

**The acquisition of New Zealand Sign Language as a second language  
for students in an interpreting programme:  
The learners' perspective**

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**Master of Arts in Applied Language Studies  
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## **List of abbreviations**

ADS	Auckland Deaf Society
ASL	American Sign Language
Auslan	Australian Sign Language
AUT	Auckland University of Technology
BSL	British Sign Language
CODA	Children of Deaf adults
DANZ	Deaf Association of New Zealand
KDEC	Kelston Deaf Education Centre
L1	First language
L2	Second language (also mean additional languages)
NZSL	New Zealand Sign Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
VLS	Visual Languages Section
WDS	Wellington Deaf Society

### **Attestation of authorship**

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the Master degree is the result of my own study, except for where due acknowledgment is made. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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## Abstract

This research study presents an investigation of interpreter trainees acquiring New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) as a second language (L2) outside their formal classroom learning.

This study was motivated firstly by a concern that a considerable reduction in learner and lecturer contact hours within an NZSL interpreting programme would compromise graduate NZSL competency, necessitating a compensatory approach predominantly in the context of the Deaf community. Secondly, the study attempts to address a marked gap in research related to L2 sign language learning from a sociocultural perspective.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a bilingual context (NZSL and English) in order to gain the 'inside' perspectives of six NZSL learners who had just completed a two-year Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting. The interviews sought to uncover the informal NZSL language learning opportunities used by the participants, especially within the social context of the Deaf community, and the individual learner strategies utilised by 'good learners' of NZSL.

Interview data were transcribed and were analysed by employing qualitative methods. Coding of the data revealed a number of categories which were subsequently examined for salient themes relating to the research questions.

The main findings of the study revolved around the significance of L2 learner access to social and material resources, especially within the Deaf sociocultural context. Of particular significance was the enhancement of learner motivation and confidence as was the frequency and depth of interaction with Deaf people and degree of mediated NZSL learning from NZSL mentors. Of key importance were the social relationships and networks developed with L1 users, which facilitated access to an array of NZSL learning opportunities. Material language learning resources, such as NZSL video samples and equipment were also useful, when interaction with Deaf people was not possible due to heavy study demands, especially in the second year of the programme. Learner involvement in the Deaf community, particularly within Deaf social networks, resulted in significantly improved linguistic, pragmatic and sociocultural competency.

The findings of the study raise two main implications. Firstly, the study highlights the need for NZSL interpreting curriculum enrichment and the resourcing of the programme to foster learner autonomy. Secondly, to date there has been little research on adult L2 sign language learning outside the classroom context and the study may stimulate further studies of the acquisition of sign language as a second language. The study may also be of benefit to autonomous L2 sign language learners and stakeholders in sign language interpreting education around the world.

## **Chapter one**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background**

Sign languages are used around the world by L1 users in Deaf communities. Many of these languages are formally taught as L2s at universities, schools and through community education programmes. However, these programmes have limitations relating to contact teaching hours, access to visual learning materials and access to Deaf people in both formal and informal settings.

Researchers assert that ‘good’ sign language learners need to supplement their formal learning with greater involvement in the ever changing and evolving Deaf communities (McKee & McKee, 1992; Patterson, 1999). They argue that social interaction is not only important to develop linguistic aspects of sign languages but also to develop socio-linguistic, socio-cultural, communicative and pragmatic competency. These findings are reinforced by sign language teachers (McKee, 1996) and the learners themselves (Peterson, 1999). In addition, increased social interaction within Deaf communities indicates a commensurate increase in learner autonomy. This is especially important for sign language interpreters, who are expected to achieve extremely high levels of language competency and to have in-depth knowledge of Deaf culture. In this regard Napier, McKee and Goswell (2006) argue:

...interpreters must continually strive to improve and expand their language base. Alongside these essential working tools, interpreters need to develop the cultural knowledge and personal attributes (Napier et al., 2006, p. 49).

As is the recent trend in higher education, AUT University has undergone a shift in focus to reduce formal classroom hours and increase autonomous learning. The adoption of new technologies has meant alternative forms of learning are offered, such as online learning. However, this reduction in face-to-face learning has particularly impacted on the sign language interpreting programme offered at AUT, which provides intensive New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) instruction. Being a three-dimensional visual-spatial language, NZSL, as with all sign languages, does not

have a written equivalent, and moreover cannot be fully captured through visual media. For example, when captured on video, the three-dimension of depth is lost. For this reason, sufficient face-to-face sign language instruction is vital (Mindess, 1999).

In the AUT University Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting programme, there has been a steady reduction of Year One NZSL instructional hours, from 450 in 1992 to 288 in 2009. In addition, due to timetable restrictions, the number of guest Deaf people invited to the programme has reduced, which indicates considerably less learner exposure to NZSL variation within the formal instructional setting. These factors have had a major impact on potential learner NZSL competency levels and have led to Deaf community concerns regarding graduate standards.

Reduced formal language learning input implies the need for NZSL interpreting learners to develop strong autonomous compensating strategies to utilise available resources. These resources include the facilities, learning materials and equipment at the university and, in particular, making use of opportunities for NZSL learning provided within the social context of the Deaf community.

Good L2 language learners have a cognitive understanding of the target language and the language learning process. In addition, they implement learning strategies, manage personal affective states, and communicate socially within the target language community (Naiman et al.; 1978; Ellis, 1994; Norton & Toohey, 2001). According to Norton and Toohey (2001) and Palfreyman (2003), good learners supplement formal L2 learning practices with informal learning within target language communities. In this regard, a sociocultural perspective provides a useful lens through which to view the good language learner and autonomous language learning in social contexts. Toohey (2007, p. 232) claims that rather than learners being agentive or autonomous on their own, “the social settings in which they participated both imposed constraints on, and enabled their agency”. The implication for pedagogical intervention is that “developing learner autonomy aims at equipping learners to engage critically, yet responsibly, in the social process they encounter” (Little, 2004, p. 124).

Good L2 sign language learners must supplement formal learning with interaction within the Deaf social context to develop high levels of sign language competency (Napier, McKee & Goswell, 2006). However, within the sociocultural paradigm of sign language L2 learning, learning to operate *interdependently* within the Deaf social context is as important as learners acting autonomously. Participation in signing ‘communities of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) implies gaining access to the Deaf community, as well as implicating ‘learner investment’, ‘learner identity’ and ‘learner agency’ (Norton Peirce, 1995; Toohey, 2007). These concepts will be expanded in chapter two.

To date there has been little research on learning sign languages as a second language, and even less research which has focused on social perspectives. Some American Sign Language (ASL) programmes incorporate compulsory service learning, where learners must regularly participate in Deaf community activities for additional language learning purposes (Monikowski & Peterson, 2005; Reading & Carlstrand, 2007). However, there is a general lack of research reflecting a focus on autonomous sign language learning practices, strategies and how to access learning opportunities within the social context, from the students’ perspective.

## **1.2 Context of study**

The School of Languages at AUT University in New Zealand runs a two-year full-time Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting. AUT is the only New Zealand university that trains NZSL interpreters and prepares them for professional careers in a variety of contexts. Year One studies centre on intensive NZSL and Deaf culture learning. Year Two studies, while continuing to provide advanced formal NZSL training, mainly focus on the development of professional NZSL / English interpreting skills.

