

AN ANALYSIS OF DEAF CULTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES

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SUBMITTED TO

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MARCH 2014

1. Introduction

Those that society calls 'handicapped' have always been members of the same society, yet there has always been an attitude to think that they are separate from the mainstream. That what makes them different, whether it is blindness, deafness, confinement to a wheelchair, etc. also makes them unable to function with the rest of the 'normal' populace.

The handicapped in society have had a long history of disenfranchisement no matter where you go in the world. They are seen as 'weird' or 'strange', as not being capable to be fully understood. That they are a minority because they are not part of the abled members of society and not that they have their own culture or identity that is not a part of mainstream society.

The word deaf comes from the old English word 'deaf' which carries the same connotation as the contemporary word, but it can also mean 'empty' or 'barren'. Cognates in other languages in its language family carry meanings such as 'confusion' 'stupefaction' or 'dizziness'.

The Deaf in 'handicapped' or 'disabled' society are distinguished by also having their own unique linguistic identity as well as having a cultural one. The existence of Deaf people has been recorded as early as 2000 BC in Egypt. They were also mentioned in ancient Greece and Rome where views on them were discriminatory in nature. In Europe in the Middle Ages the Deaf were deprived their rights of inheritance and restricted from celebrating mass or getting married without special dispensation from the Pope. Christian history is filled with miracles that cure the Deaf and some early Christians even saw Deafness as a sin.

The history of discrimination that Deaf society has faced is due to the way mainstream society has qualified it. When you speak of the Deaf it is usually seen as a medical condition, one that leaves a person impaired or missing a vital part of what makes them a person. It is only in very recent years, in this past century where the way of thinking in terms of the Deaf has shifted from a medical condition to a legitimate subculture with their own language and identity.

It has been a popular theme in literature and popular culture that deafness is always coupled with misunderstanding. There is always the need for an interpreter present because it is not

mainstream to know how to use a sign language or it is only in the thoughts of the deaf character that you can find understanding.

In most media focusing on deaf individuals it is always seen as something that is an inherent disadvantage that must be overcome. The usual trope of the deaf character is when they have to push through their ‘crippling’ disability to be able to compete and triumph against normally abled individuals.

This study will delve into the history of Deaf society in the Philippines and the contemporary status of their culture and language. It will view the deaf as a distinct subculture that has developed a non-verbal language as a means of communication. There will be a focus on the language used (FSL) as a marker of Deaf identity and a short syntactic and socio-linguistic analysis of the language.

1.1. Methodology

This study is a research on the current status of deaf culture in the Philippines. The goal of this research is to describe the state of deaf culture through their language, identity, art and relations with the mainstream (hearing) society and within Deaf culture. This is to show Philippine Deaf culture as part of Philippine society and Philippine culture.

The methods used to gather data in this study are twofold. First is a review and collection of previous studies, articles and documents done on the topics of deaf culture, deaf society, sign language, FSL and ASL.

Second is the use of informants, both hearing and deaf. They are mostly from the College of Saint Benilde (CSB), the deaf informants were students or alumni from the CSB SDEAS (School of Deaf Education and Studies) located in Taft Avenue in Manila.

1.2. Scope and Limitations

This study is focused on current deaf culture in the Philippines with a historical and cultural pretext. This study will include the history of deaf culture starting from the 1900s, mainly focused on the American colonial period. This study will also discuss some theoretical perspectives when speaking of the Deaf community.

From the information gathered the study will give an overview of the current state of Deaf culture in the Philippines and relating it to Philippine society and culture.

Because Philippine Deaf culture as a whole is a wide topic, this study will only include data on current Deaf society gathered from the informants, so there are considerations of the space where the informants are from. There was also some difficulty with some of the interviews conducted, there was not always an interpreter present so the communication had to be done through pen and paper writing or through instant messaging chat or text.

Deaf studies is also a fairly recent phenomenon, having started only a few decades earlier and there are not many sources available on Philippine Deaf history, the major publications found were related to pedagogical interests and social conditions.

