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David Harrison: Welcome, everyone. Good afternoon. Welcome. This is the lecture by Professor Lorraine Leeson. I'm very pleased to introduce her. Lorraine, I'm David Harrison from the Linguistics Department. Lorraine was nominated by Linguistics and by the Gender and Sexuality Studies Program to the Cornell Professorship. We're very delighted to have her here. She works at Trinity College Dublin in Ireland. She is I think probably the world's leading expert in Irish sign language and in practical applications of sign language studies to both theory of language and to pedagogy.

She is published very widely in the area of Deaf Studies. She is as much of an activist as a scholar. She said in her biographical statement, she first began learning Irish sign language in 1989. She has been working with the Irish deaf community ever since. Not only to learn the language but also to help improve their place in society and their ability to connect and communicate with larger society. She also publishes descriptive work. She published the first corpus-driven description of a sign language that was published anywhere in the world, which she's co-authored in 2012. That's no small feet. As someone who works on dictionaries, I know that it's a huge project to even attempt to collect all of the words.

I can't even imagine the complexity of trying to collect all of the signs in a sign language and then publish them. I'm sure you always feel that your work is not finished. She has also done a lot of social activism work which fits in very well with our values here at Swarthmore. She has personally trained and helped set qualifications for professional Irish sign language interpreters. That has led to more than doubling the number of sign language interpreters. She notes that in 1992, there were no professional Irish sign language English interpreters in Ireland.

There are now 25. There is more now. There is a hundred now. She is personally responsible for training those people, developing that expertise and really providing a way for the Irish deaf community to have their voice heard and to have greater participation in society. She is an excellent theoretician. But she is also someone who cares deeply about the community she works with and has used her scholarship and her position at university to create social change for the Irish deaf community. Please help me in welcoming Professor Lorraine Leeson.

Prof. Lorraine : Oops. I forgot to put this on. Hold on a second. Well, good afternoon, everybody. I'm blushing. I don't know that I'm going to be able to do anything that will live up to that wonderful and kind introduction from David. All I can say is that I'm absolutely honored and thrilled, as we would say in Dublin delighted and excited to be here. So thank you very much for having me. I hope it's well. It's my great pleasure to talk to you a little bit about the Irish deaf community this evening, and particularly to relate some of the historical and contemporary issues around both educational policy and the impact that educational policy has had on language outcomes, both in terms of the linguistic structure of language itself, of Irish sign language, but also in terms of the consequences that educational policy has had for the Irish deaf community.

So away we go. I tend to once I get going, talk too much. So you can tell me to shut up as well. That might be a good thing to do at some point, so here we go. When I was thinking about the talk, I came across this quote, "Language exerts hidden power, like the moon on the tides." Then I discovered that the author actually is Rita May Brown who is a feminist writer born here in Philadelphia. So I thought that was quite an apt way of opening. Why do I think this is apt? Well, because in Europe, there are over one million sign language users. Across the world, there is something like 72 million deaf sign language users. Yet the situations, the context, their experiences are still far from where they should be in the 21st century.

Let me just start by showing you this figure, which actually is from a talk given by the President of the World Federation of the Deaf, Colin Allen. He was in Dublin earlier this year. He says that of those 72 million deaf people in the world, only 17% actually access education. Of those 17%, only 3 access bilingual education. When we talk in densities about bilingual education, we mean whereby the sign language of a community, of a region or of a country is one of the languages of instruction, where the language is on the curriculum. But that is happening way way too rarely. I can vouch for the fact that it's not the case in Ireland, unfortunately.

The issue of language recognition is a key one for major pan national organizations including the World Federation of the Deaf. Their mission statement is that deaf people have full human rights in an equal world, where they and their sign languages are recognized and included as part of human diversity. This is a really critical point. Not only have deaf people been oppressed, murdered for being deaf by the Nazis, for example. They've also have been forcibly sterilized. Your very own Alexander Graham Bell was one of the key proponents of moving to, of he thought, ending the possibility of having a deaf race. His genetics was a little flawed. But his ideas have most definitely been trickled down through the ages and are still very influential today.

I'm saying all of this as a mechanism for just giving you a little bit of background and to give me time to warmup. Here we go. Let me tell you a little bit about deaf communities. First of all, I should ask, how many of you know a sign language? How many of you know a deaf person? Okay, looks good, good, good. How many people in a population, if we said, how many per thousand are deaf sign language users, any ideas? One. That's the general rule of thumb. For some communities, for example, the al-Sayyid Deaf Community which is based in Israel, they're about one nomadic community. The incidence of deafness there is as much 34,000. There are great variations that exist. But the rule of thumb and definitely in places like Ireland and the USA, generally speaking, there are about one sign language user who is deaf per thousand.

One in seven of us in this room are going to experience hearing loss at some point in our life. For every deaf person, there are approximately ten hearing people who can sign in Europe. That's a stat put forward by Professor Brita Bergman from Stockholm University. What we're going to see in a moment is that, oops, I had that one there, is that there are different perspectives on what it means to be deaf. You might have one set of views about what it means to be deaf, but deaf communities have very different perspectives. I should also say that sign languages are very complex. Traditionally, sadly, people have underestimated the complexity of sign languages. They've written them off as mere jester, as something to be discouraged and even in the 21st century, medics still discouraged parents from using sign language with their deaf children because they suggest that it's going to adversely affect their capacity to develop spoken language.

It's a myth. It's been demonstrated through the research that it's a myth. But unfortunately, that still persists. It would be a very push to most countries in the western world to find reference to sign languages in audiology clinics or in cochlear implantation units. That, unfortunately, is another one of the battles that deaf communities have got to fight. Sign languages are very complex. This is just a screenshot from our corpus, the Signs of Ireland Corpus. You can see the many layers are different layers of information structure that we were keen to capture and annotate. If anybody wants to ask me about that at any point, I'm around for a year. So I'd love to show off our little Signs of Ireland Corpus.

