

# लुप्तलिंगुवा MANCHESTER

Report

2013

The University  
of Manchester

MANCHESTER  
1824

The contents of this report are the intellectual property of the authors. No part of this report may be circulated or reproduced without explicit permission from the authors, or from the School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures at the University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, United Kingdom.

# **An Investigation into Language Provisions for Sign Language in Manchester**

Aysha Aktar

Hayley Murray

## 1. Introduction

To recapitulate our aims, we decided to focus upon the deaf community in Manchester for our investigation, as there seemed to be research lacking for this particular group of people. Therefore we felt it was important to raise awareness, and explore the provisions put in place for deaf individuals/sign language users in numerous Manchester institutions. Our research questions are the following:

1. What provisions are put in place in institutions for sign language users?
2. Do deaf people/sign language users feel as though their language needs are being catered for?
3. What areas regarding communication (if any) do they have most difficulty with?

Our methodology, as stated in our field work plan has remained the same, and due to the nature of our visits, it would not have been viable to just focus on one method of data collection, which is why our chosen methods consist of a questionnaire, short interviews and an observation. Although we did not encounter any major problems; when carrying out our investigation, we didn't manage to keep within the strict schedule we proposed earlier in the field work plan due to the meetings we arranged with the centres being delayed slightly. As a result, this hindered our investigation and therefore due to time constraints we decided to only briefly look at the media, as it doesn't directly affect the local aspect of the problem.

Furthermore and to our surprise, the staff at the Manchester Deaf Centre initially seemed reluctant to assist us with our project. The reason being, students in the past had wanted to take photos of people at the centre and they were worried this would make people at the centre feel violated. However we reassured them that we only wanted to give them short questionnaires to fill out, and agreed to give them a synopsis of our project. This highlighted our primary focus, which was to raise awareness. This synopsis can be seen in appendix B.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1 Manchester Deaf Centre

On interviewing staff at the Manchester Deaf Centre, we were told about the numerous activities and sessions suited to various age groups they have in place for the deaf community of Manchester. Firstly, we were informed about the *Manchester Deaf Football Club*, which is aimed at young deaf people to partake in football activities and competitions. Secondly, we were made aware of the *Parent and Toddler group*; an opportunity allowing parents and children from the deaf community to socialise. In addition to this, there was a *Social Club* which allowed deaf individuals to meet each other and share their experiences of day-to-day life. On some occasions there were presentations held in this club providing information and advice.

One other service the Manchester Deaf Centre provides is known as the *befriending service*. This service aims to provide deaf individuals with volunteers who can visit them a couple of hours a week, to offer practical support with things such as letter translation and making telephone calls. Moreover, they provide support to inform and help them access the various groups held in the centre. The volunteer can also act as a companion and casually talk to the individual via British Sign

Language. Another group, which is currently under development at the Deaf Centre, is known as the *Deaf Black, Minority and Ethnic Group*. This group hopes to deliver advice and support for ethnic minority groups who have close contact with a deaf person, on issues regarding health, news and events that take place in community languages such as Urdu and Punjabi.

The Manchester Deaf Centre also offers courses to the public in the Manchester area on British Sign Language. These vary in length depending on the level, and are open to anyone who wants to acquire British Sign Language. Moreover, The Deaf Centre aims to decrease communication barriers during day-to-day living demands such as; hospital visits, doctor and dentist appointments, school parents meetings and job interviews. They do this by providing interpreters and communicators everyday and include a 24 hour emergency service for those that require an interpreter outside the usual office hours.

After finishing our interview with the staff, we then went onto distributing questionnaires to the deaf individuals at the centre; to those whom were willing to help us. We managed to obtain eight responses with the help of an interpreter present. The informants were aged between 19 and 50, and some were of ethnic minority backgrounds. The quantitative display below shows the percentage of whether the individuals did or did not feel as though their language needs were being catered for.

