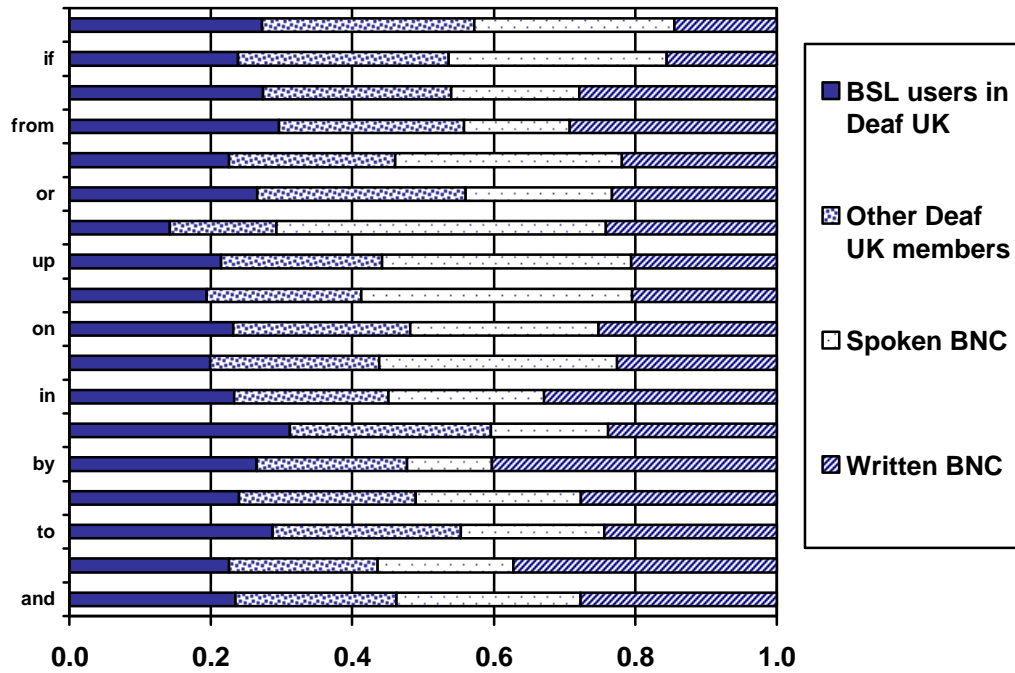


Table 6: Proportions of frequencies per million for prepositions and conjunctions in each corpus.

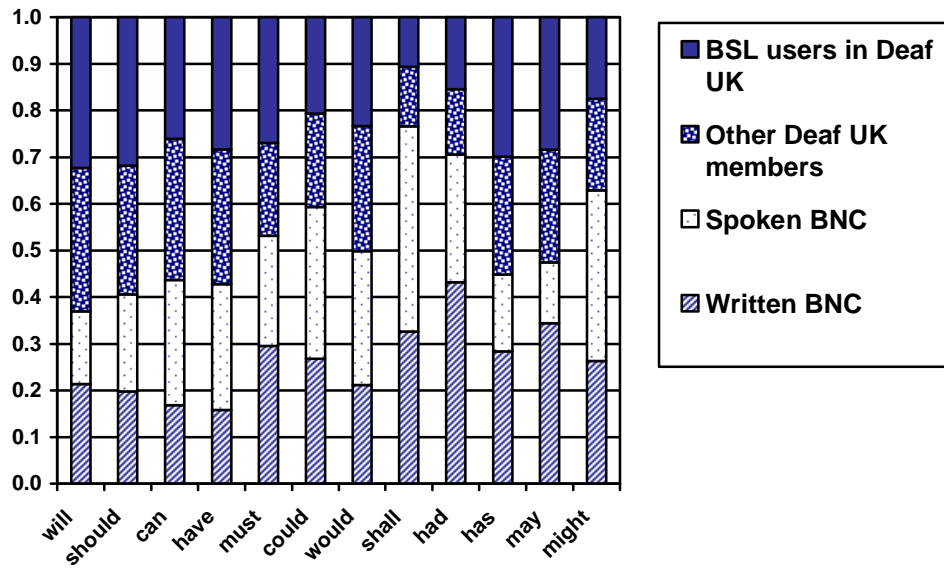


Table 7: Proportions of frequencies (per million) for modals in each corpus.