First, I thought it would be useful to talk to you about what it means to be deaf. Let's ask you first, if I ask you to describe or define deafness, what would you say? What does deaf, to be deaf mean to you? What does society say deafness is? Yeah, so not being able to hear, it's a disability. It's a medical condition. It's something that needs to be cured. In a former life, I was the executive director of the European Brain Council. In that role, I was horrified when my colleagues, as part of their, development of what they called a consensus document on brain research, they put together a list of consensus, research profiles. One of them was from deafness to hearingness. They wanted to eradicated deafness. They were quite overwhelmed by the fact that I said, "Hang on a second. If you talk to deaf communities about this, they might see it in another way."

Let me just actually tell you that for deaf communities, the idea of, as they see it, focusing on this part of their anatomy is problematic because it denies the fact that they have everything else going on in their lives. They are more than simply ears that do or don't work. Paddy Ladd is the man who has done the most work in this area of deaf culture. He is a deaf anthropologist based at the University of Bristol. I thought that it would be sensible to let him actually tell you a little bit about deafhood. My question is, "Do you want it with sound or without sound?" We have subtitles but will you be able to see the subtitles or should I just switch to the with sound version? Okay. I've been told without. Okay. So I'm going to let you have it without then. So here we go. And please play. And it doesn't want to play, so you'll have to it with sound, okay, and I did check. So here is Paddy. Sorry?

Class: We can hear the sound or not.

Prof. Lorraine : It's okay. Well, you may have it with sound. But let's not make it overly complicated.

Video: I identified my ideas of deafhood at the time for many reasons. I can't go into them in depth for the purposes of this interview. The overriding aim was to acknowledge the value of the deaf experience, their rejection by society. Previously, we tried to demonstrate our worth, making statements about having our language, having equal status to theirs but that got no interest. There wasn't an interest in our human rights either or in arguments that we have a unique culture of equal status. I was left thinking, "We need something else here."

The problem was in their view of us, framed by the word "Deafness" and that "Ness" is part of a medical vocabulary. We needed another term to counter that one. One day, it came to me or was given to me by a deaf god, "Deafhood". It just came. So I coined it. I wrote about it. Not thinking too much of it, then I realized it was actually fantastic in how much depth it captured. For example, deafhood is about owning the experience of being deaf, our communication, culture, traditions. Their word "Deafness" is about the ear and of diametrically opposed. We have provided a clear challenge to their view of deafness. Another exam ...

Prof. Lorraine : So that is from a documentary we made for a European project called Experiencing Deafhood. If anybody wants to see that, I can let you know where to find it. But it's neither here nor there. That's Paddy and he is talking about deafhood. The reason why this concept is so important to us in deaf studies is because it really does take a diametrically opposed view. It moves away from what had been earlier attempts to define what it meant to be deaf. For deaf communities, to sum it up, deaf people don't see themselves as being impaired necessarily, not necessarily.

Of course, you can't make general statements about every member of a community. Deaf people will say that to be a member of their community, the prototypical member of the deaf community is somebody who is audiologically deaf but not necessarily so because the majority of deaf parents have hearing children. They would be a sign language user. They see themselves as a member of the deaf community and are identified as such by other members of their community. They share the experience of being deaf. They have traditionally attended a school for the deaf. This is really crucial, particularly now in 21st century, where something like 90 to 95% of deaf children are being mainstreamed. Very often, they are the only deaf person in a school.

I remember, one of the very first books I ever read on deaf people was by a guy, an American guy, called Ben Showey. He talked about identity crisis in deafness. He said that many deaf children believe they're going to die when they reach the age of 18 or that they're going to magically become hearing because they've never met another deaf adult. The irony of ironies is that today in the 21st century with the mass promotion of mainstreaming, many deaf children are in that position again, which is where they were many instances in the 1960s and the 1970s, but more on that.

In contrast, and you may not have realized this until today, you are all hearing people. To be a hearing person is clearly it's determined on the basis of the fact that you're an opposition to being a deaf person. Normally, it means you're not one of us. You don't get us. You don't know our language. You may not respect our language. That's, again, the prototypical definition of hearingness. You see deafness as a problem. You see deafness as a medical condition to be cured. The worst insult a deaf person can give to another deaf person is to call them hearing. Doesn't mean, "I think you can hear." It means, "You think like a hearing person." The biggest compliment a deaf person can give to a hearing person is to say, "You're deaf." Again, it's not about the audiological standing but it is saying something about association with deaf community values, cultures and beliefs. There again, just some preliminary comments.

Now, we get onto to the real story, the Irish story but I did think that it was important just to give you a little bit of background so that you may be able to interpret some of what I'm going to try to say from that perspective. You probably all know where Ireland is, said she with her ethnocentric opinion. What's really to know, can you find Ireland on the map? Yeah? Can I just point out that we are at the center of the universe?

Class: This mark?

Prof. Lorraine : Yes, we are a small place, but we have notions of grandeur. That's probably why, at least from that perspective in that particular map. What I'm going to be talking about today relates ... Well, I'm from Dublin. It's the little red square. Some of you, perhaps all of you will know that the six counties of ... There is 32 counties in Ireland. 6 of them are still territories owned by the British Government, yeah, part of the United Kingdom. Then the other 26 counties are the ones colored in this map in green. What I'm going to be talking about today is mostly concerned with the Schools for the Deaf which are on the north side of Dublin city. We may also though make reference to some other places on the map at some point.