## **1.3 Aim of study**

This study seeks to provide insights into the language learning experiences of ‘good’ NZSL learners. The study investigates learners’ independent learning strategies and social practices used beyond the formal context. The study aims to elicit the emic, or

insider views of the learners, as opposed to etic, or outsider assumptions of those teaching the programme.

The study is interpretative and draws on a qualitative methodology. Six students, who had learned NZSL as an L2 and had recently completed their full training, were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews revolved around four key questions:

- What factors contribute to independent language learning of NZSL?
- What factors hinder independent language learning of NZSL?
- What opportunities do NZSL learners have for learning NZSL outside class?
- What learning strategies outside of the classroom benefit NZSL learners?

The study has a number of implications, for those learning NZSL as an L2, for Deaf Communities and for teachers. These are listed below: -

#### Learners

- How can learners become active agents in their own learning processes and develop autonomous language learning strategies outside the classroom?
- How can sign language learners supplement formal education with social encounters and real-life interaction with Deaf people?

#### Deaf Communities

- What sign language learning opportunities are offered by Deaf communities?
- How do Deaf communities invest in strengthening sign language competency of future interpreters?

#### Teachers

- How can teachers foster sign language learner autonomy in the Deaf social context in terms of knowledge, classroom methodology and curriculum development?

The study also seeks to contribute to the existing body of research and, given the relative absence of research on social aspects of learning sign languages as L2, to promote further research in the field.

#### **1.4 Outline of thesis**

Chapter two, as a means of further contextualising the study, first surveys the literature relating to the acquisition of spoken languages as L2s. Noting there is an absence of a social perspective, the review then turns to learning sign languages as L2s. A discussion of the ‘good language learner’ is then provided, focusing on the social aspects of learner autonomy.

Chapter three describes the methodology used in the study and the methods used to collect and analyse the data. The chapter also discusses the impact of the pilot study and identifies ethical considerations.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study.

Chapter five discusses the key findings raised by the participants and presents the conclusions. In addition, the limitations of the study, recommendations and suggestions for further research are outlined.

## **Chapter two**

### **Literature review**

#### **2.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter explores the features of ‘good’ L2 learners, who autonomously supplement formal learning with learning outside the classroom context. Literature relating to good spoken language learners is examined first, followed by literature relating to good sign language learners. In order to contextualise sign language learning, background information relating to Deaf communities and sign languages is also presented. Particular emphasis is given to sign language learning within the social context, potential L2 learning opportunities and L2 learner strategies. Finally, the gaps in research relating to this field are outlined, followed by the research questions driving this study.

#### **2.2 Perspectives on learning spoken languages as L2**

##### **2.2.1 Good L2 learners**

The term ‘good L2 learner’ implies a prototypical learner, with a set of standard characteristics. However, researchers in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have highlighted various perspectives as to what constitutes a good language learner (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1975, 2005; Skehan, 1989). Despite the variance in viewpoints within this field of research, several common characteristics have been identified. Some common characteristics include cognitive understanding, learning strategies, management of learner affective states, and social communication and interaction in L2. These characteristics will be expanded below.

##### **2.2.2 Cognitive understandings**

Good language learners tend to recognise the systematicity of the target language and as a result, develop a good L2 linguistic knowledge base (Rubin, 1975; Naiman et. al., 1978). These learners use mental processing abilities effectively, seeking to understand and analyse how the target language works (Ellis, 1994; Naiman et al., 1978; O’Malley & Chamot, 1987; Rubin, 1975, 2005). ‘Mental processes’, as defined



by Naiman et al. (1978), comprise a combination of factors including “perceiving, analyzing, classifying, relating, storing, retrieving, and constructing a language output” (p. 3).

Good L2 learners look for patterns and attend to *form* in the target language (Ellis, 1994; Reiss, 1985; Rubin, 1975). In addition, according to Ellis (1994) and Reiss (1985), good learners also attend to the *meaning* of the language, source reference material for clarification and are adept at inferring meanings and making educated guesses. Lennon (1989) asserts that good advanced learners tend to be skilled at alternating between both the form and meaning of the target language and make frequent cross-lingual comparisons. This is a point also raised earlier by Olshtain (1983) who states that good L2 learners consciously transfer language knowledge from one language to another.

### **2.2.3 Learning strategies**

Good L2 learners are able to devise strategies, or select, adapt and apply strategies from a personal ‘strategy repertoire’ to match L2 learning tasks, which impacts on learning pathways (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Ellis, 1994; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). These choices are influenced by learner factors, such as previous learning experiences (O’Malley & Chamot, 1985a, Nation & McLaughlin, 1986), learner personalities (Ehrman, 1990) and learning styles / pathways (Ehrman, 1996; Willing, 1988). Ehrman (1990) explains that learners with extrovert personalities tend to gravitate towards authentic interaction, are willing to take risks in communicative situations and use stimulation to support language learning. In contrast, introverts tend to be drawn to individual language tasks, ponder L2 aspects more deeply, and analyse the meaning and content of conversations.

Metacognitive strategies are implemented by good L2 learners who can conceptualise the language learning process and can identify personal learning styles, establish goals, plan, monitor and evaluate their progress (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Ellis, 1994; Oxford, 2003; Reiss, 1985; Rubin, 1975). Their studies show that advanced learners are analytical and are particularly adept at utilising metacognitive strategies. Ellis (1994) and Reiss (1983) add that good learners are able to describe their

language learning processes clearly. Naiman et al. (1978), Reiss (1985) and Rubin (1975) point out that good learners deliberately seek out error correction, and in addition to monitoring personal L2 output, they also monitor one another's output for comparative purposes. Ellis (1994) and Rubin (2005) emphasize that the concept of metacognitive competency includes the ability of L2 language learners to identify language learning difficulties and to take action to resolve them.

Within the sociocultural context, good learners utilise metacognitive strategies, in addition to social strategies, self-motivating strategies, and affective strategies (Oxford, 1990).

Firstly, good L2 learners need to develop social strategies to promote communicative competence, cultural understanding and to proactively engage in discourse with authentic L1 users (Ellis, 1994). Good L2 language learners learn from more competent others through socialisation, internalising social strategies, and applying them within the L2 context. Social strategies include (but are not limited to) initiating conversations with L2 users, clarification and interrupting conversations (Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975). Lightbown and Spada (1999) state that learners develop social strategies through actively finding opportunities to use the target language by seeking interaction with L2 users or participating in L2 cultural events or activities.

Secondly, Oxford (1990) raises the importance of learners developing self-motivating strategies. These involve seeking out positive influences to promote the right 'attitude' and seeking self-inspiring techniques to strengthen personal motivation to learn the target language.

Thirdly, Oxford (1990) states that good L2 learners implement affective strategies to manage emotions in social environments. Good learners allow for personality factors and develop individualised strategies to optimise personal states, such as self-confidence and self-image, in order to improve communicative competence (Brown, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Dornyei, 1994; 2001; Rubin & Thompson, 1994). Good L2 learners enjoy attempting to communicate in the target language. They are willing to take risks and make mistakes, look foolish, or live with a certain amount of

ambiguity (Ehrman, 1996; Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1975). According to Yap (1998), good learners target L2 activities that promote pleasurable feelings, in addition to L2 learning. They tend to seek out regular activities that boost personal enjoyment and a sense of achievement.