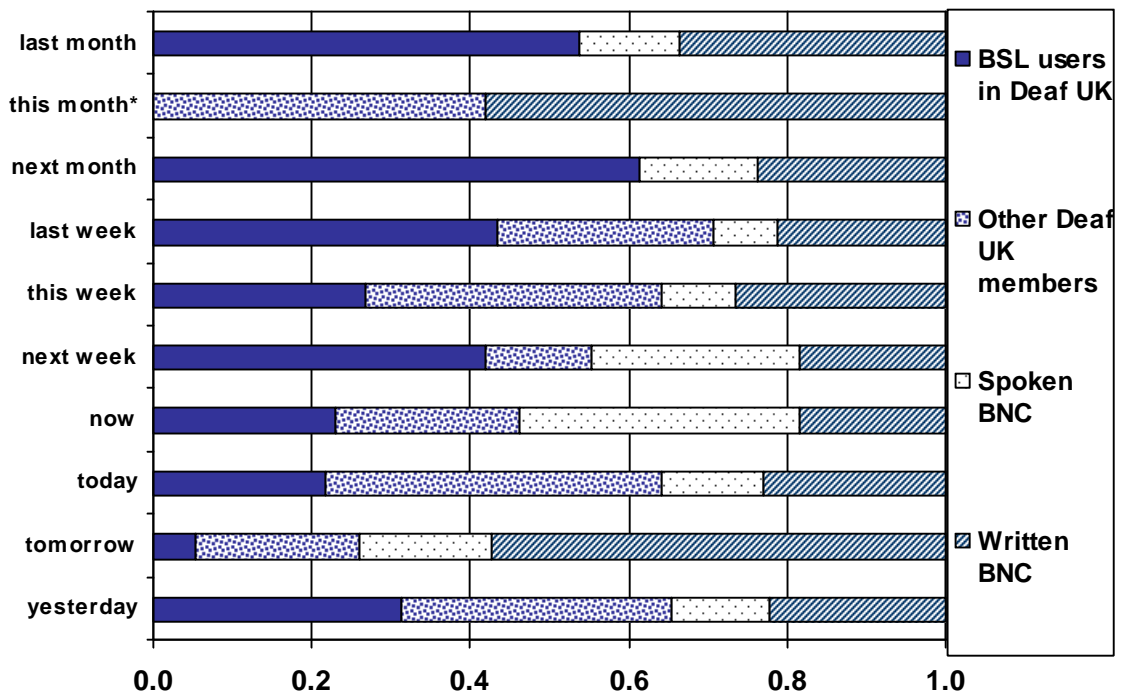


Table 8: Proportions of frequencies per million for time adverbials that are sentence-initial in each corpus. *There were no instances of sentence-initial this month in the BSL user corpus or the spoken BNC.

11.2 Preposition list, with comments in bold by Lilley (2006)

IN - has its own sign
WITH - has its own sign
FROM - has its own sign
OF - has no sign, is not usually fingerspelled either
OR – has a sign - similar to WHERE, but hands twist once with a shrug
ON - has no sign itself, needs context (e.g. TABLE BOOK-ON)
OFF - has its own sign (same as ON - needs a context)
OUT - has its own sign (changes depending on context)
IF - has no sign, often fingerspelled (some school signs for IF - tap on nose, etc)
BY - has no sign, is not often fingerspelled
AT - has no sign, is not often fingerspelled
TO - has no sign, is sometimes fingerspelled (there is a sign - pointing finger moving sideways, but not accepted as BSL)
FOR - has no sign, is not often fingerspelled (there is a slightly bent L handshape using the forefinger and the thumb, going in an outward twist. But it is not BSL.)

11.3 Email by Deaf Throat, deafthroat@aol.com, 5 June 2006

SUBJECT: [X] represent who?

Deaf Throat need respond about [X]. [Department] people defend defend defend [X]. [X] and [Y] send letter say [the board] represent staff and tell [group] go away. Do not claim you represent staff.

Now what can [X] do to help staff? Deaf Throat wait for answer. Waiting, waiting, waiting. Deaf Throat check and check e-mail, check email again. Deaf Throat ask, check, ask many people on campus. Deaf Throat finish ask people who are Deaf and who are Hearing. Deaf Throat did ask people who are Black and who are White and who are Latino and who are Asian and who are Middle Eastern and who are from different Nation. Deaf Throat done ask people who are Gay and who are Straight and are who are half Gay and half Straight like Bi. Deaf Throat just ask people who are Young and who are Old. Deaf Throat recently ask people who are Rich and who are Poor and who are Middle. Deaf Throat previously ask people who have Hearing Guide Dog and who do not have Hearing Guide Dog.

No one can answer Deaf Throat question about what did [X], [Y] and [the board] done for staff? Done what? How? When has [X] had meeting with staff? Which month? Where? When does [X] offer to meet with staff? Time? What has [the board] accomplished? Like

what example? Deaf Throat feel puzzled, but mind pop and can see [the board] is just a token committee under full control of [Z]. Oh that one, yes, that right.