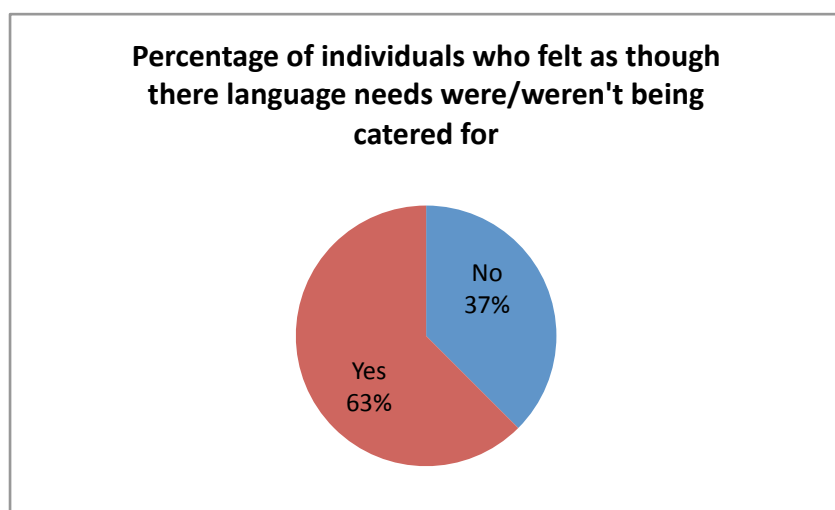


Figure 1

As shown in figure 1, the majority of our informants did feel as though their language needs were being catered for, however 37% did not, and this was mainly due to interpreters not being available at all times. A few respondents explicitly stated that the job centre was one of those institutions. The institutions that best supported their needs were the Manchester Deaf centre itself and hospitals.

Another question on our questionnaire asked whether they had difficulty with certain areas of communication, and many of the informants responded with *yes* to this question. Upon analysis of the questionnaires, most of them responded that anything telephone related they found difficult, such as interviews, making appointments and any other general communication with the public. It was also mentioned that communication in respect to media related aspects such as television was a problem. The actual percentage of figures is depicted in figure 2 below.

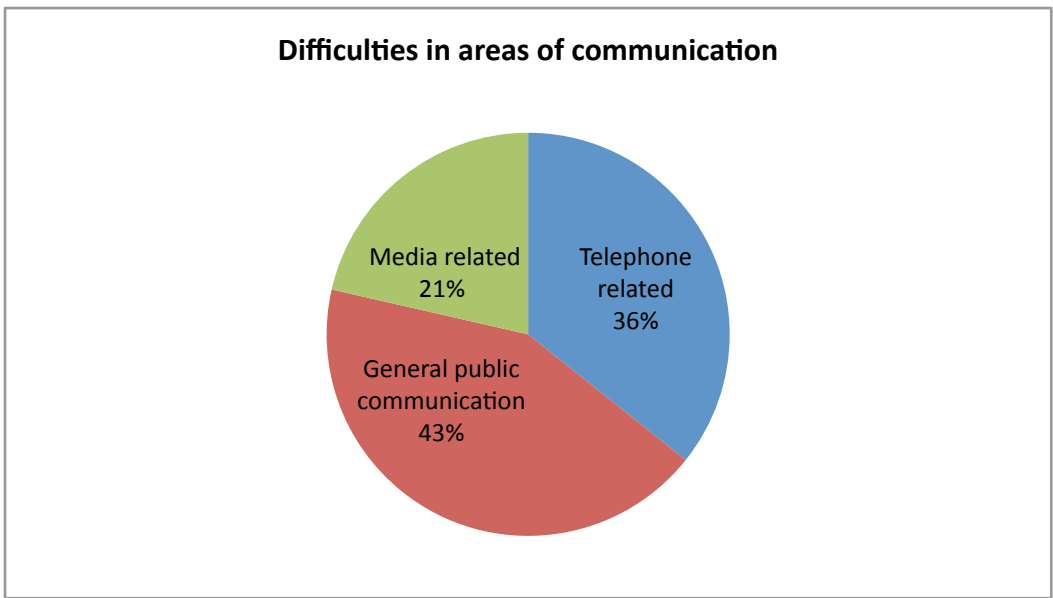


Figure 2

As we also wanted to look at the media aspect of things, we asked our informant’s whether they use social media such as facebook, twitter and online chat rooms. Having analysed the responses, it was clear the younger individuals do use social media, and find it very helpful as it acts as a useful tool for them to communicate and share experiences with their family and friends. The older respondents on the other hand, who were above the age of 40, did not find social media helpful. They stated that they did not use social media and thus relied on more traditional methods such as either meeting in person or letter writing.