#### **2.2.4 Social perspectives**

Some aspects of how good language learners interact within the target language context have been identified above. However, Kirshner & Whitson (1997) argue that good learners may need to consider additional aspects for cognitive processing and L2 learning within the social context. Similarly, Rubin (2005) states that she has realised that more attention needs to be given to the relationship between the use of L2 learning strategies and the social setting. These views are supported by Norton and Toohey (2001) who argue “understanding the good language learner requires attention to social practices in the context in which individuals learn L2s” (p. 318). Drawing on numerous scholars, Norton and Toohey state:

A focus on the learning context, however, needs to be complemented with a focus on the identity and human agency of the language learner. Whereas previous research viewed good language learners as gradually developing appropriate strategies for interaction in their respective linguistic communities by, for example, monitoring their performance more diligently and exploiting the target language more systematically, recent research on identity and language learning demonstrates that the process may be far more complex (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p. 312)

In order to examine the influence of the social context, learner identity and human agency, it is therefore necessary to look at the research field of learner autonomy.

### **2.3 Learner autonomy**

Many researchers associate learner autonomy with effective L2 learning (e.g. Benson, 1997, 2007; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991, 1996). Despite different research perspectives and associated definitions of learner autonomy, researchers appear to agree that responsibility, ability, capability and self-determination in terms of L2 language learning, are fundamental characteristics of autonomous learners. Various researchers

have sought to explain the concept of autonomy and have labelled certain associated learner characteristics as self-directedness, independence and interdependence.

### **2.3.1 Self-directedness**

Holec (1981) highlights self-directedness as a strong feature of learner autonomy. Long (1989) identifies self-directedness as a combination of independent learning, learner activities and learner mental states. Candy (1991) describes self-directedness as the willingness and capacity to conduct one's own education. Candy asserts the importance of managing thought processes in addition to managing oneself within the learning environment, which includes the use of learning resources and learning opportunities within various situations. Similarly, Rivers (2001) identifies the importance of L2 learners managing both personal learning needs and behaviours.

### **2.3.2 Independence**

Another concept, which appears to be closely related to self-directedness, is learner independence. Benson (1997) frames independence as the *extent* to which L2 learners choose to study outside of class, determine their learning goals and attempt to develop their skills without teacher intervention or interference.

### **2.3.3 Interaction within the social context (independence or inter-dependence?)**

As can be seen, self-directedness and independence are important facets of autonomous language learning. However, Barkhuizen (2004) also points out that second languages cannot be learned purely from resources, but rather, that languages are best learned within the L2 social context. Barkhuizen asserts that formal L2 learning is best supplemented by independent learning undertaken through interaction within target language communities, where learners gain knowledge of cultural norms and values and learn to act with cultural propriety.

Candy (1991) puts forward the concepts of interdependence, and interpersonal competence as important facets of learner autonomy. Toohey (2007) asserts that interdependence provides a more accurate concept of autonomy than independence, as learners are “linked to other people and their tools and practices in complex ways” (p.

241). Within the sociocultural perspective of autonomy, Toohey states that interdependence acknowledges learner “identities / resources / practices as continually negotiated, and constructed within specific cultural, political and economic constraints” p.241). This perspective will be expanded in subsequent sections.

## **2.4 Perspectives of autonomous learning**

As raised earlier, many researchers have identified features of autonomous L2 learning. Benson (1997) provides a particularly useful overview of learner autonomy though categorising technical, psychological and political aspects. To these three categories can be added a fourth perspective: sociocultural perspectives.

### **2.4.1 Technical perspectives**

The technical perspective acknowledges situational learning contexts, which influences the degree of learner autonomy in terms of how best to use available resources, learning strategies, motivation and agency. Situational learning contexts are often associated with particular places, and also include resources such as technological equipment, language learning materials and human resources.

### **2.4.2 Psychological perspectives**

Secondly, Benson (1997) identifies a psychological perspective of autonomy, which acknowledges the learner’s control of affective states and incorporates individual learner characteristics such as attitudes and behaviours. Oxford (2003) states that learners can boost motivation levels by enjoying linguistic and cultural immersion in the target language community. Young (1998) observes that boosting learner motivation levels also enhances learner pleasure and confidence levels and minimises language anxiety. According to Levine et al (1996), newcomers initially tend to utilise reasonably rigid strategies when interacting within the language community. However, learner approaches tend to relax as they become culturally acclimated over time and with exposure to more experienced individuals.

### **2.4.3 Political perspectives**

Thirdly, Benson (1997) recognises a political perspective of autonomy, which incorporates ideologies and attitudes related to issues of oppression, power, control and access for learners. This perspective highlights the importance of learner empowerment over learning situations, including contents, processes and the context of learning (Little, 1996).

Several researchers have identified one means of learner empowerment as self-directed, autonomous learning (Candy, 1991; Holec, 1981). This involves determining access to learning opportunities within the target language community in addition to recognising the associated barriers and devising strategies to resolve issues. These strategies include finding methods to satisfy cultural differences, such as becoming acculturated rather than assimilated, and identifying contrasting cultural assumptions. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001, p.145) identify autonomous learners as agents who actively construct “the terms and condition of their own learning” and alter personal learning habits accordingly. This has implications for learner’s shifting identity and membership within the target language community for language learning purposes, and will be discussed in a later section.

### **2.4.4 Sociocultural perspectives**

As raised by Toohey (2007), the concept of operating inter-dependently within the sociocultural context of the target language community is an important aspect of L2 learner autonomy. Roberts and Kleiner (1999) suggest that autonomous learning is a process that occurs through interrelated parts of a family or another social grouping. Toohey and Norton (2003) similarly conceptualise learner autonomy as socially-situated agency, where learners become increasingly involved in the social context of the target language community. Learners are constrained or enabled to access ‘desirable’ identities, resources and practices within the target language communities. Oxford (2003) identifies two related sociocultural perspectives, which supplement Benson’s (1997) perspectives of learner autonomy, mentioned above.

The first of Oxford's sociocultural perspectives of learner autonomy draws on the Vygotskian notion of 'mediated learning' (Benson, 2007; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). This perspective highlights the importance of language learners being situated in a particular social and cultural context in conjunction with a relationship with and assistance of a more capable other, termed 'mediated' learning. Learners benefit from the 'meaningfulness' of the learning and the nature of the relationship. Mediated learning revolves around social relationships in which the more capable individual scaffolds language learning and boosts learner motivation levels to achieve higher language competency. Ushioda (2006b) describes this process as learners moving through 'zones of proximal development', reflecting the assistance of others, and periods of both social engagement and separation. Ushioda also indicates that as the learner becomes more self-regulatory, scaffolding gradually lessens.

Oxford's second sociocultural perspective of learner autonomy differs from the former in that mediated learning occurs within a supportive *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). In effect, the learner becomes a 'cognitive apprentice' within the community and benefits from insider information, shared by experienced members, such as cultural understanding, practices, and strategies (Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff & Lave, 1984). As a result, the learner moves from peripheral (if any) involvement to active participation within the community. This type of learning involves a relatively high degree of learner motivation and internalization of cognitive and social strategies (Oxford, 2003). In addition, learners who participate within a community undergo a shift in social identity (Toohey & Norton, 2003).