2. Deaf Society

2.1. The Deaf

The Deaf in any group of people refer from one to three people born out of a thousand. Most Deaf children are born to hearing parents (about 90%). Most Deaf worldwide grow up without a language to communicate in. In some cases their family (which would be comprised of hearing people) would develop a few rudimentary signs, called ‘home signs’, these are not actual sign languages, and a sign language never occurs in isolation. ¹

2.2. The Development of Deaf cultures

The perspective of deafness as a culture in itself is fairly recent, having begun in the United States in recent decades.

“...we use the lowercase *deaf* when referring to the audiological condition of not hearing and the uppercase *Deaf* when referring to a particular group who share a language.. and a culture... use it(sign language) as a primary means of communication among themselves, and hold a set of beliefs about themselves and their connection to a larger society”²

Padden explains that the loss of hearing is not a big criterion for being a part of Deaf culture, he states that as long as one identifies with other Deaf people and has behaviors like a Deaf person then they may belong to the cultural group known as Deaf. In his view the shared cultural values of the Deaf are the main characteristic that should be considered when looking at Deaf as a culture.³

The Philippine Deaf Resource Center and the Philippine Federation of the Deaf both make distinctions between the deaf (with a lowercase) and the Deaf (with an uppercase). One can be deaf without necessarily being a part of the culturally Deaf.

¹ Hurlbut. 2008. Philippine Signed Languages Survey: A Rapid Appraisal. SIL International.

² Padden, C. and Humphries, T. 1988. Deaf in America. Voices From a Culture. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

³ Paden, C. 1989. The Deaf community and the culture of Deaf people. American Deaf Culture. Ed. S. Wilcox, 1-16. Maryland: Linstok Press.

“A deaf community may thus be comprised of: the culturally Deaf, the hearing, as well as non-culturally deaf individuals. The latter two groups are not considered part of the culture but are associated with the rest of the community because of their work, and hearing loss, respectively”⁴

A deaf person may become part of Deaf culture through learning of these shared cultural values that the Deaf community has. This is done through socialization in deaf schools or interacting with members of the Deaf community.

2.3. Sign Languages: An Overview

2.3.1. The Nature of Sign Languages

There is a clear distinction between spoken languages and sign languages, linguistically. But there are also stratifications within sign languages. There is a distinction between natural sign languages (those that are not invented), artificial sign languages and fingerspelling. They will be explained briefly here.

Natural sign languages are complex grammatical systems which have all the qualities common to other human languages that are spoken.⁵ They are distinct from spoken languages through means of articulation: spoken languages are articulated through sound by the vocal tract while sign languages are articulated through the hands and body (this also includes the face). There are distinct sign languages in existence throughout the world and are used for communication in Deaf communities.

⁴ Philippine Deaf Resource Center and Philippine Foundation of the Deaf. 2004. An Introduction to Philippine Sign Language. Part III. Current Issues. Studio Graphics: Quezon City.

⁵ Foley, W. 1997. Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction. Malden, MA:Blackwell

Artificial sign languages are developed primarily as teaching tools for teaching spoken languages to deaf individuals. These are manually coded versions of the spoken language they are developed from. Sometimes they borrow from the lexicon of natural sign language.⁶

Fingerspelling is basically an alphabet system represented through signing. Since there are different alphabets worldwide, different fingerspelling systems have also arisen. Some fingerspelling systems are one-handed such as ASL (American Sign Language) and some two-handed like BSL (British Sign Language).⁷



A Fingerspelling guide for use in the Philippines.⁸

⁶ Senghas, R. and Monaghan L. 2002. Signs of their Times: Deaf Communities and the Culture of Language. [http://sonify.psych.gatech.edu/~walkerb/classes/assisttech/pdf/Senghas\(2002\).pdf](http://sonify.psych.gatech.edu/~walkerb/classes/assisttech/pdf/Senghas(2002).pdf) .Retrieved March 20, 2014.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ [Photo] The Signs of Change Language Center. 2014. Handspelling. <http://signsofchangelearningcenter.weebly.com/explaining-deaf.html> Retrieved March 7, 2014.