Furthermore, we asked our informants whether they relied on subtitles when watching television. The pie chart below depicts the percentage of individuals that do, and those that do not.

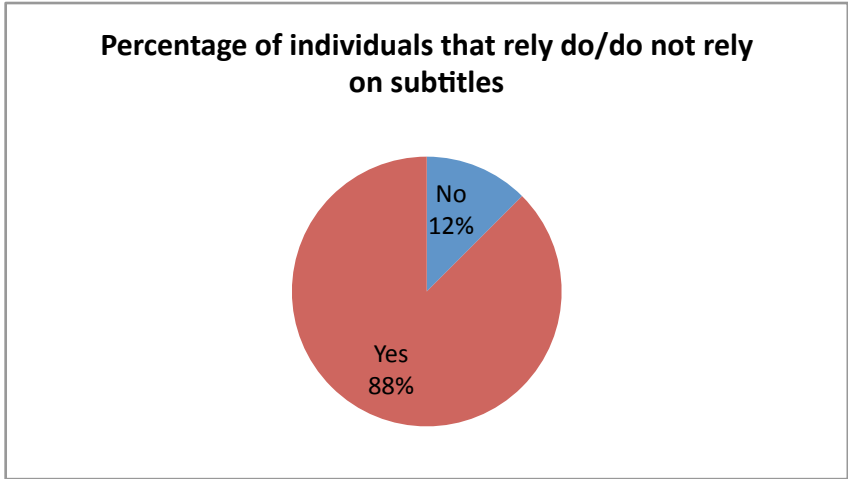


Figure 3

It was evident that the vast majority of our informants (88%) do rely on subtitles when watching television. When asked if there were any further comments they would like to make, many of them stated that the subtitles were not always in time with the speech, and therefore they sometimes found it difficult to follow. Another question on our questionnaire asked about how often they came across sign language interpreters on television. Most of the responses were *not so often*, and some further commented that when sign language interpreters are present in a programme, it is usually aired at a ridiculous time; for instance very early in the morning.

Other general comments that were made, highlighted the fact that deaf individuals face language barriers when it comes to customer service departments in stores, as when asking for help, they find it difficult to comprehend what is being said to them. Moreover a few commented that sometimes people are ignorant towards their language needs. A particular example is being shouted at during communication with their hearing counterparts. Also they claimed to experience 'tutting' or sighing from the general public when asked to repeat something.

## **2.2 Rusholme Job Centre**

Having interviewed a few of the staff at the Job centre in Rusholme, we acquired sufficient information on the provisions they have in place for the deaf community and those who use sign language as a primary form of communication. It was first brought to our attention that the Job centre has a loop system in place, which allows the deaf individual to hear sounds more clearly as it reduces and sometimes eliminates background noise. This is available for anyone to make use of, including external organisations. Additionally, sign language interpreters are available most of the time, therefore if requested; there would be an interpreter available in most cases. We were also told that an interpreting service known as *the big word* is commonly used as this is more cost efficient, in comparison to having interpreters. This is a telephone/video interpreting service which connects to an interpreter of the required language over the phone. It is increasingly popular for speakers of languages other than English who use the job centre; however, it has also become popular with sign language users as it also provides a range of non-spoken communication services. These include British Sign Language interpreting, finger spelling, lip speaking and sign supported English, amongst others.

In regards to actually looking to get into employment, the job centre has disability employment advisors, who specialise in helping people such as deaf individuals, or those with disabilities that significantly decrease their chances of obtaining a job. The help that they provide includes things such as; discussing disability friendly employers in the Manchester area and offering programmes such as residential training to give them relevant work experience and help them gain new skills. We were also told that deaf individuals usually find employment in sectors such as retail and administration, as these roles do not require much verbal communication. The job centre in Rusholme had not received any complaints in respect to communication difficulties from British Sign Language users, therefore it seems as though they have adequate measures in place to assist them.