Both sociocultural perspectives relate to learner agency within mediated, meaningful, situated learning contexts. Both sociocultural perspectives evidence the use of learning strategies and also acknowledge that mediated learning involves scaffolding by more capable 'others'. However, the second perspective emphasises that motivation is strongly connected to learner participation and subsequent investment in the target language community (Oxford, 2003).

Palfreyman (2006) describes communities of practice as social contexts in target language communities in which individuals participate by learning and using the language. Toohey (2007) describes the sociocultural perspective of autonomy as acknowledging a combination of persons, resources, and practices within communities of practice. These factors are presented as being interconnected and therefore exerting influence on one another in terms of limiting or enabling learner access.

## **2.5 Expanded views on a sociocultural perspective**

The four perspectives of autonomy discussed above, although highlighting different features of autonomy, share four main strands; agency, motivation, the context of language learning, and learning strategies. The sociocultural perspective seems to be particularly relevant to autonomous L2 learning in target language communities, such as learning NZSL within the Deaf community, the context of this study. The following section will further investigate the learner within this sociocultural perspective, with reference to learner agency, social identity, social positioning, material and social resources, motivation and personal investment.

### **2.5.1 Learner agency**

The term “agency” often occurs with reference to autonomous learners within the sociocultural perspective. Norton and Toohey (2001) use agency to indicate that learners are able to take responsibility for their own learning, and to seek out, utilise and create opportunities to take control of their own learning. Learner agency may involve providing social resources to the community, such as contributing personal knowledge and resources and drawing on similar life experiences. Toohey (2007) argues that agents shape personal learning and participation in particular communities, which could either constrain or enable learner access to identities, resources and practices. Pennycook (1997) adds that self-agency can be developed to enable learners to reposition their identities and exercise greater control over accessing resources.



### **2.5.2 Social identity**

Norton (2000) defines social identity, as being how a learner understands their relationships to the social world and how they construct relationships with others. Tajfel (1974) perceives the concept of social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (p.69). Norton and Toohey (2001) reinforce this concept and assert that identity represents “how L2 learners are situated in specific social, historical, and cultural contexts” (p. 310).

Socially and culturally, learner use of the target community’s language is of central importance. Through language, a person negotiates a sense of self, within and across different communities at different times (Toohey & Norton, 2003). As Palfreyman (2006) points out, learner identity revolves around language use.

Lightbown and Spada (1999) state that learner identity is largely determined by the extent to which the learner adopts the identity markers of the L2’s cultural group. Learners must therefore be aware of how language and social practices are structured (Norton & Toohey, 2001). Norton Peirce’s social model (1995) proposes that L2 learners experience multiple changing social identities as a result of different contexts and choices made within these contexts.

Learner social identities are dependent on a number of factors, including the range of L2 users encountered, the depth of relationships and networks and the regularity of interaction (Garton et al., 1997). Therefore social identities may either facilitate or limit access to conversations, and therefore potential opportunities to engage in target community practices.

From these explanations, two points become apparent. Firstly, it seems that social identity can be self-determined to a certain extent. Secondly, social identity is clearly linked to language use and social relationships. This means that learners experience multiple identities over time and in various settings.

### **2.5.3 Social positioning**

Palfreyman (2006) identifies learner social positioning, within the target language community, as a major determinant of the degree of access to learning opportunities in authentic settings. Palfreyman (2006) identifies role-fulfillment and prestige within the target language community, as factors that directly strengthen access. Learners are positioned socially by community members, largely as a result of social identity and language usage. Acceptance by the community at certain levels potentially facilitates or constrains opportunities to enter into authentic meaningful discourse. Consequently access to facets of that community, including powerful social networks, is achieved or denied, depending on how learners are perceived and ‘pigeon-holed’ by community members.

However, as Norton and Toohey (2001) raise, learners are free to resist or accept the positions those contexts offer them and to some extent can deliberately negotiate their own social identities. Learners can consciously self-monitor and adapt language usage to operate effectively within different facets of the linguistic community, by continually renegotiating their social identities (Toohey & Norton, 2003). Social repositioning alters levels of exposure to target language users and therefore impacts on access to authentic repertoires of language use. In other words, social identity influences entry points into the target language community, developing social networks with L1 users, participating in social practices and building relationships, and yet can be intentionally negotiated across contexts.

### **2.5.4 Social networks**

Social networks within target language communities have a direct bearing on L1 usage, which has implications for good L2 learners. Social networks are social relationship clusters whose members are determined by the social attributes of the participants. The structure and membership of social networks continually undergo change over time and across different contexts. Functions of social networks include information exchange through communication, giving or receiving support, and sharing resources (Tajfel, 1974). According to Romaine (1984) another important function of social networks is to enforce linguistic norms.

Social networks can be of various ‘strengths’. That is, more weakly bound networks, which supply more trivial information, may combine to form parts of larger social systems. Although weakly-tied people may be less likely to share resources, they might have access to wider resources, due to membership in a range of different social networks (Tajfel, 1974). These ‘looser’ networks permit language change and therefore allow for considerable language variation (Romaine, 1984). Conversely, more strongly bound networks include more intimate and complex communication exchange, more self-disclosure, increased mutual provision of services and resource sharing, frequent contact, and a type of ‘kinship’. Multiplex ties are based on many types of relations, being more intimate, voluntary, supportive and durable. Strong networks may be more personal, but less diverse overall (Tajfel, 1974). These tight-knit networks promote language maintenance (Romaine, 1984). However, both types of social networks within target language communities are important for the exchange of resources (Tajfel, 1974). It would therefore seem useful for good L2 learners to participate in a range of social networks in order to experience a wide range of target language usage and to facilitate access to resources.

### **2.5.5 Material and social resources**

Palfreyman (2006) asserts that learning strategy choices within the social context are dependent on the availability of material and social resources, the degree of accessibility and relevance, and the degree of learner enjoyment. Learner access to L2 learning resources varies across different communities of practice, different social networks, and over time. According to Palfreyman (2006), material resources include specific language learning materials and everyday authentic materials found in the social context, which may be used by learners for language learning or practice.

Palfreyman (2006) describes social resources as networks of people acting as language models for learners, or as sources of support and feedback. Norton and Toohey (2001) assert that good learners exercise human agency to gain access to intellectual and social resources within the social context. One way learners do this is to develop social networks and become favorably positioned within the social context to gain access to community resources and information. Garton, Haythornthwaite and

Wellman (1997) claim that learner access to social resources depends on the focus, degree of mutual contribution and the range, frequency and quality of contact with target language users.

### **2.5.6 Motivation**

Many researchers raise the importance of L2 learner motivation, and state that motivation is essential for successful L2 learning (Dornyei, 1994; Gardner, 1985; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Dornyei (1994) discusses three levels of L2 motivation: the language level, the learner level and the learning situation level.