How dare [X] and [Y] send out e-mail to [group] say stop to represent staff. Only SAC can do. [X] and [Y] must stop, finish, enough for trying to scare staff. That enough, finish, finish. [group] do more speak up in one month than [the board] do in 18 years. That really wow! wow, wow, imagine that! Faculty have meeting on Monday every month in [center]. Why not [X] and [Y] do the same. Have staff meeting every month? Why not? What matter with [Y] and [X]. That enough for making up about more excuses.

Take [Z] finger off your back [X] and [Y]. Tell [Z] stop poking your head with his long, long nose. Now, time to recognize [the board] represent for staff, not for [Z]. Finish, need represent and support staff now. You see what [W] do? You very surprised will be you and feel better understand after reading this. He done send e-mail to all campus. [W] laugh, laugh have tear in eye for pick [V] for Executive position. [W] happy jump in the air and up and down all day long. [W] act like not have to follow rules and he think that too bad for Deaf people. That really good example for [X] and [Y] and [the board] can write letter protest [W] not fair process for selecting Executive position. That easy for [X] and [Y] to write the protest letter about [W], that not! really hard.

Deaf Throat still have question for [X] and [Y] again, again, again. Please tell all staff when we can have meeting for all with [the board]. On monthly basis like every month. Not try to do that once every 18 years. Need more like every 18 days. That will better for staff.

11.4 Personal communication from Deafthroat
(deafthroat@aol.com) to Jenny Webster
(jmbwebster@yahoo.co.uk) 8 June 2007:

Yes madam, name is Deaf Throat and happy for meet you like say nice meet you with head bow. Please not need for give fake name because Deaf Throat not give fake stuff. Thank you and that real awesome for dissertation for your Masters study. Please not dissect Deaf Throat same as frog. Deal or no Deal?

Think up by self for use name and place for your paper, that not matter with Deaf Throat. Deaf Throat feel curious where you study

and how you expert sign in BSL, not ASL when you are American. That real interest question for Deaf Throat.

If you happen bump Queen Elizabeth, need say oh shit, excuse me for not pay attention to you with kneel down. Then tell her no way for knighten [Z], better tell him finish grow real longer for say many lies like make up stories. Be careful for get eye hurt from his very longest nose poking your eye.

Good luck for get Masters degree and write dissertation and good time for drinking your tea with biscuits.

11.5 Messages about Deaf English from Deaf-UK and personal email communication

BSL was my first language, mixed with SSE (I do not want SSE but was confused by my school force me to speak, and force me to use in perfect English, made me confused). But I grow up and now I am full BSL.

I think I was 2 years old [when I first started signing] - my first word is using BSL sign "Plane" - prove that my BSL come first rather than English.

I feel most of the times I slipped out use BSL English, but was fighting my mind (two minds) saying I must have a perfect English. Then I type in perfect English ... but when I am relax I type more BSL, and less English.

When I was spend time with deaf community more in face to face BSL, I feel in my mind - hell, I don't care, i type bsl. then i feel much enjoyable "where cafe?" "yeah, know you feeling." making me more relax, affecting my English more. I now realised many hearing people want me perfect English is abuse, forceful and should be illegal!!

I wasn't talking about you when I wrote my words about English. I was thinking about the "general" issue of Deaf and English. People need perspective. That's why I wrote it. becasue Deaf attitude to English is not really different to Ethnic/migrant attitude to English. I know. I see both.
I live with both. I was talking about both.

You don't have to justify your English. My aim was to make people THINK. That was all.

I will say this again, Deaf English is a beautiful and good way to express yourself. I am used to Deaf English, true, it is not that much different to migrant/ ethnic people who know English as a second language.

The real problem is the snobs who say PROPER ENGLISH. This is a different argument to making sure communication is clear and accessible.

Don't forget, Black people are often put down because of their slang/colloquial [informal] use of language. Esp. Black Americans.

I was amused to read the discussions about whether Deaf English is a language or not. A while ago, I came across these similar messages in a rockclimbing newsgroup (thought these examples were spoken English, rather than written).

I'll paste three examples into this e-mail to illustrate why Deaf English is as valid as any other regional / ethnical version of the universal English language. These climbers were talking about The Corner, a climbing route (no, I don't know where it is).

How a deaf climber might tell his / her friends via a TTY (minicom):
"We climb the Corner, Mike, Sara and me. You know the Corner. Fucking hard. My fingers sore. They go tight in cracks in rock. Not like gym same. Climb grade 24. Hard but not difficult. Fuck, I drop last biner. Because I look down at Sara signing. Came down, no more biners. John interest in my climb. He say I climb good till I drop biner. Go pub. Fuck great. I tell you more (signing) next we meet. "

Any of these are good in their situations, just unfathomable to those outside such regions or cultural / ethnical groups....