What I should say to you also here is the fact that Irish sign language is the second indigenous language of Ireland. As one author has put it, "Irish is the first language of Ireland, though the British seemed to have forgotten that." Mind you, so have many Irish people, Irish is the first language of the constitution. It's the first language of the republic. A small number of people, relatively speaking, speak the language. For Irish sign language users, in the republic, there are about 5 1/2 thousand. I should say to you also, we're a small country. The whole island has about 6 million, 6 1/2 million people on it. There are about 5 million in the republic.

That whole island, the population would fit into half of London, just to put it into perspective or as somebody said to me yesterday, probably downtown Manhattan. We are a drop in the ocean quite literally. We have about 5 1/2 thousand Irish sign language users in the republic, and another 1,500 in Northern Ireland. There are also approximately 4,000 British sign language users in Northern Ireland. I say that to you because what I should also let you know is that there is no formal recognition of Irish sign language in the republic but the British government has recognized Irish sign language. That seems a little bit ironic but they did so as part of the Good Friday Agreement, along with recognizing British sign language.

There has been a real history of suppression of Irish sign language as with many other sign languages internationally. The story of Irish sign language differs from that of many other other countries because of how and when oral education was introduced and enforced. I said that Irish sign language hasn't been recognized. However, it's a very very active issue at home at the moment. This was a photo taken last week outside Dáil Éireann, which is the Irish parliamentary building. It got quite a lot of media attention including on the national news. This, we have a News for the Deaf Program. A short short bulletin that we've had in place since 1992. Let me just show you what they said on news for the deaf or not, somehow, that one has decided not to work.

Let me tell you what they said. They basically said, the Irish deaf society is outside Leinster House, the parliament buildings today. Campaigning for the recognition of Irish sign language, if approved, the Irish government would have to provide interpreting services to deaf people who are availing of public services. What they didn't say in the News for the Deaf Bulletin, but what they did say on the on-signed main evening news was the government has no intention to do anything about this.

Interesting what they tell some people and interesting what they leave out. But we also have people who are pushing for the campaign within the political infrastructure. This guy, Senator Mark Daly has been working with the Irish Deaf Society for the past two years or so. They are arguing the case for recognition of Irish sign language. Again, let me just show you a very short clip of what he has to say. He has quite a strong accent so I hope that you can cope with this all right. Let's see. Okay.

Video: Was issued with the minister which ...

Prof. Lorraine : Or not. All of this worked right before we started, and go back. Oh dear goodness. Bear with me one moment. Pressed-laid plans, huh? There we go, and again. We leave him small. While he is doing the whirly gig thing, let me tell you that while the national government hasn't done very much around the recognition of Irish sign language in a formal way because to do something constitutionally would require a constitutional referendum, which is highly unlikely. But there are moves afoot to look for a bill or an act, a languages act that would recognize Irish sign language. One of the other mechanisms that people have of trying to encourage awareness from the ground up is to go to local government sources.

Just as you have mayors of states and governors of states, we have what we call county councils. So far this year, out of whatever, I think we have 25, 30 county councils, 17 have already approved and recognize Irish sign language. That is a fantastic mechanism for raising political awareness about the issue. Now, he doesn't want to do anything. Trust me. We'll see, maybe we'll come back to him later or maybe not. What I should also say, the other reason why I was going to show you this senator is because he could be a bit of an endangered species himself. Tomorrow in Ireland, there is a constitutional referendum. The people are being asked to vote to abolish the Seanad, the senate. I hope that doesn't happen because we've had many fine people coming out of the senate, but that's something else.

So the reason, in his discussion, he talks about the fact that the Irish government are in breach of the Good Friday Agreement. He says that we are obliged to recognize Irish sign language and that therefore there is a commitment inherent in that process to recognize the language. He also notes that Ireland is next in line to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UNCRPD. That makes explicit reference to supporting deaf cultures, encouraging sign languages and giving deaf children access to sign language in education. We haven't ratified it yet but we shall wait and see what happens next but you guys haven't either. I know there is a lot discussion around that in the American deaf community too. Okay.

Why is it so important? You might think, "Well, why is she going on and on about language recognition? What's with it?" Well, if we look at the outcomes for deaf people, maybe this will help set the scene. To give a timeline, 1981 was the United Nations International Year of Persons with Disabilities. In 1981, one Irish university, Maynooth University, offered a deaf student a place, just in terms of saying, "Well, okay, we see that there is a problem here. We want to support deaf people accessing third level." No deaf person could take the place. Any ideas why?

Class: [inaudible 00:25:01]

Prof. Lorraine : That could be a major part of it. But even beyond that, even if they said, "Look, we're going to wave all of that. We're going to put in all these extra supports to get you through." If you're a deaf person in education, what might be useful to have, yeah, there were no interpreters. There were no professional interpreters in 1981. In fact, until the early 1990s, if you were a deaf person and you needed an interpreter, either you would have a nun from the School of the Deaf, a Christian brother from the Schools of the Deaf, a Catholic priest or a CODA, a Child of Deaf Adults potentially, or another deaf person who might be partially deaf and who would work between speech and sign language. So there were deaf interpreters around too but there were no professionally trained full-time interpreters who were available to take on this kind of task. This was a problem not just in education but across the aboard.

By 2001, we saw 81 deaf and hard-of-hearing students at third level. Problem is that the higher education authority doesn't actually keep a note of who is a sign language user and who isn't. We can't track how many deaf students who are sign language users are being offered places, how many are being given supports because there is still a shortage of sign language interpreters. We don't know. It's really really tricky to figure all of that out. But we can say that generally speaking, based on the figures and based on what we know of the community, that deaf ISLUs, there is still something like ten times less likely to have a third level qualification than their hearing peers. Ireland is a country where education is highly valued. Ireland has one of the highest rates of third level education completion in the European union. This is a real issue. It puts deaf people at a very serious disadvantage.

