d. Project Description

I. Introduction

Without a doubt, the question asked most frequently by laypersons as they turn their attention to sign languages and Deaf communities is whether sign language is universal, i.e. whether there exists only one sign language that is known and used by Deaf people all over the world.[1] The answer, most often greeted with surprise, is that there is no universal sign language in the sense that the questioner intends it. That is, there have been attempts to devise and implement systems that can be understood by deaf people in situations such as international conferences (Rosenstock 2003), with decidedly mixed results. But there is no one naturally occurring universal sign language to which all deaf people somehow have access. Not only are there basically as many sign languages as there are viable deaf communities, sign languages that exist alongside the spoken languages of the majority communities, these sign languages are also differentiated internally according to social criteria, in the same way that spoken languages are. That is, sociolinguistic varieties of sign languages exist and the social factors that help define these varieties include both those that play a role in spoken language variation – region, age, gender, socioeconomic status, race – and others that are unique to language use in Deaf communities, such as the language policies implemented in deaf education and the home environment (e.g. Deaf parents in an ASL-signing home vs. hearing parents in a non-signing home).

This project aims to describe the linguistic features of one such variety of American Sign Language (ASL) used by African American signers and usually known as Black ASL. While there is abundant anecdotal evidence that such a variety exists and while studies have examined lexical differences between Black ASL and the ASL used by White signers, no large-scale empirical studies have documented the linguistic features unique to Black ASL. The specific objectives of the proposed study are:

- To complete the analysis of data currently being collected in six sites in the United States as part of a 12-month project entitled "The History and Use of Black ASL in the South," funded by the Spencer Foundation.

- To provide a description of the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and discourse features that make Black ASL recognizable as a distinct variety of ASL.

The project will inform a) general theory in sociolinguistics, b) the study of Black-White language relations, and c) the study of sign languages.

As concerns a), general theory in sociolinguistics, a major focus of sociolinguistic studies has been the structure and use of ethnic varieties, in particular African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The proposed project will widen this focus to include ethnic varieties of sign languages. Since William C. Stokoe's pioneering work in the 1960s, linguists have recognized that natural sign languages are autonomous linguistic systems, structurally independent of the spoken languages with which they may co-exist in a given community. This recognition has been followed by extensive research into different aspects of ASL structure and accompanied by the recognition that, as natural sign languages are full-fledged autonomous linguistic systems shared

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[1] The use of upper-case Deaf here indicates cultural deafness, as opposed to the strictly audiological condition indicated by lower-case deaf. Both uses are conventional in the literature on deafness.

by communities of users, the sociolinguistics of sign languages can be described in ways that parallel the description of the sociolinguistics of spoken languages. On Stokoe's pioneering work, Garretson (1980) remarked that, "To know, once and for all, that our 'primitive' and 'ideographic gestures' are really a formal language on a par with all other languages of the world is a step towards pride and liberation" (vi). A "formal language" by definition includes sociolinguistic variation and distinct subsystems or varieties. As of this writing, we have clear empirical evidence for one such variety of ASL, the Tactile ASL used by Deaf-Blind signers, distinct in its phonology[2], morphosyntax, lexicon, and discourse structure from "sighted ASL" (Collins and Petronio 1998; Collins 2004). Yet, while there is a widespread perception in the American Deaf community of the existence of Black ASL and mostly anecdotal reports that it is as distinct from the ASL used by white signers as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is from middle-class White English, empirical descriptions of Black ASL based on natural language use data do not yet exist. Hairston and Smith (1983) comment that there is "a Black way of signing used by Black deaf people in their own cultural milieu – among families and friends, in social gatherings, and in deaf clubs" (55). Based on lexical data, Woodward (1976) described a variety of ASL used by Black Deaf adults in the South that arose in part in the schools for Black Deaf children and existed before desegregation. However, no data exist to document empirically its structure and use in a way comparable to the extensive data collected for AAVE. Another central focus in sociolinguistics has been on the outcomes of language contact. The proposed project will necessarily investigate the outcomes of language contact both between users of different varieties of ASL but also between Black ASL and spoken AAVE.

The concern with and ethnic varieties and language contact is linked to b), the study of Black-White language relations. Over forty years of research findings have documented the structure and use of AAVE in rich detail. AAVE has been shown to be a rule-governed and systematic variety of English distinct in its structure from other varieties of English, a variety that acquired its distinctiveness over a long period of time and as a result of the interaction of many historical and social forces (see Mufwene et al. 1998 and Green 2004 for reviews of the AAVE literature). Furthermore, not only linguists but also both Black and White laypersons recognize AAVE as distinct from other English varieties. While laypersons may use different labels than linguists to identify this variety (e.g. "Ebonics"), they nevertheless easily and clearly perceive it to be distinct from middle class White English as well as from other varieties of English. Moreover, laypersons' perceptions of distinctiveness are solidly confirmed by many empirical descriptions of AAVE structure and use. However, segregation affected deaf as well as hearing people and historically the social and educational conditions were present for the emergence of a Black variety of ASL. We propose documentation of Southern Black ASL that will be similar to the many empirical descriptions of AAVE.