## **2.3 Flowery Field Primary School**

We looked at the problems within the deaf community faced in schools, in particular focusing on Primary schools and their efforts to help deaf children fit in the best they can. We therefore visited a local primary school in Hyde (Greater Manchester) which is known to both of us through a work placement and siblings there. We looked at how the staff catered for children communicating solely in sign language and obtained our information through directly questioning staff at the school about any extras classes, courses, or changes in work given to the deaf students. We found out that the main form or provision in place for deaf children was the teaching of *Makaton* sign language. This was taught to the class as a whole in order to provide a way of communication between all students and include everybody.

*Makaton* is a language programme that uses signs and symbols to help both teachers and children communicate effectively in time. It is designed to support spoken language and the signs and symbols are used in spoken word order along with speech, therefore making it useful for all students. It requires no prior knowledge in signing. We were informed that *Makaton* is encouraged by the government and taught in several schools. It has been put in place not only for deaf children but for children who experience frustration during communication as it is thought to ease such problems. We soon learnt that this was a big success as the children found it fun and so were communicating a lot more during class.

We conducted an hour long observation on a year five class learning *Makaton*. The class had one deaf student and we were interested to see how helpful he found it and how the students communicated with each other. The teacher made learning the signs and symbols fun through the use of songs and we found that all the class members seemed to thoroughly enjoy the lesson. The teacher told us that the deaf pupil felt a lot more included since the *Makaton* course began, as other students were interacting with him a lot more and he was using this sign to answer questions during class.

## **2.4 Manchester Sensory Support**

Our final point of contact was with Manchester Sensory Support; a service provided by the Manchester City Council to help individuals live as independently as possible. It is aimed to help those aged 18 and over and who have a sensory impairment such as deaf and blind adults. One prominent service that is available on their website is the sign video translation service. This is a live service which connects to a sign video interpreter; enabling the deaf individual to communicate with the Manchester City Council about any general issues they may have or want to discuss via the interpreter. Furthermore, the Sensory Support service offers advice such as that relating to benefits, and sign posting to other agencies. They can also provide sensory equipment, though this is dependent upon the results of a sensory assessment.

## **3. Discussion**

Contrary to the finding of Sutton-Spence & Woll (1999), who found that signing in some schools has been neglected, our findings suggest otherwise, as from our observation we found that Flowery Field primary school does make use of a particular sign language. Although it is not British Sign language, it is nonetheless a form of sign language. However, it could be argued that the Literature taken from Sutton-Spence & Woll (1999) is quite dated, and since that time, the government and other senior figures have raised the status of signing and felt the need to have it implemented. Phoenix (1988) carried out a survey in which his aim was to find out the experiences of deaf people residing in Northern Ireland. His findings revealed that signing; which was often vital for communication purposes, was discreetly resorted to by the teachers, due to it being rejected by society and professionals. This study also exemplifies the fact that during those years, sign language was looked down upon. Although our findings show that perhaps attitudes towards this have changed, and a recent study carried out by Doherty (2012) is in support of this. Doherty found that the majority of people favoured the idea of using sign language in education for their deaf pupils, as they reported that their deaf pupils experienced a great deal of difficulty with other methods.

Our findings seem to be consistent with the literature in that deaf people work with hearing individuals. Kyle et al (1985: 19) states that 'deaf people work with large numbers of hearing people in lower-paid jobs'. Having visited the job centre, we were informed that deaf people work in areas such as administration and retail along with hearing individuals. Further to this, Kyle et al found that the vast majority of deaf people were happy in their workplace; citing a figure of 71 per cent. While only 6 per cent claimed to have disliked their work surroundings (1985: 19).

One noteworthy finding however, which contrasted with our findings at the job centre relates to the responses we received regarding the job centre. Some responses claimed that going to the job centre is in fact a stressful experience and felt a lack of deaf awareness. They claimed in some cases interpreters were never provided for those that had the ability to speak; regardless of it being limited.