The language level indicates social and cultural attitudes towards the target language. Dornyei (1994) asserts that this level incorporates instrumental and integrative reasons for L2 learning. According to Gardner (1985), instrumental orientation refers to a learner desire to learn a L2 to enhance career or qualification opportunities. Integrative orientation refers to a learner's willingness to interact and communicate with L2 users, and is thought to be a better predictor of L2 achievement. L2 learners, who are motivated to use the target language practically, also tend to utilise and create effective learning strategies (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

The learner level indicates learner characteristics that enhance L2 learner motivation, such as beliefs, attitudes, achievement needs, linguistic self-confidence and learning styles. According to Bandura (1997), high learner motivation stems from 'self-efficacy', or the learner's inner belief that they are ready and capable of taking responsibility for meeting personal L2 learning requirements. Various researchers have also described learner level motivation as 'intrinsic' or 'extrinsic' learner motivation. Skehan (1989) describes intrinsic motivation as the learner's desire to do something for internal satisfaction, such as participating in particular interests and activities for enjoyment, or the satisfaction of becoming competent in the L2. Deci and Ryan (2000) perceive intrinsic motivation as resulting from learners being self-determined and taking control of their learning situations. Intrinsically motivated learners tend to be autonomous learners who actively follow their preferred learning pathways (Bandura, 1997; Benson, 2007; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ehrman, 1996). Extrinsic motivation stems from the learner's desire to carry out activities for external

pressures or rewards, such as achieving grades, receiving praise or completing tasks (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ellis, 1994). However, rather than being mutually exclusive, Deci and Ryan (1991) point out that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation act synergistically to drive a L2 learner. They consider that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are therefore best viewed as opposing points on a continuum, from self-determined to relatively externally controlled.

The learning situation level of motivation incorporates influential factors such as the resource materials, and social groups. An example of how social groups influence motivation is the degree to which a target language community socially accepts, recognises and encourages learners. Positive reinforcement is likely to increase the desire for learner participation. Mediated scaffolding with more capable L2 users and peer support is another example of how groups influence learner motivation. However, Dornyei (2001a) argues that autonomous L2 learners do have the ability to enhance their sense of control in different learning situations. They can self-initiate and self-regulate their actions, for specific learning rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand, 1997).

Although Dornyei (1994) highlights three levels of motivation, Ellis (1994) emphasises that the different facets of motivation should be taken as complementary and as dynamic in nature, varying over time, depending on the learning context, the activity or individual learning needs.

### **2.5.7 Investment**

The concept of ‘investment’ according to Norton Peirce (1995) is similar to learner ‘motivation’ with the distinction of being socially motivated within the context of the target language community. Norton Peirce argues:

if learners invest in a L2 language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wide range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital (Norton Peirce, 1995, p.17).

Investment thus concerns the actions of learners seeking and accessing target language learning opportunities and negotiating their way in the socially structured culture of the language in an effort to gain L2 competency. The learner is perceived as ‘investing’ personal ‘resources’ such as time and effort, with the expectation of measurable learning ‘returns’.

Learners invest actions, interaction time and the development of relationships in the target language community in reciprocity for learning gains such as L2 competency and access to cultural knowledge and insights to enhance participation in a variety of social contexts. Evolving social identities result in changing positioning within the target language community, which in turn impacts on the degree of learner engagement and access to learning opportunities. Therefore the nature of learner investment undergoes constant change. The notion of investment is very relevant to learners operating within the L2 sociocultural context.

Various perspectives of learning spoken languages as L2s have been raised above, including the characteristics of ‘good’ L2 language learners. In addition, L2 learner autonomy has been highlighted and examined from the technical, psychological, political and sociocultural perspectives. Of these four perspectives, it would seem that the sociocultural approach to learning L2s is particularly relevant for ‘good’ autonomous learners who seek to supplement formal learning with language acquired within target language communities. In parallel with these points, the concepts associated with learning sign language as an L2 will be discussed below.

## **2.6 Deaf communities and sign languages**

Deaf people, as raised by Baker and Cokely (1980), are identified by four determining factors. These are audiological deafness, linguistic competence in their native sign languages, and political and social involvement with their Deaf communities, regardless of ethnic backgrounds. All of these factors are underpinned with a positive ‘Deaf’ attitude. People belonging to these cultural linguistic groups are identified by the capitalisation of ‘Deaf’ (Padden, 1980). Many Deaf communities exist worldwide, that share common Deaf values and yet possess their own unique visual-spatial

sign languages (Higgins, 1987; Kyle & Woll, 1985; Padden, 1980). Contrary to popular belief, sign languages are not universally the same, just as spoken languages are not all the same (McKee & Kennedy, 2005).

The work of an early researcher (Stokoe, 2005) determined that American Sign Language (ASL) possesses all the qualities of a distinct language. As a result, ASL was recognised and further sign language research followed around the world (Fischer & Siple, 1990; Kyle & Woll, 1983; Schembri, 1996).

### **2.6.1 Validation of NZSL**

The New Zealand Deaf community also comprises Deaf people who share a common belief system, which centres on NZSL linguistic and cultural values. Dan Levitt (1986) first coined the term ‘NZSL’ when he published a collection of Deaf community signs entitled “An Introduction to New Zealand Sign Language”. Marianne Collins-Ahlgren published the findings of her research investigating NZSL linguistic features in 1989. Further linguistic research has since reinforced recognition of NZSL as a visual-spatial language used by members of the Deaf community in New Zealand (Kennedy, 1996, 1999; McKee, 2002). Following many years of lobbying by the Deaf community, the 2006 NZSL Act finally recognised NZSL as the third official language of New Zealand (McKee, 2007).

### **2.6.2 L2 sign language learners**

Currently, NZSL may be learned as an L2 through formal educational and informal social channels. Deaf NZSL tutors teach NZSL community education classes, and NZSL papers are offered at Victoria University in Wellington and AUT University in Auckland.

As New Zealand society revolves around the use of spoken languages, and in particular, English, the majority of people do not experience NZSL in day-to-day life. This means that NZSL learners must actively seek L2 learning opportunities within the Deaf social context.

### **2.6.3 NZSL interpreting situation**

In the past, the ‘interpreter’ role has been filled by untrained family members, welfare workers, church-goers, teachers, or CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults), who may or may not have been bilingual (Napier, McKee & Goswell, 2006). This role was often blended with a ‘helper’ role, which raised accuracy, ethical and empowerment concerns for Deaf people.

As a result of the Deaf community demand for trained sign language interpreters, a single four month NZSL / English interpreting programme was established in 1985 (Napier, McKee & Goswell, 2006). As the demand continued to grow for more trained NZSL interpreters, a permanent two-year Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting programme was officially established in 1992 by the same institution. AUT University remains the only provider of an NZSL interpreting programme.

AUT intensively trains students to work as professional interpreters within the Deaf community, across a variety of professional and community settings. NZSL interpreters are generally required to work in a greater variety of settings than spoken language interpreters, and therefore must be competent and adaptable (Napier, McKee and Goswell, 2006).

Fluency in both languages is an obvious prerequisite to interpreting skills, yet the jump from second language conversational fluency to the depth of language adaptability required for interpreting between such different languages can be difficult (Napier, McKee & Goswell, 2006, p. 38).

Learners must meet a minimum standard of NZSL proficiency (at least 100 hours of sign language learning) on entry to the programme. They are also expected to concurrently supplement formal NZSL learning with ongoing autonomous language learning within the sociocultural context of the Deaf community.

Despite overseas research relating to learning sign languages formally as L2s, and research relating to psychological and sociological approaches to sign language learning, there is little known about autonomous sign language learning in the social context. Existing research is briefly outlined below. There are no published studies



whatsoever relating to ‘good’ NZSL learners, or sociocultural learning approaches to learning NZSL autonomously in the Deaf social context.