Finally, as concerns c) the study of sign language, earlier studies have clearly demonstrated the importance of sociolinguistics in understanding the nature of sign languages and the proposed project will significantly contribute to that body of knowledge, while at the same time serving as a model for investigating and documenting sociolinguistic varieties in other sign languages.

II. Relation of the proposed project to the present state of knowledge

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[2] The term *phonology* is used in sign linguistics to describe the same area of linguistics that it refers to in spoken language studies, i.e. the study of the basic units of the language, in this case handshape, location, palm orientation, movement, and facial expressions.

Research on all aspects of the structure and use of ASL and other sign languages has progressed continuously since Stokoe's work in the 1960s (see Emmorey and Lane 2000 for an overview). Differences between Black and White signing have also been noticed by researchers for at least 40 years. Linguistic descriptions of the differences between Black and White signing focus primarily on Black signers in the South. For example, in his appendices to the 1965 *Dictionary of American Sign Language* (DASL), which he co-authored with William Stokoe and Dorothy Casterline, Croneberg discusses these differences as a consequence of the segregation of deaf schools in the South. Based on responses to a 134-item sign vocabulary list, he reports "a radical dialect difference between the signs" of a young North Carolina Black woman and those of White signers living in the same city (315). In comparing signs that can be produced on the face or on the hands (e.g. RABBIT, LEMON, COLOR),[3] Woodward, Erting, and Oliver (1976) claimed that White signers produced more signs on the face than did Black signers. Woodward et al. (1976) also noted a regional difference within the South. In New Orleans, both Black and White signers produced more signs on the face than did signers in Atlanta. In their study of two-handed signs that can be signed one-handed (e.g. CAT, CHINESE, COW), Woodward and DeSantis (1977) claimed that Black signers produced more two-handed signs than did White signers. More recently, aspects of Black ASL have been examined by Aramburo (1989), Guggenheim (1993), Lewis, Palmer, and Williams (1995), and Lewis (1998). Aramburo and Guggenheim observed lexical variation during the course of structured, formal interviews. Lewis et al. studied the existence of Black ASL and attitudes toward it. They described the increases in body movement, mouth movement, and the larger use of space in the signing of one Black female signer who code-switched from more standard ASL to Black ASL during the course of a monologue. In addition, they explored how sign language interpreters handled the code-switching, i.e. when the signer code-switched between Black ASL and more standard ASL. They found that the interpreters produced the shifts in posture and eye gaze that accompany role-shifting in ASL, features not unique to Black ASL. Lewis (1998) continued the examination of Black signing styles and described parallels between the communication styles of hearing and deaf African Americans. He focused on kinesic and non-verbal features, specifically, body postures and rhythmic patterns that accompanied the production of signs by one Black adult female. He specifically mentioned the lengthening of the movement in signs, the addition of side-to-side head movement, and change in body posture.

Differences between Black and White signing have also been examined in a large-scale national study of sociolinguistic variation in ASL. Lucas, Bayley, and Valli (2001) (described in detail in section III below) found variation between Black and White signers in the responses to a vocabulary elicitation task: for twenty-eight of thirty-four stimuli, the Black signers used signs that the White signers did not. However, signer ethnicity was found to be significant with only one of the three phonological variables produced during free conversation, with the class of signs exemplified by the sign KNOW, usually produced at the forehead but subject to lowering. Black participants in the study favored the non-lowered citation form of these signs (the form of the sign appearing in dictionaries and taught in sign language classes). It may simply be that ethnic variation does not manifest itself in the phonological variables selected for detailed study, but the explanation may also have to do with methodological issues. This will be addressed below.

As can be seen, much of the prior work on Black ASL was undertaken 30 years ago. Most of the

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[3] English glosses of ASL signs are typically written in upper case.

more recent work has focused on the signing of single individuals or small groups, often in interview situations, which may influence how the participants sign. While building on these earlier studies, the proposed project will provide a more comprehensive description of Black ASL based on a broader sampling Southern Black Deaf communities. It also represents the next logical step in the research program begun in Lucas et al. (2001), which surveyed a number of deaf communities throughout the United States and demonstrated the systematicity of variation in ASL at different linguistic levels. The proposed project is both narrower and deeper in scope than the work reported in Lucas et al. (2001). It focuses on a single ethnic group, African Americans, in a specific region, the South. Given the importance of residential schools in the transmission of ASL (Baynton 1996; Lucas et al. 2001) and the long history of segregation of Black and White deaf children in the South, the region possessed the social conditions necessary for the development of a separate language variety.