Another issue that raises its head and I think it's interesting because here in Pennsylvania, I know deaf people can serve on juries. In many many parts of the world, they can't including Ireland. We're hoping that we're going to be able to do some work on that. We've just been awarded the European Commission Project across. I think we've got six, seven countries involved to look at deaf people's access to justice. There are a whole slew of issues that we could talk about on that front too. The bottom line is that there is a very significant issue around access to education.

Deaf people are four times more likely to be unemployed in a recession, according to a study done by the Irish Deaf Society with Dr. Pauline Conroy back in '97. They interviewed over 380 deaf people. They found that those deaf people, something like 38% said that they had trouble reading a letter. So functional literacy is a major major problem for many deaf people. We'll say a little bit more about why that's a case in a few minutes. This is a real issue in the sense that there is a link between pro-educational access between obviously tertiary education, third level educational outcomes, and then following from that, in terms of employment opportunity and relative poverty.

One of the things that we know is that deaf people tend to go into jobs, like for example, the Irish Civil Service has a 3% quota of places, positions held open for people with disabilities. When deaf people go into those posts, they tend to stay in those posts. They don't tend to get promoted. So deaf people tend to be underemployed rather than unemployed which is another critical thing to be challenged. So far, so good? How are you doing with the accent?

Class: All right.

Prof. Lorraine : Okay. Good. Okay. A key issue is the issue of social justice for me. It's always been one of the reasons why I do what I do. Paddy Ladd, he talks about deaf bodies as being colonized. He says that just, and he is a British, and he says, "The British colonized the world and look what happened to the communities who were colonized." He says, "Equally, deaf people's bodies have been colonized by hearing people. The focus has been on normalization or on eradication, and that this has a huge impact on them." He would suggest that there are hearing hegemonies at work, that we have a notion of what it means to be a normal. Anybody who falls outside those parameters is problematic and needs to be fixed.

Patriarchy in Ireland is a big issue. In Ireland, until the 1980s, if you were a woman working in the civil service and you got married, you had to leave your job until the 1980s. If you're a married couple and you wanted contraception, you still couldn't do it until after 1979. You may when you could do it but you couldn't have contraception. Badum, I'm sorry, bad joke. Didn't expect that from an Irish Catholic, did you? Anyway. Okay, none practicing, she hastens to add.

You many know our Former President Mary Robinson, by name. She was also the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. She was one of the people who led the women's liberation movement. Her and a number of other women famously in 1979 traveled up across the border to Belfast to bring back condoms on a train, which they distributed freely. It was known as the condom train. It puts in perspective the fact also that 90 to 95% of all schools today in the republic are controlled by religious orders. Our current minister for education is an atheist. He is trying to change that status quo not least because Ireland has changed radically in the past 15 to 20 years. We've had an influx of immigrants. So 90% of the population is no longer practicing Catholic. That's a real issue for parents who don't want their children to be educated through the Catholic schools in terms of what is available. This also plays a really important role.

Our first president was a holder of an American passport, Eamon de Valera. That's why he didn't get killed after the 1916 rising as it happens. When he was co-crafting the Irish Constitution, he worked and was very closely influenced by the Archbishop of Dublin, a man called John Paul McQuaid. Yeah. Archbishop McQuaid and de Valera, they both actually went to the same private boys school in the south of Dublin as it happens. So they were old pals. They grew up together. Archbishop McQuaid was highly influential in terms of deaf education in the 1950s and the 1960s. Just bear that in mind in a few minutes when we come to talk a little bit about what he led to happen.

There is also issues of this side with education exclusion, which lead to professional gaps. Also, there is issues then. If you as a community, if you are excluded for a long long period of time from access to third level education and from access to the professions, when you finally have a community who can come in to education, to take for example, a master's degree in linguistics, where do you get the vocabulary from? How do you bridge the conceptual gaps that exist? These are some of the issues that in very practical terms, facing interpreters and deaf communities. Then are you going to be influencing the language deliberately making lexical choices and whose decisions are they? Are they interpreters controlling what happens with Irish sign language development or is it going to be a deaf-led issue?

These are all other issues that emerge but we don't have time to talk about that so much today. Let me tell you a little then about religion, colonialism and the evolution of contemporary Irish sign language. This is an image from St. Joseph School for Deaf Boys around about 1939. You might be able to make out the long line of ... These are black-robed Christian brothers lining the street. I'm not quite sure who they were waiting for but it was obviously an impressive turnout, so there must have been somebody pretty eminent. I show you that because with St. Joseph, so you can see it's an old old building. Now, it's been demolished. Last year, they built a deaf village in Ireland. The deaf community is very proud of it. The only part they kept is this section, it's the church wing. In part because this beautiful stained glass windows which show deaf people signing. The funding for all of that was raised by a deaf man in the 1860s.

St. Joseph's ... Well, we should actually with the girls. I'll tell you about that in a minute. Hold on a second. Let's go back and talk about where does Irish sign language come from. Deaf education, in our island, the first school for the deaf was established in 1816 by a man who came from the Braidwood Institution in Scotland. We were a colony of Britain. British sign language uses what we call the 200-alphabet. Yeah? The alphabet, looks, I'll just do a few letters for you. Yeah, so you've got A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K and so on and so forth. Irish sign language today has a 100-alphabet. So like American sign language, so A, B, C, D, E, our F is your G. No. Yes, our G is your F. It gets complicated. I'm learning ASL. I'm like, "Oh, that's a head melt." There is too many similar things that are meaning different things.

Anyway, we have the Braidwood school, it was established. The Braidwood's basically had an influence on the first school of the deaf established in Ireland. They were using finger spelling. Now, given what I said about the idea that Ireland was a colonized country, that there was this Protestant ascendancy, that Catholics had been for hundred of years suppressed. It probably comes as no surprise to say that in the middle of the 1840s, round about the time with the great famine, the Catholics became extremely concerned about Proselytization. They were concerned that good Catholic souls were being stolen by the Protestant orders. They wanted to have permission to establish a Catholic school in order to provide an appropriate education for Catholic deaf children. The archbishop at the time supported this. The story goes that the Dominican nuns asked the Braidwoods if they could come and study their approach. The Braidwoods said, "Well, it'll cost you."

