

A Summary of
Language Contact in the U.S. Deaf Community
by Dr. Clayton Valli (Gallaudet University)
delivered on October 1, 1997

The project began in the summer of 1986 as a linguistic and sociolinguistic investigation of this contact signing. The project's original goals were actually quite straightforward: to look at contact signing and to reexamine claims that it is a pidgin and the result of deaf-hearing interaction.

We reviewed research that has been done on contact both in spoken language and sign language situations, described the characteristics of the deaf community relevant to an understanding of language contact, and presented a model of the linguistic outcomes of language contact in the deaf community. We described our study of contact signing: how we collected the data, what patterns of language use emerged from the data, the issue of judgments, and the linguistic features of contact signing based on our data.

Such issues include not only the linguistic features of contact signing but the situation in which it is used and the fact that its use is not restricted to deaf-hearing interaction, the nature of the outcome of language contact in situations different from the ones we examined, the parallels between language contact outcomes in spoken language situations and sign language situations, the history of language contact in the U.S. deaf community, and the implications of our study for a larger theory of language contact and for areas of practical applications such as education, second-language teaching, and interpreting.

[Applicant: Professor QUAY, Suzanne]