Research on other varieties of ASL is also relevant here, most notably the work on what is known as Tactile ASL, the variety of ASL used by Deaf-Blind people, specifically those with the genetic condition, Ushers Syndrome I. Individuals with this syndrome are born deaf and later, usually in their teen years, start losing vision in varying degrees due to retinitis pigmentosa. Crucially, most Deaf-Blind people in this category grow up using ASL and are fluent signers by the time they begin to lose their sight. A variety of ASL has emerged in this community that accommodates the loss of sight at all linguistic levels: phonological, morphological, syntactic, and discourse. One of the consequences of the loss of sight is that Deaf-Blind people no longer have access to the numerous ASL grammatical and discourse markers produced on a signer's face. Remarkably, these non-manual (facial) markers are produced on the hands in Tactile ASL. For example, the raised eyebrows required for yes/no questions or the nodding required for back-channeling are produced manually (see Collins and Petronio 1998 and Collins 2004 for fuller accounts). As mentioned, features of Tactile ASL are manifested at every level of the language and there is a vigorous community of Deaf-Blind signers who use Tactile ASL. Tactile ASL qualifies as a clear example of a variety of ASL. In addition, research has demonstrated the existence of tactile varieties of other sign languages such as Swedish Sign Language (Mesch 2000) and Norwegian Sign Language (Raanes 2006). The proposed project aims to demonstrate the specific linguistic and sociolinguistic features that qualify Black ASL as a variety of ASL, in the same way that Tactile ASL has been shown to be a variety of ASL.

III. Results from Prior NSF Support

Lucas served as the Principal Investigator for SBR-9310116 (1994-1997) and SBR-9709522 (1997-1999), Sociolinguistic Variation in ASL, and for a subsequent project (2001- Feb. 28, 2004) that created dissemination materials based on the findings of the first two grants (Lucas et al. 2001; Lucas, Bayley and Valli 2003). The overall goal of the first two projects was to create a large videotaped corpus representative of ASL use in the United States, in order to investigate two theoretical questions: 1) can internal linguistic constraints on variation such as those identified and described in spoken languages be identified and described for variation in ASL? and 2) can external social constraints on variation such as those identified and described in spoken languages be identified and described for variation in ASL? To create a representative corpus of ASL, seven sites in the United States were selected: Staunton, Virginia; Frederick, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Kansas City, Missouri (and Olathe, Kansas); New Orleans, Louisiana; Fremont, California; and Bellingham, Washington. All of these sites have thriving

communities of ASL users. In addition, Staunton, Frederick, Boston, Fremont, and Olathe are the sites of residential schools for deaf children, all with long-established surrounding Deaf communities. At each site, ASL users in three age groups (15-25, 26-54, 55 and older) and in two socioeconomic groups (middle-class and working-class) were videotaped in natural conversation. In addition, a subset of each group participated in in-depth interviews, with questions related to language use in the family, education, work, and leisure. A total of 207 ASL users, including 53 Black signers, participated in the projects. The Boston, Fremont, New Orleans, and Missouri/Kansas sites included both White and Black signers; only White signers were interviewed in Staunton, Frederick, and Bellingham, areas with very few Deaf African Americans.

Phonological, syntactic, and lexical variables were examined. The three phonological variables were: 1) the sign DEAF, which in citation form is signed from ear to chin. This sign is variable, in that it can also be signed from chin to ear or as a contact on the cheek; 2) a class of signs exemplified by the verb KNOW, signed in citation form at the level of the forehead but produced at locations on the cheek or even in the space in front of the signer; and 3) signs produced with a 1 handshape, that is, index finger extended and all other fingers and thumb closed. 1 handshape signs exhibit a great deal of variation and may be produced with the thumb open, thumb and all fingers open, and so forth. The DEAF variable was selected prior to data collection, based on Lucas' 1995 findings. KNOW and signs like it ("location" signs) and the 1 handshape signs were selected during the course of reviewing the data tapes, based on the variation that they exhibited and their frequency of occurrence in the data. All of the variables occurred naturally in the data; none were specifically elicited. Following spoken language models of variation and earlier claims about variation in ASL (e.g. Liddell and Johnson 1989), we originally hypothesized that the variation observed in all three variables could be explained by phonological factors, i.e. features of the location or handshape of the signs preceding or following the target variable. However, the analysis of almost 10,000 tokens of the three target variables clearly showed that while phonological factors do play some role, the major factor in explaining the variation is grammatical function (approximately 25 tokens of 1 handshape signs were coded per signer, for a total of 5356; 15 tokens per signer were coded for location signs (e.g. KNOW) for a total of 2862; all instances of DEAF were coded, for a total of 1618). Specifically, the sign DEAF can function as an adjective, as a noun, or as a predicate, and non-citation forms (chin to ear and contact cheek) are much more likely to occur with adjectives and in compound signs, while the citation form (ear to chin) is much more likely to occur when DEAF is a predicate. With the location of signs such as KNOW, verbs favor citation forms (i.e. at the forehead), while function words such as prepositions favor non-citation forms. First person pronouns (i.e. "I") favor non-citation 1 handshapes, second person pronouns are neutral, and third person pronouns and content signs (nouns and verbs) favor citation forms.