The nuns probably said something like, "Don't you know there is a great famine going on?" They didn't have the money is the bottom line. Instead what they did, perhaps fortunately, was they went to France. France has been considered the place of enlightenment in terms of deaf sign language-led education. You'd get also deaf origin stories about the origins of modern sign languages surrounding the founder of the School for the Deaf in France. As it happened, two nuns went to France. They went to Cannon, Normandy with two little deaf girls. They spent six months there.

Now the thing is, we don't know very much about the deaf girls. We know that at least once was eight and the other was seven or nine. Who knows? Did they have some mechanist of communication already? Had they been in the Protestant school? We don't know. We do know that they went to France. When they came back, clearly they have been talking to deaf kids for six months. They were going to have an influence by what they had learned, just as the nuns had formally studied what it was that the people in Can had been doing and brought back their approach to Ireland. They modified the signs. The nuns wanted to have signed English basically. Yeah. They wanted to have things like ... Well, they didn't have computers but if they did, the computer is on the table. So you'd have morphological endings. So I am going to the shops.

But of course, that's not the way sign languages work. Sign languages are using three-dimensional space to represent space. They use movement to represent movement. The body is a really important center in terms of expressing perspective and other things. This was 1846, we got St. Mary School for Deaf Girls established. Ten years later, the Christian brothers agreed to establish a boys school. It's about a mile down the road from St. Mary's. But they decided it would be wrong to have the boys signing the way those girls sign. They made a deliberate effort to modify the signs to make them more masculine. They also deliberately sought out influences from American sign language. Apparently, they had access to some written descriptions of elements of American sign language at the time. So they built-in what they had available to them into their structure.

The schools, as one of my colleagues Cara MacGraffin says, "They effectively became communication islands." So you had the girls school. We had the girls school and the boys school. They didn't get to meet again. This idea of you separate them. The belief was you discourage deaf people from marrying one another. They didn't have natural interaction. If you get two islands, it's no surprise then if you also get some variation emerging. In fact, what happened was that we had very very distinct male and female variations emerging as a result of this educational policy, of this religious community determined educational policy. This is just another way of looking at the Irish sign language lexicon because we can also say that there are influences from what we call the productive lexicon. We don't need to talk about that right now.

But there is also a gestural substrate. So somethings may have come from gesture, like the sign for a stop. You'll see some deaf people using stop. It's still there, and also the established lexicon. The established lexicon is what you'll find in a dictionary, the citation forms, whereas the productive lexicon, it's not typically written down but there are mechanisms that deaf people use to expand the lexicon. In terms of influences from English, what we have over on your left, we've got Valerie. These are all images from our corpus. She is signing shoes. It's considered the citation form of shoes. Now, I say it's considered the citation form because actually it's the male variant. Traditionally, this is the male variant for shoes. This lady is using shoes. It comes from cued speech.

So from the sh, can you feel the sh sound on the expulsion of the breath on your finger when you do that. There are other signs like that but they are only used in the girl school. They're still considered to be part of the female lexicon today. But the male variant was very dominant and has persisted. I'm going to just skip those. Except to say what's interesting is that over here, these are all variants of the sign "To go." A few years ago, I had a colleague from Canada, Terry Jansen come visit. He is very interested in grammaticization processes, how languages shift and develop grammar over time. He had said to me, "Oh, did you see?" Another colleague's work he was talking about this gesture that was widely used in Europe in the 1860s to mean like, "To go." It was evident in early dictionaries. A French sign language to mean partiere, to go.

I said to him, "We still use it." The French connection is still alive and kicking in our sign language. In American sign language, it's grammaticalized. They hypothesize that it's use to mean future, so something that will happen and it's come from to go, which over time came to mean the future. Other signs from French sign language that still persist include the girl sign for Friday, which is a V hand shape from Vendredi, yeah, or the sign to look for, which has C hand shapes from cherche. So there are interesting little tidbits that follow through. In terms of British sign language, anybody know what the national drink of Ireland is?

Class: Guinness.

Prof. Lorraine : Guinness. You have to, come on. There has to be a forced family fun. Somebody says group participation. This is the sign for Guinness. You need to be able to order this if you come to Ireland. Except Van, you can't. You've got an exemption. So this is Guinness. This hand shape is from British sign language. This is G in British sign language. But that is not the contemporary British sign language sign for Guinness. Their sign is much more interesting actually. I think because their sign is this. Yeah? Any prizes for guessing?

Class: Priest?

Prof. Lorraine : Yeah, the priest. The white collar on the black coat, yeah? We have lots of BSL-influenced signs. Member, that's an M hand shape. Professional is a P hand shape. They are not BSL signs today but there are definitely evidence of that historic link to British sign language. So with that out of the way, let me also tell you a little bit more about the Schools for the Deaf and this notion of gendered signing. Schools for the Deaf, I grew up in Cabra. So Schools for the Deaf were literally just up the road for me. St. Joseph School is on one end of the road. A few blocks away, you can get in this way, so you've got St. Mary's over here.

They're up and running for hundreds of years. For those of you who know something about deaf history, you'll know that 1880 was a very important year. 1880 marked the congress of Malan. It was the year when the International Congress of Educators of the Deaf voted to officially ban sign language in education. Consequences were horrific for deaf people. As a result of that, deaf teachers were overnight sacked. Children were told that they could no longer sign. They were punished for signing. This is a western story. In Ireland, to their credit, the nuns and the Christian brothers said, "You know what, we don't think this is going to work so well." They held out. They didn't introduce oral education until the middle of the 20th century. So it's much much later than most places who adapted oralism.