## **2.7 Good L2 sign language learners**

Good sign language L2 learners share similar traits to good spoken L2 learners, such as cognitive understanding, learning strategies, management of learner affective states, and social communication and interaction in L2. However, sign language learners face additional challenges associated with visual-spatial languages, which highlight certain learner characteristics. These will be outlined below.

### **2.7.1 Cognitive understandings and learner assumptions**

Like spoken languages, sign languages contain all the linguistic features of a language (Stokoe, 2005). However, sign language learners typically, and incorrectly, assume that sign language is easy to learn, being merely a manually coded spoken language (Jacob, 1996). This is reflected in Peterson’s study (1999), which reports that many learners initially value vocabulary acquisition over learning grammatical features. According to Jacobs (1996) and Walton (1992), some learners also believe that L2 competency can be achieved through practising with one another. However, this tends to compound errors relating to L1 linguistic and cultural interference and a lack of authentic clarification. In fact, Walton (1992, p. 4) asserts that it may be “pedagogically harmful” for learners from the same culture to practise together. One reason for this is that learners may be encouraged to continue to use the English pragmatic system. This will be expanded in Section 2.7.2. (Communicative aspects). Walton (1992) goes on to argue that

It is the negotiating of meaning across different cultures that should form the heart of the instructional process, for we are supposedly educating our learners to interact successfully with members of another culture, not our own (Walton, 1992, p.5).

Effective sign language learners must therefore put aside assumptions and undertake learning in the social context of a Deaf community (Peterson, 1999). As previously raised, sign languages have grammatical and linguistic features, which relate to visual

spatial languages as opposed to spoken languages. Sign language learners are therefore likely to face many unfamiliar learning challenges. Unlike 'linear' spoken languages, sign languages present many facets of linguistic information 'simultaneously'. McKee and McKee (1992) assert that the process of learning visual-spatial sign languages may be, in fact, more complicated than the learning processes associated with spoken languages due to the visual, physical and mental effort required.

Learners of a three-dimensional visual-spatial language, with no written mode, find that learning materials alone are insufficient for learning. They must make efforts to learn and communicate 'face-to-face' with Deaf people visually, and to discriminate signs through distinguishing movement, location, orientation of the palms and handshapes (McKee & McKee, 1992). Grammatical components of sign languages can also be visually difficult to discriminate between. For example, non-manual signals (nms), expressed on the face, convey a wide range of very specific grammatical meanings and are expressed simultaneously with other grammatical and lexical features. NMS can be easily overlooked or misunderstood by non-fluent sign language learners.

According to McKee and McKee (1992), sign language learners also expend physical energy through coordinating the fine motor hand, body, ocular and facial movements required to express and comprehend the language. This results in learners becoming very tired.

McKee and McKee (1992) state that sign language learners not only expend visual and physical effort, they also need to possess mental and linguistic flexibility. They point out that 'good' sign language learners tend to have L2 aptitude and lexical memory skills.

In addition to possessing visual, physical and mental aptitudes for learning sign language, learners are also expected to contribute to conversations earlier than spoken L2 learners. In fact, communication attempts are often expected on their first encounter with Deaf people. Sign language learners therefore tend to develop

expressive skills before they can fully process and understand sign language (Peterson, 1999).

### **2.7.2 Learning strategies**

Overseas and local research emphasises the importance of learner involvement in Deaf communities of practice for language learning purposes. However, there is little known about the effectiveness of sign language learner strategies within the social context.

### **2.7.3 Psychological aspects**

Learners must deal with a number of psychological factors when learning sign languages. Kyle and Woll (1985) point out that sign language learners must confront the emotional and social factors attached to general society's view of deafness as a disability, in contrast to the cultural-linguistic perspective. Similarly, Peterson (1999) cautions that sign language learners must not fall into a 'helper' mentality, but rather acknowledge the 'insider' Deaf perspective in order to be successful learners.

According to Price (1991), spoken language learners typically feel anxious when they are not able to fully comprehend the target language, experiencing anxiety about missing information, and how to clarify, interrupt and enter conversations. Similarly, some sign language learners experience high levels of anxiety related to receptive sign language use when meeting and interacting with Deaf people (Kyle & Woll, 1985; McKee & McKee, 1992).

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) observe that language anxiety is significantly higher for spoken language learners when producing the L2 than when receiving it. This also holds true for sign language learners, who in addition must deal with the learning process of producing the target language in a visual-spatial modality. Limited proficiency in sign language can also inhibit learners, in terms of establishing and maintaining social contacts in the Deaf community (McKee & McKee, 1992). As one participant in their study said

To become fluent in ASL it definitely helps to associate with Deaf people. I've been studying ASL for one and a half years and haven't associated with Deaf people because I feel intimidated. I don't feel confident or competent enough to mingle (McKee & McKee, 1992, p. 144).

Furthermore, sign language learners can experience considerable discomfort as they become accustomed to unfamiliar Deaf communicative norms, such as prolonged eye contact, use of non-manual features and being the visual point of focus (McKee & McKee, 1992). This is particularly problematic for learners with introverted personalities, or those from cultural or personal backgrounds with conflicting communicative values.

#### **2.7.4 Motivation**

Following Dornyei's (1994) three levels of (interconnected) L2 learner motivation, sign language L2 learners can also be motivated by the language level, the learner level and the learning situation.

Researchers have identified language level motivation amongst sign language L2 learners (Kemp, 1998; Kyle & Woll, 1985; Lang et al., 1996b; McKee & McKee, 1992; Quinto-Pozos, 2005). They may be driven by either integrative or instrumental reasons. Historically, *integratively*-based learners learned sign language to communicate with Deaf family members, friends, fellow church-goers or work colleagues. They were often community-based helpers (Kyle & Woll (1985). More recently however, integratively-motivated learners tend to possess a strong interest in linguistics, language or Deaf culture or simply wish to communicate with Deaf people. They are inclined to seek out and enjoy frequent social interaction with Deaf people, and pursue *life-long* learning goals (Kemp, 1998). According to Kemp (1998) and Kyle and Woll (1985), integrative motivation is a strong contributing factor for good sign language learners. Increasing numbers of learners are becoming *instrumentally*-motivated and have the desire to learn a second language for career or qualification requirements and to work in professionally-oriented fields, such as interpreting or teaching Deaf students. These learners tend to set short-term learning goals and are exemplified by people who wish to become professionally involved in Deaf education, Deaf community organisations or the interpreting field (Kemp, 1998).

As raised earlier, learner level motivation to learn sign language can stem from either extrinsic or intrinsic drives and is influenced by individual learner characteristics such as affective states, belief systems, achievement needs and desires (Quinto-Pozos, 2005). Lang et al.'s study (1996b) reveals both types of motivation. Staff in an educational institution experienced extrinsic motivation by work requirements to learn sign language. However, staff were primarily intrinsically motivated. They believed that it was their own personal responsibility to improve communication with Deaf people on campus. They were also interested in the language (Lang et al., 1996b). Personal attitudes towards sign language and Deaf people also influence learners. Some learners, often labelled by researchers as 'altruistic', feel a responsibility to help or care for Deaf people (Jacobs, 1996; Peterson, 1999). They are often affiliated with community or church groups who value interaction and communication over the level of language proficiency attained (Kyle & Woll, 1985).