2.3.2. Sign Languages in the Philippines

Contrary to popular belief by hearing individuals, there is no universal sign language that is in use in the Philippines. The sign languages that are in use are described below.

2.3.2.1. ASL (American Sign Language)

American Sign Language was developed by Dr. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. It is the standard sign language used in the United States and it is a natural sign language recognized by many colleges and universities in and around the United States.⁹

2.3.2.2. SEE (Sign in Exact English) or MCE (Manually Coded English)

Signing in Exact English or Manually Coded English is an artificial sign language in which the spoken English language is signed. Unlike ASL or FSL it does not have its own grammar or syntax, instead it seeks to represent exactly the vocabulary and grammar system of the spoken English language.¹⁰

2.3.2.3. FSL (Filipino Sign Language)

Filipino sign language is a natural sign language that was developed by the indigenous Filipino Deaf community. Though it is called “Filipino” Sign Language, it does not follow the grammar or syntax of the spoken Filipino language. FSL is influenced by ASL and Manually Coded English from which it has borrowed a number of signs.¹¹

⁹ Bahan, B. 1996. Non Manual Realization of Agreement in Sign Language. Boston University. <ftp://louis-xiv.bu.edu/pub/asl/disserts/Bahan96.pdf>. Retrieved March 20, 2014.

¹⁰ Hoffman, A. 2008. <http://lifefprint.com/asl101/topics/signedenglish02.htm> . Retrieved March 22, 2014.

¹¹ Martinez, L. 2012. Primer on Filipino Sign Language. <http://opinion.inquirer.net/41909/primer-on-filipino-sign-language> . Retrieved March 21, 2014. Signed Exact English.

There are currently at least 100,000 deaf persons who use the language in the Philippines and it is currently classified as a developing language in international publications.¹² This means that FSL is in vigorous use among its speakers, having a standardized form being used by some, though it is not classified as fully sustainable as of yet.

FSL is a productive language, meaning that it changes and adapts to the needs of its speakers. It can be seen below in the primer that it has coined new terms for emerging technologies and industries:¹³

Traditional signs in FSL lexicon

					
HOME-GO: Very common sign with complex derivation from two productive morphemes "home" (itself based on a compound sign) and "go"		HEARING, lost from lexicon. Note mouth nonmanual signal which appears to remain as a productive morpheme in existing signs.		LACK-EDUCATION (idiom): Distinct mouth nonmanual signal; meaning literally unschooled or lacking in experience or skill	

Emerging signs (IT and telecom) in FSL lexicon

					
MINIMIZE (WINDOW) variant: Classifier predicate with whole object morpheme and movement process root; spatial verb using topographic space		BATTERY CHARGE DEplete—UBOS ("lowbatt") or BATTERY CHARGE DEplete: Compound sign, classifier with extent morpheme on dominant hand and whole object morpheme on nondominant hand; with nonmanual signal. Segment deletion for shortervariant			

SOURCE: PHILIPPINE DEAF RESOURCE CENTER AND PHILIPPINE FEDERATION OF THE DEAF. 2004. "AN INTRODUCTION TO FILIPINO SIGN LANGUAGE, PART I. UNDERSTANDING STRUCTURE" PHOTOS BY CHARLIE ALTOPONTE

¹² Lewis, M. Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). 2014. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Seventeenth edition*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

¹³ [Photo] Philippine Deaf Resource Center. 2004. Sign-Language. <http://opinion.inquirer.net/41909/primer-on-filipino-sign-language> Retrieved March 14, 2014

2.3.2.4. Communication chains

The general communication chain from signers to non signers is as follows:¹⁴



¹⁴ Martinez, L. 2012. Access to Justice: Case monitoring by the Philippine Deaf Resource Center (2006-2012). *Strategies for Attaining Legal Access and Safeguarding Human Rights of the Deaf in the Philippines*. Retrieved from http://www.phildeafres.org/files/PDRC_Case_Monitoring_2006-2012.pdf

3. Historic and Cultural Considerations

3.1. Deaf Society in the Philippines

3.1.1. Who are the Filipino Deaf?

According to the 2000 NSO census the total number of Persons with Disability in the Philippines is 1.2% of the total population or 942, 098. Among these 4.7% or 44,725 people are classified as Hard of Hearing.¹⁵ They are those that are deaf, partially deaf, or with poor hearing ability.