### **3.1 General trends**

Overall, our research has identified general trends such as the use of interpreters in institutions, such as the Deaf Centre and the Job Centre. Therefore it appears that they are of high importance to the deaf community of Manchester. Furthermore, the use of video translation such as *the big word* and the sign video interpreter appeared to be increasingly popular and a primary means of communication. It was institutions such as the Job Centre and Manchester Sensory support that utilised them.

### **3.2 Broader factors encountered**

We discovered that the government was in support of the idea of having measures in place to help the deaf community overcome barriers. For instance the Job Centre had implemented the Access to Work scheme (AtW); an initiative supported by the government. This was of great help in respect to communication barriers encountered within employment. This scheme can assist a deaf individual in a number of ways. Examples include; payment for an interpreter to accompany them during interviews, if visually impaired then a communicator can be made available in work, special equipment can be provided to suit their disability and alternations to the work environment in order to ease any problems.

During our school visit to Flowery Field primary School, we encountered the realm of Makaton sign language; something new to us. It appears that the government are supportive of this initiative, and it is widely dispersing through schools, hospitals and residential homes in the UK. Makaton is now classified as a registered charity. Thus our findings suggest that successful provisions put in place for the deaf community have received ample support from the government.

To conclude, our findings have exceeded our expectations in terms of measures used to assist the deaf community. Our investigation on the whole has given us an insight into language barriers deaf individuals are faced with in their day to day lives and simultaneously how their language needs are assisted to by different institutions in Manchester. Moreover, we have had the opportunity to discover how society perceives sign language overall.

Our investigation has revealed that the different institutions have different provisions in place to support sign language users; though a common one being the use of sign language interpreting. We have discovered that the majority of the people we surveyed do feel as though their language needs



are being catered for, although there is the exception of some. In respect to the areas of communication they had most difficulty with; it was revealed that it was areas regarding telephone communication, the media and the general public.

## References

Doherty, M. 2012. Policy and practice in deaf education: views and experiences of teachers, and of young people who are deaf in Northern Ireland and Sweden. *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 27:3, 281-299.

Kyle et al. 1985. *Sign Language: The study of deaf people and their language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Phoenix, S. 1988. *An interim report on a pilot survey of deaf adults in NI, with detailed reference to their educational experience, employment and social situation*. Belfast: Workshop for the Deaf.

Sutton-Spence, R & Woll, B. 1999. *The linguistics of British Sign Language: An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Appendix A: Questionnaire**

1. What is your primary form of communication? (e.g. lip reading, sign language etc.)

.....

2. How old are you? .....

3. Do you feel as though your language needs are being catered for?      Yes      No

4. If so, what institutions or places best support your needs?

.....  
.....

5. Do you have difficulty with certain areas of communication?      Yes      No

6. If so then what are these areas and why?

.....  
.....  
.....

7. Do you use social media? (Such as facebook, twitter, online chatting rooms)      Yes      No

8. Do you think that the existence of such social networks and technology play a big part in your life, and do you consider them helpful?

.....  
.....

9. When watching television, do you rely on subtitles?      Yes      No

10. How often do you come across sign language interpreters when watching television?

.....  
.....

11. Is there anything else you would like to comment on regarding your communication experiences?

.....  
.....  
.....



**What the project is about?**

The project aims to investigate the provisions in place in Manchester institutions for the deaf community; with the purpose of raising awareness regarding their language needs. The primary focus is to ascertain any communication difficulties and barriers faced by the deaf community. As part of the project we will be visiting different institutions including the Manchester Deaf centre, the Job Centre in Rusholme along with a visit to Flowery Field Primary school and contact with Manchester Sensory Support.

**Why we are asking for your participation?**

You have been asked to assist us because your main form of communication is British Sign Language and/or other non-verbal forms of communication.

You are under no obligation to complete the questionnaire and can withdraw from participation at any time.

**What will happen with the information I provide?**

If you fill out our questionnaire, the information you give us will assist our research and will be analysed along with the findings from the other institutions mentioned above. All data will be anonymised.