The nuns again were ten years ahead of the Christian brothers. In 1946, this lady over here is Sister Nicolas Griffy. She moved to implement an oral policy. She was the principal of St. Mary School for the Deaf. She was also incredibly influential with respect to the archbishop of Dublin, whom I mentioned earlier. She had his ear. Sorry, it's another very bad pun. Anyway, she wanted to introduce oralism. She said in her autobiography that she did this because parents were demanding it, that the parents of deaf children were saying that they were going to send their deaf children to Catholic schools in the UK where oralism was offered as a mechanism for education. She also, in her book, she talks about a letter she received from a deaf past pupil whose niece, who's also deaf, was about to enter the school the year that oralism was introduced. That deaf woman said, "By all means, teach her to speak. But make sure that you let her sign because in letting her sign, you're going to give her access to language, which will give her access to literacy."

Deaf people at that time in the UK and in Ireland were known for their literacy skills. They had very good literacy outcomes in comparison to now, where the average literacy outcome for deaf people is round about that, it's equivalent to that of an 8 1/2 to 9-year-old hearing child. Again, you start to see why the access to education later on is problematic. Now, I mentioned that the Schools for the Deaf became communication islands. With the advent of oralism, what they did to further the development of oral language skills was sub divide the children. They did this over summer. I know this because I have two deaf friends, two elderly deaf ladies who were in school when the introduction to oralism happened. They said they came back out of the summer holidays and everything had changed.

The nun basically were the teachers in the school. They segregated the kids out on the basis of those who were hard of hearing, those who would be oral successes and that was the label, versus those were oral failures or what they also called the deaf and dumb section. Now, in the original plan, the school, St. Mary is very like St. Joseph. It's built around about the 1850s. They initially put the girls who were signers in another part of the building, upstairs. We all wear school uniforms in Ireland even today. For those girls at that time, they had to wear a different uniform. They had their hair cut differently to everybody else. When they came down to play, the other girls were told to physically look away. They were allowed to have no contact.

For the girls who were in the oral success section, they were threatened. They were threatened that if they were caught signing, they would be punished. They would be punished by being hit, by being caned, by being told to sit on their hands, but also they were punished by being told that signing was sinful. If they were caught signing, they were sent to confession. You go to confession. You weren't allowed to sign your sins because would be to reiterate the sin, to sin twice. So you had to write down your sins. You get this overlapping of educational attitude, of hearing hegemony, of religious belief, of stigma towards a language that all come together. The impact on the deaf girl is quite shocking.

For those girls who were in the oral success part of the school, they were still sign language users but now, they didn't have access to deaf role models. There were no deaf adult teachers who they had daily contact with. From generation to generation, they were reconstructing and regenerating Irish sign language. They also created signs that they were going to be able to use with each other but they wanted to make sure that the teachers didn't know that that's what they were doing. In the oral success group because remember, the girls and I would invert it back, the deaf and dumb section. They did have access to sign language. In that sense, they were fortunate. But they were also incredibly stigmatized.

The other girls assumed that they were mentally damaged, that they were intellectually inferior. Until the 1980s, if you were in the signing section of either the girls or the boys school, you were not allowed to take state curriculum. You were not allowed to sit state exams. Again, there were consequences. I had a deaf student before who was taking a bachelor of deaf studies. He is actually one of the first deaf students to get a bachelor in deaf studies in Ireland. He told me how he had gone to St. Joseph's. He'd asked one of the Christian brothers to let him have the books that the students were taking the state curriculum on. The Christian brother came into the dormitory where there were about 30 beds, all the boys were there ready to go to bed and threw the books out and then said, "Let's see how you get on. You think you're smart enough for this?" That is a very common story. That's just the top of the surface. But let me show you some gendered signs. Any idea what this might mean?

Class: Mascara.

Prof. Lorraine : These were Catholic girls in a British school. Good try though, good try. It's like, "Watch out. Someone's coming." Yeah. Hang on. Where have we ... Has it gone back on me? Or here is another one, now again, think about it. You're in school. Somebody is sitting beside you and if you go like this, "Don't annoy me." So don't annoy me. This is my colleague, Cara McGraffin. She is deaf and from a very large deaf family. This sign down here, this is actually, it was traditionally a male sign. It's used to mean surprise or I did something wrong or I did something in error. So for anybody who has ever walked into a glass panel thinking that there wasn't anything there, this would be a sign for you or if you pick up a cup that doesn't have the drink that you thought you had in it. You drink and you go, "Spit it." That would be an appropriate sign to use.

It was traditionally a masculine sign. But that has actually spread and is used throughout the female community too. Another one here, it means like, "Ugh. What are you telling me?" You're winding me up or you're telling me something silly. It's not quite true. They had all of these little idiomatic signs that they used in the school, that the whole idea about patriarchy of course is that there is male domination. With Irish sign language, it was no difference. When the girls left school, male signers told them that wasn't proper sign language at all. In fact, what they should do is modify their signing style and sign differently.

What I should also say is these are more contemporary signs but these are signs still seen in the deaf community. For older signers, the women who were educated and men who were educated before oralism was introduced, their used of gendered signing was much more pervasive. The American anthropologist Barbara LeMaster wrote her PhD talking about this very issue in the Dublin deaf community. She noted that for example, something like 68% of the vocabulary items in the list of I think it was 132 items that they were in fact different between the male and the female population. Yeah, 106 different male and female signs, and 63% of those signs were related to each other in some way. The others were not related. Despite this, men and women reported that they often did not understand each other's signs.