3.1.2. History

The history of the Deaf community can be explained through waves of influence beginning in the 1900s, they include contact with religious organizations, educators and international non-governmental organizations.

In the early 1900s the Manila School for the Deaf (which would later become the Philippine School for the Deaf) and the Philippine Association for the Deaf was established. It was during this period that the Deaf community was recognized as a minority by the government. This period is characterized by the first contact of the indigenous sign language with ASL and the convergence of the Philippine Deaf in Manila in a school setting, as the Manila School for the Deaf was the only option for education for deaf individuals at that time.¹⁶

Starting with the 1960s religious organizations began to have an interest in the deaf members of society. This wave was characterized by the founding of the Deaf Evangelistic Alliance Foundation, the Laguna Christian College for the deaf and the Bible institute for the Deaf. This would mean that the Deaf community would also interact in religious settings in addition to educational ones.¹⁷

¹⁵ National Statistics Office. 2000. 2000 Census of Population and Housing.

¹⁶ Philippine Deaf Resource Center and Philippine Foundation of the Deaf. 2004. An Introduction to Philippine Sign Language. Part I. Understanding Structure. Studio Graphics: Quezon City.

¹⁷ Ibid

With the mid 1970s came non-governmental organizations such as researchers and the Peace Corps (Through Peace Corps Volunteers or PCV). The researches documented traditional or indigenous signs which culminated in the publication of “Love Signs” and the work of Carol Cobar in 1985. It is in this period that MCE/SEE had first contact with the Deaf community in the Philippines, brought through educators.¹⁸

The 1990s were the start of many educational opportunities in the Deaf community. Tertiary level education programs were begun in the DLSU-College of St. Benilde with their Bachelor of Applied Deaf Studies. The Manila Christian Computer Institute for the Deaf and CAP School for the Deaf were also founded at this time. FSL as a sign language distinct from ASL and MCE/SEE was recognized in this period as well. Developments in deaf consciousness, increased advocacy and integration into mainstream society through education and employment also characterized this era in Deaf history in the Philippines.¹⁹

3.1.3. Perceptions and Stereotypes of Philippine Deaf Culture

The past ways of viewing Deaf culture has been one of a medical/infirmity model, one where deaf individuals are considered hearing impaired or handicapped, thus taken as separate from mainstream society and needing special treatment in terms of . It can be seen though the language that was used in the time periods for example in this American account on describing the students of the Manila School for the Deaf:

“During the year 1907-08 the Bureau of Education opened in Manila a school for defectives, providing at first for a number of deaf children, and later for the blind. As the parents of these children were usually unable to pay the expense of maintenance away from home, the government made provision to subsist and clothe them, so that they were given a chance to develop into self-reliant, and self-supporting members of society. Basketry, hat-making, and other handicrafts were taught, as well as academic subjects”²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Forbes, W. 1928. The Philippine Islands. Boston: Houghton Muffin.

The Deaf were seen as defective, not normal, and different. They were also remarked as a burden to society and to their parents because the cost of raising a deaf child when compared to a hearing one was more expensive, so the government had to step in to make them contributing members of society.

It can also be seen that in recognizing the Deaf as a minority during the 1900s this marked the start of discrimination of the Deaf, as this was the first time they were integrated into the rest of Philippine society.

4. The Deaf as a Subculture

4.1. Demographics

According to NSO statistics, male and female members of the Deaf community are equal in number, with around 22, 000 for each sex.²¹ Because the informants for this study were students in CSB, most information about the culture will be from those aged 19-25.