We found strong evidence that grammatical constraints play a more important role in conditioning phonological variation in ASL than the features of the preceding and following signs (Lucas and Bayley 2005). The challenge was to understand why this is so. The first answer is simply that, as in spoken languages, phonological variation in ASL is not constrained only by phonological factors, at least if phonological factors are restricted to the features of the preceding and following signs. The focus heretofore may have been on features of the preceding and following signs, but large data-based quantitative studies such as Lucas et al. (2001) clearly showed that grammatical factors must also be considered. A second answer concerns differences

between spoken and sign languages. Having established that sign languages are indeed languages, research on all aspects of sign language structure has begun to reveal some very fundamental and most likely modality-related differences between spoken and sign languages. Of most relevance to these prior projects are the fundamental differences in how morphology functions and how these differences manifest themselves in variation. In many of the spoken languages in which phonological variation has been extensively explored, morphology is a "boundary phenomenon." That is, meaningful segments are added to the beginning or to the end of other units in the language, in the form of plural markers, person and tense markers, derivational affixes, and so forth. These units are essentially added to an existing phonological environment. It stands to reason that when variation occurs, a good place to look for the cause of this variation is the immediate environment to which the units have been added, i.e. the preceding or following segments. And in fact, many studies of spoken language variation have demonstrated the key role of the immediate phonological environment in governing variation. However, morphology in sign languages is by and large not a boundary phenomenon, at least not to as great an extent. There exist very few affixes. Morphological distinctions are accomplished by altering one or more features in the articulatory bundle that makes up a hold or a movement segment or by altering the movement path of the sign. For example, segments are not usually added to other segments to provide information about person or aspect. Rather, the location feature of a segment (e.g. near the signer or away from the signer) indicates person, and movement between locations indicates the subject and object of the verb in question. Similarly, a particular movement path indicates continuative aspect or inceptive aspect (Emmorey 1999).

Based on the results reported in Lucas et al. (2001), it would seem that the fundamental differences between spoken and sign languages manifest themselves in the variable components of the language. That is, the immediate phonological environment turns out to not have the major role in constraining phonological variation, in part because the variables themselves are not affixes. The grammatical category to which the variable in question belongs consistently is the first-order linguistic constraint. This finding has important implications for our understanding of variation in spoken and sign languages. As the modality differences between spoken and sign languages manifest themselves in the basic phonological, morphological, and syntactic components of the language, so do they seem to manifest themselves in the variation found in the language. As phonological and morphological processes go, so apparently goes variation.

Lucas et al. (2001) also looked at variable pronominal subjects, specifically with a class of verbs known as "plain" verbs. Many verbs in ASL exploit the spatial resources available to a visual language by indicating person and number. Plain verbs, however, do not use space to indicate person or number and hence would seem to require an overt manual subject, either a pronoun or a full noun phrase. In spite of this apparent requirement, many plain verbs are produced without any such overt manual subject. Our analysis of plain verbs in narratives that occurred during the course of conversations showed that the majority of these verbs occurred without manual subjects and that, as in Spanish (see e.g. Flores-Ferrán 2007; Otheguy, Zentella, and Livert in press), this variation is constrained by coreference with the subject of the preceding verb. Coreference favors a null subject while switch reference disfavors it.

The focus of the earlier projects was on *sociolinguistic* variation in ASL and the analyses yielded sturdy correlations between linguistic features and social factors such as region, age, gender, language background (whether the signer was from a deaf ASL-using family or from a hearing

non-signing family), and as mentioned above, in the case of the location of signs such as KNOW, ethnicity. One important sociolinguistic finding that has direct bearing on the proposed project is the clear and strong link between linguistic variation in ASL and the history of deaf education, in particular the language policies implemented at schools for the deaf over the years. These policies ranged from the use of ASL in the classroom beginning in 1817 at the first school, the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, through the strict oralism that was enforced in most schools from the 1880s through the early 1970s (to the exclusion of sign language in the classroom), to the various "combined" methods of signing and talking simultaneously implemented in the 1970s, and finally back to the use of ASL in the classroom in many schools today. The signers in the two projects were divided into three age groups according to the language policy in place at the time they were in school: 55 and older (oralist), 26-54 (combined method, and also the period when Stokoe was beginning his research and ASL was starting to be recognized as a real language), and 15-25 (in the project sites, ASL as the medium of instruction in the classroom). This three-way division proved to be statistically significant for all of the phonological and the syntactic variables examined. As will be explained, this history of language policy, with the added feature of enforced segregation – in the case of Louisiana, until 1978, i.e. long after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling – has been crucial to the framing of the data collection and analysis for the proposed project.

The findings of the earlier NSF-supported projects have been widely disseminated in the form of a book (Lucas et al. 2001), numerous articles in refereed journals (Bayley, Lucas, and Rose 2000, 2002; Lucas and Bayley 2005; Lucas, Bayley, Reed, and Wulf 2001; Lucas, Bayley, Rose, and Wulf 2002; Wulf, Dudis, Bayley, and Lucas 2002) and numerous conference presentations and workshops. At the time of these endeavors, Rose, Wulf, and Dudis were graduate assistants They have now either completed their doctoral studies or are very close to doing so. The subsequent dissemination project created a CD and handbook, *What's Your Sign for PIZZA? An Introduction to Variation in American Sign Language* (Lucas, Bayley, and Valli 2003), that present the project findings for a general audience. As of this writing, the latter materials have been very well received in 19 separate venues – community workshops, conferences, invited lectures – and are being used in graduate and undergraduate courses. As per the terms of the dissemination project, copies of the materials have been made available to academic programs (Deaf studies programs and programs for interpreter training and sign language instruction), community centers, and school libraries. Finally, research groups in Australia and New Zealand have undertaken major projects on variation in the sign languages of those countries, based on the methods and results reported in Lucas et al. (2001) and related articles (McKee and McKee 2006; Schembri and Johnston 2007; Schembri, Johnston, and Goswell 2006).