Ooops - looks like I misled someone here. I don't mean that Deaf English is "also known as" Black English (that is what aka means, yes?)... I was trying to point out the similarity in perception. That is, the establishment (white, middle-class, straight, etc) USED to believe that Black English was "wrong" and ungrammatical, and now BE has become accepted and recognised as an English variant. That is what I anticipate could happen with Deaf English.

I don't know enough about the 'deaf language' mentioned by Paul - but if it consists of mime, mouthing, gesture and rudimentary signs,

then is it really a language? Deaf English wouldn't itself be a language, by the way, but a mode of transmission of one language, BSL, through the writing of another, English. Complicated? Mmmm yes.

By Deaf English I mean the written English used by Deaf people to each other when using minicoms, faxes and notes, etc. The way of using English that Typetalk operators seem so confused by (and try to correct) when I speak it in response to a Deaf person calling. The one that so many English teachers mark as 'wrong' and try to correct. It often has a power that standard written English lacks, and takes that power from BSL.

Until there is a written version of BSL, Deaf English seems the only alternative - and it fascinates me!

Cheers (or should I say 'Regard')

In the latter half of the 20th century poets and writers in these groups re-emerged and re-claimed their creativity in pidgins, Creoles and even ancient language like Sanskrit. Their work is now recognised as World Literature and Theatre.

Deaf Theatre gathered apace over a similar period but we've still a long way to go when it comes to celebrating the creativity of our Deaf English. I remember in the 1970s in the NUD when we used to publish a newsletter and would discuss whether it was right to edit Deaf English so that it read as standard English. We weren't very sure but decided to edit because we feared that the oralists would use "Deaf English" as evidence that NUD people were stupid etc. I don't see much Deaf English published in the Deaf Press (UK) today, so I guess this internalised oppression stuff hasn't altered much in 20 years or so. I'm so excited about the discussion here in Deaf UK because people are really breaking new ground towards that celebration. I think its crucial. I also think that the freedom to write in Deaf English via Deaf UK and via the Internet to the whole planet is something else.

...one has to take responsibility for personal growth and learning [have high expectations of ourselves]. More than that, if we "Good English" Deaf take away our skills, what would the Deaf community then have to learn and grow from?

More to the point, this elist is a discussion list. So that means we have to accept how people communicate, talk, and write. If I can

learn to read and understand Deaf English, WHICH IS NOT THE SAME AS POOR ENGLISH. Actually they are different. I've deliberately written Deaf English [not here, elsewhere]. But if you are talking about important information such as Law Changes, Services providers etc, then yes, a Deaf English version should be provided.

I remember doing a comic story, the subject was HIV/AIDS, and because it was for the Deaf Community in Australia, I decided to write the dialogue in Deaf English. I tested it with the team, and it was OK. It was understandable. Except, the bloody education department, wanted it to be in proper English to ensure that The Deafies in schools are exposed to proper English. Well fuck me dead, I couldn't win in this situation either. And the project manager whose English wasn't brilliant at the time [dunno abt now], didn't defend the story on grounds that it was conveying IMPORTANT IN-FOUR-MAY-SHONE on health issues which should take priority over good English!!!

The deafeducation.org website has attracted some comments about the English, and how it could reflect badly on us. The stories and poems were written in the voices of their authors. More importantly, as I pointed out to one of the team, it does not need defending. But that's my growth as a person from a snobbish deaf who thinks poor english is "embarrassing" to a much humbled [though many would disagree <smirk | shrug>] deafie who has learnt to read and write Deaf English. If I didn't, I wouldn't be able to sign sing! Now that would be sad.

So, if I can do that, then Deafies whose English is not perfect can learn and grow too!

I think I'm out of this group soon - it seems that there is not much of "give and take" among deaf people.

1. Is it my fault that I feel comfortable with my standard of English?
2. Is there a law in the statute books that says I must NOT use the standard of English that I feel comfortable with?
3. Must I struggle uncomfortably to write English at a standard that I do not like?
4. Is life outside of school not a continuing learning experience, so that people with a lower standard can continue to learn from others and raise their standards?
5. I use BSL - there are those whose BSL is of poor standard, but that's OK, and there are those whose BSL is of higher standard and that is still OK. but the same attitude does not apply to English!

6. People complain about those who have higher standard being unfair to those with lower standard. But who complains on the side of those with higher standards about those with lower standards?

7. In life, there is nothing equal. People may do the same occupations for different wages, pay different prices for same goods, but none will achieve same qualifications on same courses because no one person is the same as the other. Then why complain?

OK, if any of you don't see me as your friend due to my use of a certain standard of English, do make it clear in the next postings and I'll unsubscribe without qualms.

Don't you think it is the contents and the contributions that would enhance the lives, plans and course of life for deaf people that are more important than arguing about standards of English that are more important?