The learning situation incorporates important factors such as resource materials, and social groups, which impact on motivation. Social groups include the target language community and more skilled L2 users. The level of acceptance and encouragement offered by Deaf community members is particularly important for motivation (Cokely, 1986; Jacobs, 1996). Cokely (1986) highlights the 'invitation' paradigm where Deaf signers historically formed relationships with hearing people, invited them to 'interpret' at times within a voluntary capacity and later encouraged them to enrol in formal sign language interpreting education. From the perspective of sign language interpreting providers, Monikowski and Peterson (2005) claim that learner motivation increases through 'experiential learning' such as service within the Deaf community, combined with active learner reflection.

Conversely, Lang et al (1996b) point out that learners may also be de-motivated by learning situation factors such as workloads, scheduling constraints, insufficient practice opportunities and the attitudes of others in the learning environment.

### 2.7.5 Sociocultural perspective

It is important for ‘good’ sign language learners to embrace a social perspective of language learning (McKee & McKee, 1992; Peterson, 1999). The social perspective involves the use of material resources and social resources, the latter comprising L1 users and others (Palfreyman, 2006).

Unlike spoken language learners, sign language learners do not have the advantages of accessing language learning materials that are written in the target language. As three-dimensional languages, they do not have written equivalents and must be learned visually. Traditionally, sign language dictionaries provide two-dimensional sketches of static signs with arrows to indicate direction and movement. These images are accompanied by notation systems which approximate handshape, location, orientation and movement of individual signs, and report the non-manual signals (n.m.s.) which provide information regarding grammar, emotion and listening feedback. The NZSL dictionary is no exception (Kennedy et al, 1997; 2002). More recently, other countries have developed online interactive dictionaries of signed languages, such as Danish Sign Language and Flemish Sign Language.

As Lentz, Mikos & Smith (1988) point out, visual language learning materials, in the form of video language samples of L1 signers, are preferable to written materials, (in relation to American Sign Language, ASL) as:

On videotape we can show correct sign forms, how a sign is used in a sentence, how a sign form is influenced by the sign that precedes or follows. We can show where facial expressions occur in the sentence, how body, head, and eye movements are used for phrasing. We can handle more complicated ASL features such as spatial referencing, classifiers, verb inflections, and role-shifting, all of which gather meaning from movement (Lentz, Mikos & Smith, 1988, xi).

In the New Zealand context, the AUT NZSL interpreting students can access visual video NZSL resources, which comprise recorded NZSL language samples of Deaf people. These are available through the Visual Languages Department, and the AUT library. AUT also provides access to supportive visual technology in a dedicated self-directed learning video lab and in the main library. However, material resources, while useful, do have limitations. Peterson (1999) claims that it is much more

beneficial for sign language learners to learn from Deaf L1 signers, than from materials.

Deaf people operate in various communities of practice within the Deaf social-cultural context. Napier, McKee and Goswell (2006) identify a major contributing factor to successful sign language learning, as being learner access to a range of L1 sign language users. As Monikowski and Peterson (2005) and Napier, McKee and Goswell (2006) state, 'good' sign language interpreting learners independently reinforce their formal sign language learning by engaging with members of the Deaf community on an informal basis. In addition to sign language development, this enables learners to develop pragmatic knowledge and become somewhat enculturated into the Deaf community.

McKee (1996) identifies two main groups of Deaf people who are L1 social resources. McKee reveals that sign language learners prefer to utilise paid Deaf teachers and Deaf private tutors as 'insiders', to facilitate access to natural language, cultural information and their Deaf community. Lang et al's study (1996b) reveals a third type of social resource. Learners, who work with Deaf colleagues in educational institutions, prefer to communicate 'in house' than venture into the wider Deaf social context for language extension. Despite recognising the advantages of accessing social resources within the Deaf social context, Peterson's study (1999) reveals that few sign language learners follow through with regular social practice, revision and interaction. One reason offered by McKee and McKee (1992), is that some learners may be reluctant to impose on unknown Deaf people for learning support, which may include seeking assistance for homework assignments, or observing private sign language conversations.

## **2.8 Deaf communities**

Central to the lives of Deaf people are 'sign language communities,' commonly referred to as Deaf communities. As raised by Higgins (1987), Deaf 'communities of practice' are linked to a variety of settings and situations. Naturally, Deaf people interact with a variety of hearing people during the course of their day to day

activities. However, sign-language rich settings are to be found within the context of local Deaf communities, which provide rich interaction possibilities for learners.

Deaf communities are seen as cultural-linguistic minorities, with a defining difference. Members of each Deaf community share a Deaf identity related to their use of sign language. Nash describes sign language as the “cement of the Deaf community” (Nash, 1987, p. 91). Sign languages within Deaf communities promote the interconnection of Deaf people through social networks, which are sometimes geographically far reaching (Higgins, 1987). As Croneberg (1965) states:

The deaf as a group have social ties with each other that extend further across the nation than similar ties of perhaps any other American minority (Croneberg, 1965, p.310).

Deaf community settings are therefore language-rich environments, where concentrations of Deaf people congregate and network from interest group level, to local level, regional and national levels (Ladd, 2003). Although sign languages are unique to each country, Deaf communities are also somewhat interconnected at an international level (Higgins, 1987). As Ladd (2003) and Padden (1996) point out, the dynamics of Deaf communities alter with the size and demography of the populations, and change over time.

### **2.8.1 The Auckland Deaf community**

The New Zealand Deaf community incorporates a diverse range of people who, if hearing, would normally never cross paths. New Zealand Deaf people socialise and share commonalities as members of a close-knit minority group with a unique shared language, NZSL. Statistics relating to the number of people who identify as Deaf in New Zealand vary considerably. According to a survey conducted by Statistics NZ in 2001, approximately 7700 D/deaf people use sign language in various forms (Statistics New Zealand, 2001). Similarly, Dugdale (2000), a Deaf New Zealand researcher, estimates that there may be as many as 7,000 members of the New Zealand Deaf community.



AUT University is positioned in the centre of the Auckland Deaf community, which is one of the two largest Deaf populations in New Zealand, the other being Christchurch (Dugdale, 2000). From anecdotal observations, Deaf people residing in the Auckland region come from diverse backgrounds, life experiences and educational backgrounds (Monaghan, 2003). In addition to New Zealand-born Deaf people, the Auckland Deaf community incorporates many immigrants (Monaghan, 2003), and several with refugee status. Many ex-students of Kelston Deaf Education Centre (KDEC) also tend to remain in the Auckland region because of friendships and family associations. As a result, the Auckland Deaf community is relatively large, rich and diverse, and includes a range of ethnicities, cultures, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds.

As raised by James and Woll (2004), Deaf clubs are significant meeting places for culturally Deaf people, where social networking and information sharing is facilitated. Dugdale (2000) comments that over seventy percent of respondents reported either membership or attendance of a New Zealand Deaf club. The physical venues include regional facilities which are available to Deaf people for hosting community activities such as regular ‘get-togethers’, affiliated interest and leisure groups, meetings and special Deaf events (McKee & Kennedy, 2005; Monaghan, 2003).