IV. Data Collection completed with support from The Spencer Foundation

Data collection has been supported from May 2007 to May 2008 by the Spencer Foundation and will be completed by the time the proposed project begins. The overall goal of the data collection phase has been to record production of Southern Black ASL that is as natural as possible. Data collection has inevitably been shaped by two major factors: a) the history of deaf education in the United States and how it has intersected with school segregation, and b) the sensitivity of signers to the audiological status and ethnicity of the audience. As concerns the former, the first school for deaf children was established in Hartford, Connecticut in 1817, but no attempt was made to

provide for Black Deaf children until the mid-1850s. Following the Civil War, some states established schools or departments for Black children within already-established schools (Gannon 1981). The P. H. Skinner School for the Colored Deaf in Niagara City, New York in 1856 is regarded as the first short-lived attempt to provide formal education to Black deaf children (Dunn 1995). In the South, North Carolina established the first school for Black deaf children in 1869 (Crockett and Crockett-Dease 1990); South Carolina followed in 1876, Georgia in 1882, Arkansas and Texas in 1887, and Alabama in 1892 (McCaskill 2005; Bardes 1952; Crouch and Hawkins 1983). Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan (1996, following Hairston and Smith 1983) report that in the early 1950s, thirteen states still had segregated schools for Black deaf children and that as late as 1963, eight states still had such schools. In the North, no separate schools for Blacks were established, but Black children were sometimes excluded from established schools. Baynton (1996), for example, reports that in 1908 the oral Clarke School in Northampton, Massachusetts affirmed a policy of excluding Black students. Crucial to the proposed project is the fact that oral education was not extended equally to Black and White students. By the early part of the 20th century, when many white schools described themselves as using an "oral" or "combined" method, most Black schools described themselves as "manual" (Baynton 1996:46). Two other facts about the education of Black deaf children are of importance. First, some schools required Black children to be taught only by Black teachers (Doctor 1948). Many schools had close and valuable ties to historically Black colleges from which vocational and academic teachers were often recruited (McCaskill 2005). Many of the hearing teachers recruited from historically Black colleges did not know how to sign and did not sign in the classroom beyond the use of fingerspelling (Doctor 1948). Second, between the founding of the first school for Black deaf children in 1856 and the time when schools for the deaf were all finally desegregated in the late 1970s, Black deaf children and adults did not interact with White deaf children and adults on a regular basis. In some areas, they still do not interact today.

The long-term systematic separation of Black and White deaf children provided optimal conditions for the development of distinct varieties of ASL; it also leads to some intriguing puzzles for the proposed project to investigate. For example, it is well established that in residential schools for White deaf children, those who come from homes in which ASL is used, i.e. children who are native ASL signers, have always served as language models for children from hearing families in which ASL is not used (Lane et al. 1996). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the same is true in schools for Black deaf children. The main puzzle stems from the fact that, historically, the White deaf and Black deaf communities did not interact, so the question becomes, what were the Black children from deaf signing homes modeling for their peers and how did it differ structurally from what the White children from deaf signing homes were modeling? We are addressing this puzzle during the course of the project, by recording and interviewing signers who were in school during the years of segregation.

McCaskill (2005) reports that starting in 1869 with the establishment of the North Carolina school, a total of nine residential schools for Black children were eventually opened, along with nine already-established residential schools that added "Colored Departments" and six day schools that provided classes for Black children, servicing 24 states. Data collection for the proposed project is taking place in five of these states – North Carolina, Texas, Alabama, Arkansas and Louisiana – selected to represent the range of founding dates. Table 1 provides the dates for the founding of the school for White children, the founding of the school for Black

children, and the date of final desegregation, i.e. when White and Black deaf children began to beeducated together.

School location	Year White school founded	Year Black school founded	Year of desegregation
North Carolina	1845	1869	1967
Arkansas	1850	1887	1965
Texas	1857	1887	1965
Alabama	1858	1892	1968
Louisiana	1852	1938	1978

Table 1. Founding and desegregation of schools for the deaf in five Southern states

We hypothesize that the kind of school attended by the signers will have direct bearing on their use of language. Signers for the project are therefore being recruited according to whether they attended segregated or desegregated programs. On average, this will mean a group of signers who are over the age of 50 and a group who are under the age of 35.

The second factor shaping data collection is the sensitivity of signers to the audiological status and ethnicity of the audience. The amount of attention language users pay to their language production and the nature of audience design on language use have been addressed by sociolinguists starting with Labov (1972) and continuing with Bell (1984, 2001), Giles (1973, 2001), and Giles and Powesland (1975). In sign linguistics, Lucas and Valli (1992) demonstrated that ASL users are very sensitive to an interviewer's audiological status and ethnicity, i.e. hearing or deaf, Black or White. This sensitivity may be manifested by rapid switching from ASL to Signed English (a manual code for English) or Contact Signing (an outcome of the contact between ASL and English characterized by core features from both languages and continuous voiceless mouthing). As explained by Giles' Accommodation Theory (1973), many deaf people will adjust their signing to bring it closer to what they perceive to be the preference of their interlocutor. In Lucas et al. (2001), Black signers were recorded with no White researchers present and interviewed by a Black deaf interviewer. Nevertheless, while the lexical elicitation task showed clear differences between Black and White choices, it seems that the Black signers in the study did not consistently produce phonological, morphological, or syntactic features of Black ASL. Rather, they shifted to a more standard ASL, possibility as a consequence of being filmed and interviewed by strangers. However, the results may be a reflection of 1) the fact, with the exception of the signers from Louisiana, the Black signers reported on in Lucas et al. (2001) were from Boston, Kansas City, and California, locations not subjected to segregation in deaf education, and 2) the possibility that the target variables in Lucas et al. (2001) are not relevant to defining Black ASL. The proposed project aims to create data collection conditions conducive to the production of Black ASL. The main components of the data collection are the sites, the participants, the contact persons, and the settings for filming: group sessions, interviews, and elicited narratives.