4.2. Deaf Culture

4.2.1. Language

At present, FSL is the main medium of instruction for the SDEAS in CSB. It is taught to both Deaf and hearing students (for hearing students it is an elective course). The staff is fully trained in FSL to accommodate Deaf students.

FSL is also the language used by the majority of the Deaf in their homes and when they interact with each other. Some Deaf students who come from deaf schools in which ASL is the language of instruction have to learn FSL to communicate.

Most hearing students in CSB do not take FSL classes so there is a language barrier when interacting with their Deaf schoolmates. Some methods of communicating through the language barrier include writing on paper to understand each other or sometimes using digital methods of communication such as texting or instant messaging.

Though it is called “Filipino” Sign language, instruction of FSL is done in English, so most communication though textual means is in that language. Some Deaf students will not be able to understand or communicate in Filipino or Tagalog.

Dialects of FSL are noticed and recognized by the Deaf community. In interviews, there is an admittance of a “Manila” dialect that they sign in CSB.

²¹ Ibid 11

There is a prevailing attitude with the students I have spoken to regarding the use of FSL as opposed to ASL or SEE (they use the term SEE more than MCE) are as follows: FSL is the language that is used when communicating within the Deaf community while SEE should be included in the school curriculum because it helps the students learn writing and reading in English, it is also needed to conceptualize words for English. It was said that both should be included in the school curriculum to have a well-rounded education for the Deaf community and deaf students in particular.

4.2.1.1. GSL (Gay Sign Language)

Through the course of the study it was seen that there was the existence of a sociolect (a variation of a language used by a specific social group) of FSL used by the gay Deaf in CSB. The informants (none of whom were members of this group) termed it GSL or Gay sign language.

This sociolect is characterized by exaggerated facial expressions and what the informants have described as ‘glittery’ or theatrical gestures.

Examples of this sociolect:

GSL of “going to the mall”



FSL equivalent:



GSL of “to think”



FSL Equivalent



4.2.1.2. Slang

There is also the presence within some groups of the Deaf where they use the linguistic phenomenon known as ‘coining’ where they would make new signs that signify arbitrary meanings without a clear origin. These signs are only intelligible to those belonging to the group that coined them.

4.2.1.3. FSL to English

It can be seen that the syntax of the English sentences and phrases that are used by the Deaf community do not conform to the regular grammar of standard English. In constructions such as:

“As long as my future wish I will be Deaf teacher for teaching the kids in High School or College asap”

There is a lack of articles (such as a, an or the) in some places (which is common in the constructions) and in some cases the word order is different. It is my theory that the syntax of FSL has influenced the patterns that the Deaf use in English sentences, but syntactic analysis such as that is beyond the scope of this study.

4.2.2. Identity

Deaf identity as well as culture is included in the lessons taught to those majoring in Deaf studies and it is also taught to hearing students taking up FSL lessons in CSB. Deaf identity is defined to those students as those belonging to a specific linguistic and cultural group that holds shared values, customs and world views.

Within the Deaf community there are differences which make each individual unique. In addition to differences between religion, age, gender, political affiliation, etc. the Deaf community also makes distinctions between the situation they were born in. If the Deaf person was born to Deaf parents, to hearing parents, to only one Deaf parent, if they had siblings who

were deaf or hearing while they were growing up or if they were born hearing but there was an onset of hearing loss due to age. The experiences that each of the individuals face while facing these situations show the existence of a range of diversity within the Deaf community.

Schooling makes a big impact on the identity of a Deaf individual. The distinctions here are made if the individual was taught in an all Deaf environment, if they were taught with hearing students but with support services from their school, or if they were taught in an all hearing environment.

Since not all Deaf individuals have complete loss of hearing the community with which they self-identify is also a major consideration when talking about an individual's identity. They can consider themselves a member of the Deaf community, a member of the hearing community or both.

Language competence and language performance are two other considerations. Because the main language used in communicating with other members of the community is FSL, the ability to sign in FSL is a strong marker of identity in the Deaf community. The use of English as the language with which you communicate through text is also important while language performance such as speech, lip reading and auditory skills are taken into consideration.