These were all people educated pre-oralism. When the women left school, they were told, "That's not the way you sign in Ireland. This is the way you should sign." In the community, they signed using the male variant. With each other, they used the female variant. Days of the week were different, color terms were different, all sorts of prepositions were different. To give you some examples, the sign for girl and boy, well, the sign for girl was different. So this was the boy sign, the standard sign if you like, for girl. This is the girl sign for girl. Signs for Easter, so the male sign for Easter and the female sign for Easter. Sign for blue, the boy sign for blue, the girl sign for blue. It goes on and on. It was very very pervasive.

Over time, that has reduced, not least because of the introduction of oralism, but also because the community now interacts more. But LeMaster suggested that this kind of variation had been eliminated by agreement amongst the Irish deaf community back in 1979. In 1979, there was a standardization project set up. The goal was to create a unified dictionary of Irish sign language. The people who led that included Sister Nicolas Griffy who was the woman who introduced oralism to the schools in the first instance. On the committee, there was one or two deaf people, including a man called Stan Forn. In the foreword to his 1979 dictionary, he actually says that deaf men and women could understand each other. But in fact the dictionary was being developed to make it easier for hearing people to learn sign language. It was a language planning act all right. But the recipients of that act were hearing people, not deaf people.

There is just another, one of those, some more signs. These have persisted, these gendered signs. As I say, it's less extensive than it was in the population that Barbara LeMaster described but it does still exist nonetheless. Here is my colleague talking about another sign, which she describes as ... So it means that you're wrong or you've given me the wrong thing. Over time, it has changed. So over on the far left, she is signing a two-handed version of the sign which would be used by people maybe in their late 60s. Then that moved to a one-handed version. Then the handshake changed, probably again this is reflecting lack of straightforward transmission patterns that existed for deaf kids in the school during oralism. But it moved to a one-handed sign touching ...

Initially, it moved across the torso. Now, it's at the center of the torso. So you get this phonological reduction over time. We also have differences in terms of generational signing which relate to the use of the mouth, not surprising given the introduction of oralism. So let's see if these movies, let's see will these ones work. Okay. This guy over here, he is going to talk a little bit ... I've just got a tiny little clip about his daughter. She was a full-bright student to Gallaudet University, also deaf. He talks a little bit about coming to visit her in the states. What I want you to do when you're watching this and the next piece is just have a look at what's happening on the mouth and what's happening in terms of finger spelling, see if you notice any finger spelling. See if you notice anything about the size of the signing space. So three things to look out for.

A lot of movement on the mouth. So he was educated pre-oralism. This guy is Sean Herley. He is a teacher. He teaches at St. Joseph School for Deaf Boys. He is also former President of the European Deaf Youth Association, and he is marvelous. So here we go. Even if you know nothing about sign languages at all, you can see that that's quite striking in terms of difference. What's interesting, well, there are all sorts of things that are interesting, so you can see that the size assigning space is quite radically different. We reckon that this is also about more public acceptance of Irish sign language. People of this gentleman's generation would have been told not to sign in public and would have discouraged their children from signing in public.

In contrast, you now see deaf people have no problem marching up and down and demanding recognition of Irish sign language. So that's a major issue. Oh yeah, the other thing that I was going to tell you about is that we had a PhD, we had a PhD student who looked at the issue of mouthing in our signs of Ireland corpus. Because we know that okay, there are changes over time in terms of the use of mouthing and what we call mouth gestures to mark for adverbial constructions, for example, but we wanted to try and quantify it. She looked at the corpus data in terms of three age groups. She found that for those aged 18 to 35, 75% of women use language contact, so English-influenced mouthings. While only 52% of the men do. So that's even for now, the youngest signers.

Whereas for the older signers, 45% of women used English-influenced mouth patterns but only 12% of the men did. Again, part of that is because St. Mary's introduced oralism ten years ahead of the boys, St. Joseph School. But you can see that's had a major impact on what Irish sign language looks like. It has had a major impact in terms of intergenerational communication for one thing. It's also really important to say that ironically, when the Schools for the Deaf were suppressing sign languages, you still had deaf people in one place. You had a space for the creation of community. Today, with mainstreaming and mainstreaming policies, what you find is the fragmentation of community potentially on the fragmentation of language. Nobody is really talking about that in many places. I was delighted to see Mark Rousebal talking about that here a few weeks ago.

But this is a really significant issue in terms of the language and not just in Ireland. I have a colleague, Trevor Johnston in Australia who has successfully argued that Australian sign language is under threat of ... Well, we won't say extinction but of significant ... It's under significant threat because of things like genetic screening and of preemptive abortions and because of cochlear implantation and mainstreaming. So the community is under threat to the point that the language is also under threat. We probably don't have time to say very much about this issue. But it also links in neatly the whole idea of cochlear implantation, the idea of genetic screening. I don't know if some of you may have come across some of the work in the UK on the human fertilization and embryology act. But if not, I can tell you about that some other time. We've talked a little bit about mainstreaming already so I won't say anything more on that. I'm conscious the time has probably run out already.

There are some other issues that I'd be more than happy to talk about with you, not least the issue of the invisibility of deaf communities and sign languages in much of the policy-making on deaf education. But I am also pleased just to say that the National Council for Special Education in 2012 published a report. For the first time in Irish history, an official document talked about the need to support Irish sign language in education and to provide access to Irish sign language for deaf kids. But that's only a document that is made of recommendation to the Department of Education in Signs and isn't one that necessarily will be implemented.

Fundamentally, sign language needs to be at the heart of everything that we're doing when we're talking about deaf communities. That's what deaf communities say and I think that's what we need to be listening to. I'll leave you with that, from the Irish deaf community, which is the call to legalize and to recognize formally Irish sign language now. So I should say [foreign language 01:02:01]. Thank you very much indeed.

Class: Floor is open for questions.

Class: So that older man, whose daughter went to Gallaudet, at home, when he speaks to her, does he sign this way and she signs that sort of way? It's like an immigrant family where the daddy is speaking in [inaudible 01:02:33]

Prof. Lorraine : Well, except it's all Irish sign language.