a) data collection sites: as explained above, the project includes five data collection sites, selected according to when the schools for Black deaf children were founded: Raleigh, North Carolina, Little Rock, Arkansas, Houston, Texas, Talladega, Alabama, and New Orleans, Louisiana. Raleigh, Talladega, and Little Rock are the sites of former schools for Black deaf children as well as the sites of integrated schools for deaf children today. Houston and New

Orleans have large and stable Black deaf communities. In addition, attendees at the regional 2007 National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) conference were filmed in informal conversations. NBDA is an advocacy organization whose annual conference in August 2007 was attended by upwards of 300 Black Deaf people. Observers of this conference frequently remark, "Yes, I see something different from Standard ASL. I see Black ASL." Informal conversations were recorded by the graduate research assistants working on the project.

b) participants: the participants at each of the five sites include members of the local Black deaf community, selected to represent the "over 50" and "under 35" general age groups. Since Deaf families are traditionally held in high esteem in the community, attempts will be made to recruit their members as participants. The elderly participants provide both examples of Black ASL and of the history of the schools during segregation as well as a basis for contrast with the younger signers. The elderly signers also offer crucial information about language use in the schools and about teacher characteristics, i.e. deaf or hearing, Black or White. In combination with library research on the history of the Black schools, this information will help us build an accurate picture of Black ASL, its origins, and what kind of sign models the children in these schools were exposed to. The signers filmed at the NBDA conference represent a sampling of conference attendees.

Following the methods used in Lucas et al. (2001), we recruited a representative number of participants in each of the relevant social categories at each of the main sites, as shown in Table 2. In addition, as mentioned, we have worked with respected members of the community to insure the representation of participants from Deaf families at each site.

| | Under 35 years | | 50 years + | | |
	F	M	F	M	Total
Alabama	4	4	4	4	16
Arkansas	4	4	4	4	16
Louisiana	4	4	4	4	16
North Carolina	4	4	4	4	16
Texas	4	4	4	4	16
NBDA	4	4	4	4	16
Total	24	24	24	24	96

Table 2. Participant characteristics

c) local contact people (following procedures used in Lucas et al. 2001): the signers at each of the four sites have been identified and recruited by contact persons who live in the area and with whom the participants are very familiar.

d) there are four settings for the filming:

i) the local contact persons have arranged for the signers to participate in free conversation lasting between 30 and 40 minutes;

ii) following the free conversation, the researchers conduct a 30-minute interview with the participants. The interview focuses on signers' life stories, particularly on their educational experience, their school, and the nature of language use both in and out of the classroom when they were students.

iii) informal conversations were filmed at the August 2007 NBDA meeting;

iv) a narrative elicitation task is being performed. Forty-five years of research findings about the structure of ASL provide us with a very clear picture of the language as used by White signers, including narrative conventions and narrative development (see e.g. Galvan and Taub 2004; Rayman 1999). In order to examine possible differences between White and Black narrative styles, we are doing a focused narrative elicitation: Black signers at the five sites are being asked to view a portion of a wordless cartoon and then re-tell it to another participant. Two different cartoons are being used. During the spring of 2008, twelve White signers will be recruited for the same task. The cartoon re-tellings by the Black signers will be compared to those of the White signers. In addition, as in Lucas et al. (2001), we expect that the informal conversations and interview sections of the data will contain examples of narratives of personal experience. In fact, interview protocols have been designed to elicit such narratives, particularly narratives dealing with the Black Deaf experience. These more informal narratives will provide another source of data for the analysis of Black Deaf narrative style.

The conversations and interviews are being filmed using two Canon GL2 digital video cameras. The cameras are positioned in such a manner as to capture every nuance of the signing. The conversations and interviews are being transferred a computer for editing. Editing consists primarily of trimming unneeded frames and compressing the final footage to comply with available technology. The primary means of video distribution will be CD and DVD; archiving will be accomplished using mini-DV tapes. Following the filming, the data will be catalogued using a professional cross-platform database program, FileMaker Pro. The data stored in FileMaker Pro can be made accessible via a local network or on the internet. This will allow the data to be viewed and/or entered from various locations.

V. General Plan of Work

Using the data collected by May 2008, the work for the proposed project will have three major parts: 1) linguistic analyses, 2) historical description and 3) dissemination of findings. The linguistic analyses and historical description phases are described in this section. Plans for dissemination conclude the proposal.