The markers of individual identity that are most apparent in the CSB context are the choice of communication (whether FSL or ASL), variance in educational levels (year level, etc.), degree of hearing loss (some Deaf students may have hearing aids which help them communicate with the hearing community better), sexuality (there is the presence of the gay Deaf community), age and lifestyle choice (CSB is still an art school so there are those within the Deaf community that are also members of other subcultures such as Otaku or anime enthusiasts or the Punk subculture).

It is important to note that visual medium is very important to the Deaf community. Currently through YouTube videos and the internet, the Deaf youth has an avenue which they use to express themselves in their language (FSL) which would not have been possible in any other time. Technology such as video recording, instant pictures and digital art and animation are ways with which the Deaf community, especially those in CSB, express themselves and their identity.

4.2.3. Relations with Hearing Culture

Because of the language barrier the interaction between Deaf students and hearing students is difficult at best. There are those CSB students who take FSL courses and interact with the deaf community in CSB but those individuals are few and far between. Deaf students do join organizations with majority hearing members such as one of joined the Benildean Press Corps, most of these individuals use this opportunity to expose those that are unfamiliar with Deaf culture to the community.

The hearing students in general in CSB have a neutral attitude towards the Deaf community. Though this may seem less than ideal, it does mean that there is little bullying and harassment from the hearing students. The hearing students are interested in FSL and signing in general as for most of them it is the first time they have been exposed to or have interacted with a member of the Deaf community, but that interest is not persistent enough for most of the hearing student populace to take up FSL as a course.

There is also ignorance towards the different sign languages for most of the hearing student body. Those that don't take FSL lessons don't know the difference between ASL, FSL, SEE and Fingerspelling. Though the Deaf community has lectures and events which help educate the hearing community about their situation.

4.2.3.1. Discrimination

4.2.3.1.1. Legal Cases

A study done by the Philippine Deaf Resource Center (PDRC) entitled "Access to Justice: Case monitoring by the Philippine Deaf Resource Center (2006-2012)" highlighted the vulnerability of the Deaf community especially women and children in terms of legal and judicial proceedings.

Most legal cases 68% involve the deaf party as the complainant. 68% of cases also involved a deaf female. For the complainants the most common charge was rape, outnumbering

other types of cases in a 10:1 ratio. The deaf parties that filed these charges were primarily female (75%) and deaf minors that filed cases were also predominantly female (84%).²²

It was seen that out of 213 known cases only 24% have court appointed interpreters. 44% of these cases had volunteer interpreters while 21% had unconfirmed appointed interpreters, 11% had no interpreters at all. For 63 cases with unschooled deaf parties requiring a Deaf Relay Interpreter, these are cases where the deaf party was not educated in any sign language and predominantly used home signs, only 25% had been appointed interpreters.²³

This data only highlights the lack of sign language interpreting in legal and judicial proceedings. It has serious implications in terms of Deaf society to access justice, limiting the upholding of the human rights of deaf persons.

The study also highlights the fact that there is no annual budget appropriation specifically for sign language interpreting for the DOJ. In over 2000 trial courts in the country there are full time court interpreter positions for spoken languages yet next to none are available for sign languages. The study outlines the strong need for accessibility to interpreters for persons with disabilities, increased attention of the government to programs and services targeting the disabled community and an increased capacity of government agencies to engage with the Deaf community.

4.2.3.1.2. Cyber Bullying

During August of 2014, there was an issue wherein a member of the Deaf community posted a Facebook status detailing her experiences in university. The member of the Deaf community in question was a student of the CSB Deaf education program.