Class: Right. But he is using male and she is using female.

Prof. Lorraine : Yeah, but it's so much more diluted, like for her mom for example, her mom would use female signing. I mean, what we sometimes joke about, we say, "Well, deaf women are bilingual." They can manage both variants. But the men, they have a little bit of trouble with that. What's really cool, what I forgot to mention is the fact that obviously, deaf mothers talking to their deaf and hearing children are going to use Irish sign language, so very many of the men in Barbara LeMaster's study weren't aware of the fact that the signs that they were learning from their mom were seen as female signs.

They became declassified female signs, may have been adapted, may have been adjusted a little bit over time. What's also really cool is that the Irish deaf gay community use some of what were traditionally these old gendered women signs. I don't think that very many of them know that that's where they've come from, so there is that very interesting shift in terms of usage and functionality without necessarily having the conscious historical follow through.

Class: You may have kind of explained and I apologize, the [inaudible 01:04:01] program. The gentleman on the left who was the one that got the heat, did a more spelling of the word. In that on-calling English word and Irish in terms of when there is actually words them self, and this one will prefer spelling in Irish and some in English.

Prof. Lorraine : Oh that's such a good question. No. What's interesting is when I showed you the map of Ireland at the beginning, the west and the southwest of Ireland and also the north, we say it all the west, let's take all the west is traditionally the stronghold for Irish language speakers in Ireland. They're called the [foreign language 01:04:35]. What would happen traditionally is that when a child was born there who was deaf, they were sent to St. Mary's or St. Joseph's. Particularly when oralism was introduced that meant that they were going to be spoken to in English. So the parents would have to then to switch to use English with their children so that there was also a consequence in terms of family language for those who did come from an Irish speaking environment.

Also, what's interesting is because the Schools for the Deaf were designated as special schools and because the Irish Educational Authorities see deafness as a learning disability, deaf children have been exempted from learning Irish. So no Irish was offered at Schools for the Deaf. This is other consequences because if you want to become a primary school teacher in Irish, you must have fluent Irish in order to get into the training program. No alternatives are permitted. So one of the things that we've been doing probably for five, six years now is working with the teacher's unions and with the colleges of education to try and shift that. See if we can't offer an Irish sign language pathway instead. In fact, actually what I should also say is the guy who was on the right, Sean, he is from an Irish-speaking family. Yeah.

Class: Does anybody else have any questions? Just show off hands. All right. How much are sign language [inaudible 01:06:06]

Prof. Lorraine : Not very much. What's really cool about sign languages is that you can have ... Well, you have two major articulators. You can have simultaneity of expression. Instead of having to say the house was in front of the tree, you have tree and then the position of the house relative to that. You can have two things happening at the same time. People have talked about how sign languages represent motion with motion. You track movement through space. Maybe an easier example is if I have the cup on the table, if I'm going to do that in signed English, I would say something like the cup is on the table in Irish sign language.

Whereas, I'm going to sign it, you'll have first the table. It's topicalized, so I raised my eyebrows to mark it as the topic. Then I have cup. I locate it on the table, but relative to where it is on the table. If I said, "The cup is there," and it's actually there, that's incorrect information. Actually this modality issue also creates lots of problems for interpreters because English doesn't encode that degree of specificity but sign languages do. This has actually caused cases to be thrown out of court. Another example is sign languages used as spectral modification a lot. To be sick in Irish sign language, to be continuously sick, you also have a little rocking of the body, see as ... You've got a particular mouth pattern that marks for that. Whereas in English, you wouldn't do that of course. You have to be sick for a long time or whatever or to continuously be sick. If you're going to do it in signed English, it's a little bit complicated.

Actually there was a case in New Zealand where a deaf man had been accused of murdering his baby. The person who was brought in to interpret was a teacher of the deaf who didn't know very much sign language. When the man said something equivalent to, "I did this action three times," the teacher said, "Oh, I hit the baby three times," meaning that they had deliberately engaged in an action which led to the child's death. In fact, the father was saying he tried to resuscitate the baby. The man went to prison. It took several years before he was released on appeal. So the whole issue of the relationship between sign languages and spoken languages is one that still isn't well enough understood or discussed particularly around the provision of interpreters in medical and legal settings.

Class: You follow that the United States, American sign language is not dependent on the [inaudible 01:09:04].

Prof. Lorraine : Yes, they're completely different. For example, yesterday, I had the great pleasure of talking to people at the Deaf Hearing Center, DHCC, the Deaf Hearing Communication Center here in Swarthmore. After the talk, I was shown some of the deaf guys there, some of the state of the Irish sign language footage. I went, "Oh my god. I have no idea what that man just said." They're completely different languages. What's interesting also though is in terms of access, I mentioned that we have News for Deaf. So you see deaf signers every evening doing News for the Deaf and the weather forecast in Ireland.

But in British sign language, there is much much better access provided, even if it is at 3 AM where they have programs with an interpreter that yee-hay in the corner. It does mean that Irish deaf people gain most of their access to current affairs and to media and to soap operas through British sign language. Irish deaf people are typically quite receptively bilingual. They have receptive knowledge of British sign language as well as Irish sign language. That does come into play. Yeah.

At the same time, why sign languages are different when you're using a sign language completely, because the parameters are so shared, deaf people are much better at communicating cross-culturally than hearing people. If you're a deaf person from Ireland and you're going to China, you could still have a surface level conversation. You mightn't get into great depth, but you would be able to have a conversation and deaf people from different places see other deaf people as part of their deaf world, as part of their deaf family. So there is a sense of identification across national boundaries. I told you you'd have to tell me to shut up.

Class: I want to thank you, Lorraine.

Class: Thank you so much.

Class: Thank you, Lorraine.

How did we do?

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