1) Linguistic Analyses:

Based on the data and findings of Lucas et al. (2001), earlier recorded interviews conducted at NBDA, earlier research on Black ASL, and consultations with members of the Black Deaf community, the following 8 variables have been chosen for analysis:

Phonology:

- **the use of two-handed versus one-handed signs.** One hand can often be deleted in two-handed signs and, as mentioned earlier, Woodward and DeSantis (1977) claimed that Black signers used more two-handed signs that did White signers. The Lucas et al. (2001) and NBDA tapes reveal numerous examples of signs produced with two hands by Black signers but with one by White signers, such as LIE, FINE, HAPPY, and DON'T-KNOW. Most

recently, Lucas et al. (2007) completed a quantitative analysis with 137 signers (84 White and 53 Black, using the data from Lucas et al. 2001) and 2258 tokens which shows that the Black signers in the sample are more likely than White signers to use the two-handed variants. The free conversation and interview portions of the data tapes will be sampled for this variable.

- **the lowering of signs produced on the face.** Woodward, Erting, and Oliver (1976) claimed that White signers produced more signs on the face than did Black signers, while in Lucas et al. (2001), the Black signers favored the non-lowered citation forms of signs represented by the sign KNOW, produced at the forehead level (citation forms are those that appear in dictionaries and are taught in sign language classes). The Lucas et al. (2001) tapes and the earlier NBDA tapes reveal examples of KNOW produced not only at the forehead by Black signers but in the middle of the forehead, an older form of the sign. The free conversation and interview portions of the data tapes will be sampled for this variable.

These two variables lend themselves to quantification and will be subject to multivariate analysis with VARBRUL (Sankoff, Taglaimonte, and Smith 2005; Young and Bayley 1996), a specialized application of the statistical procedure known as logistical regression that has long been used in sociolinguistic studies of variation (Bayley 2002). With VARBRUL, the researcher can model the multiple linguistic and social factors that influence a signer's choice between one or another linguistic variant. As with the Lucas et al. (2001) study, a set number of examples of each feature will be coded for each signer.

- **the size of the signing space.** Anecdotal accounts, the Lucas et al. (2001) tapes and the NBDA tapes repeatedly support claims by Lewis et al. (1995) and Lewis (1996) that Black ASL uses a bigger signing space, i.e. signs that exceed the rectangle that covers the area from the top of the head to the waist, from shoulder to shoulder, and a foot in front of the signer. We will take into account that this feature may also require morphological and discourse explanations, since altering the size of the signing space may be done for emphasis or as a function of constructed action and constructed dialogue (see below). The cartoon re-tellings by Black and White signers will be used, so that we can control for topic. A grid will be imposed on the video screen for each re-telling, allowing us to measure the size of each signer's signing space and compare it empirically with others.

Syntax:

The Lucas et al. (2001) and NBDA data and anecdotal reports indicate that Black signers may use **clausal or phrasal repetition** more than do White signers, as in the following examples: HAVE SON NOW, HAVE SON ("I have a son now."); LAST-YEAR PRO.1 VISIT NEW YORK, NEW YORK, NEW YORK ("I visited New York last year.") The cartoon re-tellings will be used for analysis here, as well as bounded sections of the free conversation and interview data. The number and kind of repetitions will be counted and analyzed for form and function.

Discourse:

- **constructed dialogue and constructed action**. Constructed dialogue and constructed action (Tannen 1989, Metzger 1999) are very commonly used in ASL discourse, as signers report conversations and take the role of individuals or entities they have interacted with. An analysis by Metzger and Mather (2004) based on the Lucas et al. (2001) tapes suggests that

both strategies may be used more extensively in Black than in White ASL. The cartoon re-tellings will be analyzed, as well as selected narratives that occur spontaneously in the free conversation and interview data.

- **eye contact by the narrator during narratives.** An examination of narratives in the Lucas et al. (2001) tapes by Black signers that occur during conversations reveals a consistent lack of intermittent eye contact by the narrator with co-interlocutors during the course of the narrative. The narrator tends to shift his/her eyegaze away from the co-interlocutor at the beginning of the narrative and focus on his/her hands or on the locations being used for constructed dialogue and constructed action for the duration of the narrative. The cartoon re-tellings will be analyzed, as well as dialogues in the free conversation and interview data.

 Results of contact with English and AAVE:

- **voiceless mouthing of English.** The tapes from Lucas et al. (2001) and NBDA reveal markedly less mouthing of English words by the Black signers in both narratives and conversations. Some of the interviewees show no mouthing at all. Bounded sections of the free conversation and interview data will be analyzed and compared with the mouthing behavior of White signers from Lucas et al. (2001).

- **outcomes of contact with AAVE.** Anecdotal reports and informal observation attest to the outcomes of contact with AAVE, that is the use of AAVE lexical items and phrases – "My bad.", "Girl!", "He my home boy."– either simultaneously spoken and signed (i.e. code-mixing) or incorporated into Black ASL (i.e. borrowing) or spoken without signing (i.e. code-switching). The free conversation and interview data will be analyzed, with as many instances as possible noted.