The content of the post itself was as follows:

²² Martinez, L. 2012. Access to Justice: Case monitoring by the Philippine Deaf Resource Center (2006-2012). *Strategies for Attaining Legal Access and Safeguarding Human Rights of the Deaf in the Philippines*. Retrieved from http://www.phildeafres.org/files/PDRC_Case_Monitoring_2006-2012.pdf

²³ Ibid

“Good time for experience life right way for your college most than past since high school how to process even itself grow knew already realization life high school from college. Seem bad person or good person by whom trust to be care yourself and didn’t try anymore.”²⁴

The post in question follows the syntax of a person signing in English, and most Deaf, even after graduation from college are not adept at written forms of English or even Filipino. The medium that they use to communicate is still firmly in sign language.

Response to the post quickly turned viral as it was shared throughout social media and comments such as "Sakit sa ulo basahin. Bigti na!" and "Ito ang tunay na nakakanosebleed..."²⁵ were made by hearing people who railed against the so-called bad English grammar.

This was the response until film director Mike Sandejas, who had dealings with Deaf Filipinos stepped in and posted:

“I saw this posted on Facebook. I saw a pattern in the misuse of English that I have seen before in my dealings with Deaf people and I immediately looked up Minino Buhat. Yes, the person who wrote it is Deaf and according to Facebook is a student of College of St Benilde which has a School for Deaf. This is where I found my actors for Dinig Sana Kita If you look at the right side of the picture you will see how people have made fun of the English this Person with Disability has used. Deaf people rarely have a mastery of English Grammar because they only understand English as used in sign language which is shorthand in nature. The writing ability sometimes is still being developed while in college. I am outraged by how people are so quick to judge others by their use of English. SHAME ON ALL OF YOU WHO POSTED THIS IN JEST!”²⁶

²⁴ Macanas, M. 2014. Deaf Pinoy Cyberbullied because of his Faulty Written English.

<http://www.techpinas.com/2014/08/deaf-pinoy-cyberbullied-because-of-his.html> Retrieved September 1, 2014.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

As of August 15 2014 that post has generated 9,482 likes, 3,643 shares and 230 comments, engendering support from both the Deaf community and the mainstream hearing community.²⁷

This outlines the general ignorance of mainstream hearing society of how the Deaf as a community communicate in non-sign language arenas. Especially in terms of the digital sphere, as the internet and social media becomes more widely used as a platform of communication and self-expression it is evident that mainstream hearing society ignores the different sectors of society that also use it as a platform.

4.2.4. Religion

There are many churches and chapels that support the deaf community, in those services there are either interpreters that relate the contents of what the priest is saying to the Deaf congregation through FSL, or if there is no interpreter present, the priest would have some training in FSL to be able to communicate the basic idea of the sermon to the Deaf members of his audience.

Among all religious denominations the Jehovah's Witnesses have the most support for their Deaf members, even making a video FSL Bible translation for them. Though it should be noted that there are also linguistic differences between the FSL the Jehovah's Witnesses use and the FSL they would use in a Catholic mass (for example the sign for "Bible" is different)

By some Deaf religious people, scripture is important. Bible passages that mention the Deaf such as "Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God, I am the Lord." Leviticus 19:14 are cited as validation that God recognizes the Deaf as a community.