With the exception of the signers from Louisiana, the Black signers discussed in Lucas et al. (2001) are from Boston, Kansas City, and California, so their signing provides a rich basis of comparison with the signing of the Southern signers in the proposed study. As with the Lucas et al. (2001) study, examples of the 8 features will not be explicitly elicited and we will also leave open the possibility that features not listed here will emerge from the data and be worthy of analysis.

Lexical Variation

In addition to the eight variables listed, two analyses of lexical variation will be undertaken: a) an analysis of the signs that occur in the free conversation and interview portions of the data. Many examples occur naturally and others are produced during the interview as a result of direct questions from the researchers. Signs will be analyzed by semantic category and in terms of regional, ethnic and age differences; b) at the end of the interview, participants are being shown a set of pictures to elicit signs claimed to be produced differently by Black signers and White signers in the South, specifically MOVIE, COLOR, RABBIT, PEANUT, PEACH and LEMON (Woodward, Erting and Oliver 1976). The analysis will re-examine this claim.

2) Historical Description

Based on participants' responses during the interview and on library research, a detailed description of the history of schools for Black deaf children will be undertaken, with a focus on

the schools in our five target sites. Key information will include when and by whom the schools were founded, what the stated language policy was, and who the teachers were. Knowing whether the teachers were Black or White and deaf or hearing will help us build a clear picture of what kinds of sign models were available to the children and therefore provide some of the answers as to how a "Black way of signing" came to be. Historical information will also allow us to understand possible links between Black ASL as used in widely-separated areas of the South. As Lane et al. (1996) point out, many deaf schools were founded by teachers and graduates from deaf schools that had been established earlier. These connections had linguistic consequences as well. For example, Lucas et al. (2001) reported that patterns of variation in white ASL in Virginia and Washington State were more similar to one another than to patterns documented in neighboring states. Research into the history of deaf education revealed that the Washington State School for the Deaf was founded by teachers from the Virginia School for the Deaf in Staunton, who presumably brought with them a particular way of signing. This result highlights the importance of historical research on deaf education in explaining relationships among different varieties of ASL.

VI. Expected Outcomes

As noted above, this project represents the first systematic study of Black ASL using standard sociolinguistic methodology. Hence, as in the case of our earlier work on variation in ASL (Lucas et al. 2001), we are prepared for a number of possibilities. In general, we expect Black signers to use: more 2-handed versions of signs than 1-handed, more non-lowered forms of signs that can be lowered, a larger signing space, more clausal repetition, more constructed action and constructed dialogue, less eye contact with the interlocutor, less voiceless mouthing of English words and more incorporation of AAVE structures into the signing. We expect to see lexical variation related to age, ethnicity and region and we expect to be able to document a clear connection between educational and language policies and the use of language. In sum, we expect to be able to provide a description of the features that make Black ASL recognizable as a distinct sociolinguistic variety of ASL.

The outcome of the proposed project will be significant in four ways, all of benefit to society at large:

1) as concerns the intellectual merit of the project, it will greatly enhance our scientific understanding of the structure and use of American Sign Language as a full-fledged language with distinct varieties;

2) also related to intellectual merit, the project will contribute to our understanding of the structure and use of human language in general, as we provide strong and continuing evidence that the phenomena of sociolinguistic variation and dialects are not unique to spoken languages;

3) as concerns the broader impacts of the project, the findings will have direct and wide practical applications in a number of areas: for undergraduate and graduate courses on the structure and use of sign languages and on Deaf culture, in sign language skills courses (i.e. courses for people learning ASL), in the training of sign language interpreters, and in the training of teachers of the deaf. There is a need in all of these areas for empirical information about variation in ASL, including the variety known as Black ASL, as a basis

for the creation of teaching materials.

4) Two Black Deaf graduate students are involved in the current project as research assistants (see resumes included) and will continue to be involved the proposed project. By making the project findings available to the educational groups named above and by involving graduate students directly, the proposed project will integrate research and education and advance discovery while at the same time promoting teaching, training, and learning.

The success of the proposed project will depend on the collaboration of a diverse group of researchers, students, and community members. By focusing on Black ASL, the project will by definition broaden the participation of underrepresented groups, i.e. Black Deaf Americans, both men and women. The project will involve the partnership of two academic departments at Gallaudet University (ASL/Deaf Studies and Linguistics) and an academic department at the University of California, Davis (Department of Linguistics).

VII. Dissemination of the Findings

The project findings will be disseminated in a number of ways: 1) a book about the project will be produced and project findings will be presented by all project staff, including the graduate assistants, in a number of venues, including conferences such as NWAV, ADS and TISLR (Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research), the national and local meetings of National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) and Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and in workshops for schools at all levels and community centers; 2) papers will be submitted for publication in refereed journals; 3) a CD and guide for a general audience similar to *What's Your Sign for PIZZA?* (Lucas et al. 2003) will be produced; 4) a web site will be created and maintained for the project, on which a description of the project will be provided and the findings will be reported; the web site will be interactive, such that members of the community can contribute their own reflections on Black ASL and on the history of Black Deaf education; 5) as with the findings reported in Lucas et al. (2001), the findings of the proposed study will be used in graduate and undergraduate courses on the structure and use of sign languages and on Deaf history and culture.

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