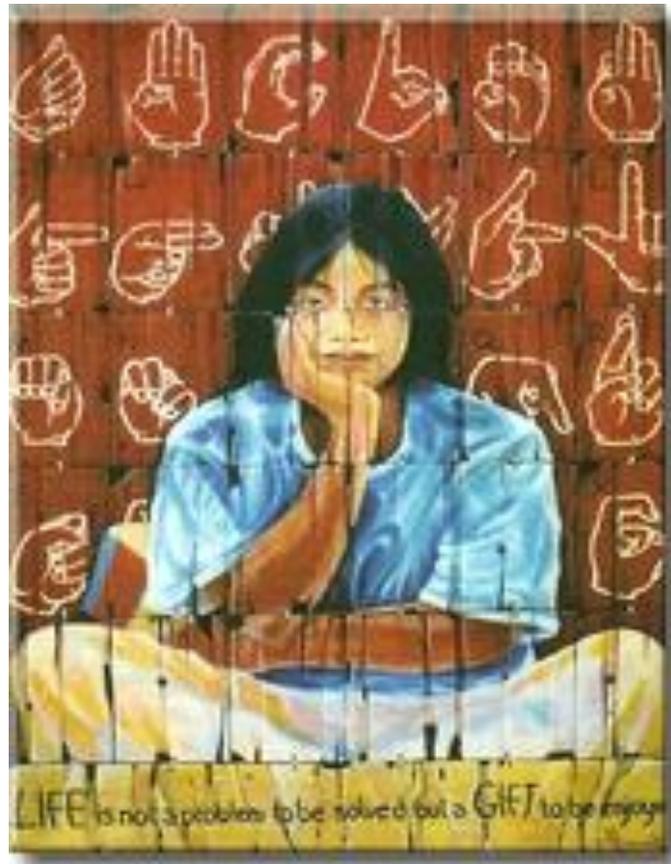
²⁷ Ibid

4.2.5. Art

Deaf art is completely visual in nature. Most famous deaf artists are painters and some have established groups such as the Filipino Deaf Visual Art Group (FDVAG). Art to Deaf artists is a means of exposing mainstream society to deaf culture while also being a source of livelihood to provide for themselves or their family.

The motifs used in the art are usually themes which are central to the Deaf community. Hand signs and messages of hope and acceptance are common themes.

A painting by a Deaf artist, Rommel Agravante “Let’s Talk Deaf Way”²⁸



²⁸ [Photo] Agravante, R. 2008. Let's Talk Deaf Way. <http://deafphilippines.wordpress.com/tag/rommel-agravante/>. Retrieved March 15, 2014.

An oil painting by Deaf artist Amelito Regalado “Pag-Asa” (Hope)²⁹



²⁹ [Photo] Regalado, A. 2008. Pag-Asa (Hope). . <http://deafphilippines.wordpress.com/tag/rommel-agravante/> . Retrieved March 15, 2014.

5. Current Stereotypes of Deaf Culture

There are still a lot of stereotypes left for the Deaf community to have to contend with. It is still a common misconception that the Deaf are unable to communicate, that they are illiterate and it is very clear in the way that mainstream society labels them. The Deaf are still 'handicapped' in the minds of some people and even the so-called politically correct terms such as 'hearing impaired' still have the implication that deafness is an impairment and not a distinct Linguistic and Cultural group. It is also seen that there is a notion that most hearing people think the very word 'deaf' is offensive to the Deaf, yet it is appropriated by their culture as a sign of identity and pride.

The stereotype of Deaf culture in the Philippines centers around their ability to do things a 'normal' person would be able to do. There is still a strong association between 'deaf' and 'not normal', and this implication is problematic because it implies that the Deaf are not just 'different' but 'lesser'.

There is still a great disconnect between hearing culture and Deaf culture, the lack of exposure mainstream hearing culture has to Deaf culture makes it difficult for the majority to understand the struggle of the Deaf Filipino.

6. Conclusion

Deaf culture in the Philippine context has a very rich history. The Deaf are their own subculture with shared values, shared experiences and a shared history. Their markers of identity are primarily their language (FSL or ASL) and their self-identification in the Deaf community.

Current Deaf society is now more empowered and has a better chance of integrating with mainstream society through the use of technological sources such as YouTube, or through text and instant messaging to help eliminate the language barrier.

While there is relatively more empowerment when looking at deaf culture, discrimination still exists in social contexts. There is still a prevailing ignorance from mainstream hearing culture on the understanding of the Deaf in terms of communicating in digital media. There is also a struggle against institutional ignorance wherein Deaf society is underrepresented and limited in the way they can access basic human rights.

Linguistically FSL is a very productive language, it has been seen that there is the existence of at least one sociolect, GSL or Gay Sign Language. The syntax of FSL is still not fully described by linguistic sources and that may be a point of interest to a researcher who may want to expand the topic.

The Deaf value visuals, both as a medium of art and as a method for communication. In both The Deaf community seeks to express themselves while keeping their identity as Deaf, in some instances to educate or expose mainstream culture to their community.

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