The Auckland Deaf Society clubroom (ADS or the “Deaf club”), was inaugurated in 1937 with the aim of providing a “safe, secure and enriching Deaf cultural community centre... [where] all deaf people feel welcome in a culture that accepts difference.” (Auckland Deaf Society, 2007, p 5). ADS provides a cultural base for Deaf people to enjoy social, sport and recreational activities together. It has the largest regional membership in New Zealand (Monaghan, 2003). In October 2008, ADS had three hundred and eighty six members and associate members. Of these, three hundred and thirty five were New Zealand Deaf people, fifteen were Deaf people from other countries, and thirty six were associate hearing members. ADS has far reaching Deaf social networks, and distributes newsletters to twenty one Deaf clubs and associations nationwide and overseas (Auckland Deaf Society, October 2008).

The wider Auckland Deaf community, due to its size, is able to specialise in activities for segments of its population. A variety of Deaf people are involved in Deaf interest groups such as sports, politics, churches and arts and crafts (Dugdale, 2000; Monaghan, 2003). These interest groups function locally, and (at times) at regional and national levels.

In addition to socially based groups, several organisations are Deaf oriented and serve the Deaf community. One of these, the Deaf Association of New Zealand (DANZ), plays a key role in providing social services to Deaf community members in addition to publicly lobbying for Deaf rights (McKee & Kennedy, 2005). DANZ estimates a Deaf client base of 2500 country-wide (Deaf Association of New Zealand, n.d.). Auckland boasts a regional office in addition to the DANZ nation-wide headquarters.

Kelston Deaf Education Centre (KDEC) is one of the two Deaf residential schools in New Zealand, the other being in Christchurch. KDEC employs a large number of Deaf staff in a range of educational roles (Monaghan, 2003). These include professional and support roles such as teaching, NZSL and Maori language and culture support, and residential social work.

Socially structured groups are predominantly run by Deaf volunteers, whereas formal organisations tend to employ a mixture of Deaf and hearing staff that are mainly paid. Formal organisations tend to be open to Deaf and hearing volunteers.

### **2.8.2 Accessing the Deaf community**

As raised earlier, significant NZSL learning opportunities can be found in the Deaf social context. However, as McKee and McKee's study (1992) reveals, gaining access to the core Deaf community can be problematic for some learners, even at advanced level. Kyle and Woll (1985) point out that Deaf people determine the extent to which the exclusivity of their language and culture is maintained. This raises a number of implications for the identity of learners as perceived by the target language community.

### *Social identity*

The social identities of learners may either facilitate or limit access to L2 learning opportunities within the Deaf social context. Baker and Cokely's model (1980) shows that audiological, social, linguistic and political factors all affect 'membership' into, and identities within, the Deaf community. Although learners can develop the last three factors, they are clearly audiological different. Therefore learner enthusiasm to acculturate may not be reciprocated by Deaf people (Jacobs, 1996). Hearing people's life experiences are naturally shaped by sound, which results in significantly different world perspectives to those of Deaf people who experience the world visually. Learners must rely on the goodwill of Deaf people in order to interact and learn in the Deaf world. Despite lacking the audiological factor, learners may facilitate entry and develop favourable identities through exhibiting positive attitudes toward Deaf people, sign language and cultural values (Jacobs, 1996). According to Kemp (1998) and McKee & McKee (1992), good sign language learners are willing to acculturate as much as possible into the Deaf community and internalise Deaf culture and sign language. This aligns with Schumann's (1986) observation that increased learner enculturation leads to lessened social and psychological distance between the learner and L1 users, which promotes L2 competency. As noted previously, Norton Peirce (1995) asserts that learner identities are related to personal learner investment and acceptance by the L1 users.

Norton Peirce (1995) further states that "the right" for L2 learners to speak is derived from their identities within the target language communities. Some sign language learners automatically possess desirable 'Deaf' identities, are accepted by L1 users, and have a 'passport' to the Deaf world. These are exemplified by CODAs (children of Deaf adults), who may have varying levels of sign language competency, but who share certain life experiences and cultural backgrounds with Deaf people (McKee, 1996; Napier, McKee & Goswell, 2006). Learners who are partners or family members of Deaf people are also viewed favourably within the Deaf world (Kyle & Woll, 1985). Another group of learners who tend to be identified favourably in Deaf circles are interpreting students. Napier, McKee and Goswell (2006) identify a 'symbiotic' relationship between interpreters and the Deaf community. Deaf people

are ‘tapped’ for their language and cultural knowledge, with the unspoken expectation that potential interpreters will reciprocate by benefiting the Deaf community in the future. Deaf people become natural sign language models for interpreting learners, and in doing so increase the likelihood of interpreters earning a living and maintaining a professional status in society. Conversely, Deaf people are potentially empowered to access societal information and advocate for community goals through working with more competent interpreters.

It would seem that enhancing learner social identities would result in increased access to L2 learning opportunities and social networks within the Deaf community.

### *Social networking*

As raised in the Deaf community section, Deaf social networks are integral to the Deaf community and are based on the frequency of contact, shared experiences, interests, knowledge and support. They are important pathways in developing primary and secondary social relationships, where word of ‘hand’ is highly valued (Becker, 1987). These networks centre on Deaf family connections and friendships, which are often life-long and established at Deaf schools (Becker, 1987; McKee & Kennedy, 2005) and as such can be difficult for sign language learners to establish and maintain social networks (McKee & McKee, 1992).

In contrast to the traditional ‘invitation’ paradigm, many sign language researchers have identified a shift in sign language learning approaches (Cokely, 1986; Monikowski & Peterson, 2005; Peterson, 1999). More recently, learners have tended to be initially ‘enculturated’ within classrooms. They observe that academically oriented sign language learners have been learning ‘invisibly’ far from the view of the Deaf Community. This has resulted in less learner involvement in the Deaf community, and increased difficulties in the social context, due to scant social networks and remaining somewhat anonymous to Deaf people.

### *Communicative aspects*

As Napier, McKee and Goswell (2006) raise, good L2 sign language learners are aware of situational variances in the Deaf social context and can internalise and make

appropriate sociolinguistic and pragmatic adjustments. Sutton-Spence and Woll (1998) identify factors that affect communicative sign language usage:-

- Topic and reason for conversation
- Type and number of conversational partners
- Level of communicative competency
- Setting formality and register
- Strength of social relationships; degree of familiarity

As raised by Sutton-Spence and Woll (1998), conversational partners and settings result in code-switching. Woodward (1982) describes the 'diglossia continuum' where sign language users can shift between varieties of sign language, fingerspelling and mouthing to match the assumed communicative needs of the other parties in various settings. Code-switching can range from fluent sign language usage amongst Deaf people, to English-like signing with vocal cues (Lucas & Valli, 1989) especially in the presence of hearing conversationalists. This can be a source of frustration for L2 good sign language learners who aspire to high sign language competency (McKee & McKee, 1992).

Highly contextualised information can also be problematic for sign language learners. As raised by Hall (1989), some spoken language communities reside in high-context cultures, in which most information is found in the physical context or internalised in the people, rather than explicitly coded in messages conveyed. Hall (1989) asserts that highly contextualised cultures are those in which people have far-reaching, tightly bound relationships and perceive a clear difference between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (p.98). Deaf communities are high context cultures (Mindess, 1999; Napier, McKee and Goswell, 2006). Strong social ties, familiarity and common histories and experiences amongst Deaf people means that a large percentage of information is highly contextualised and shared within Deaf networks. Many referents are therefore implicit, rather than explicitly stated, resulting in efficient, less ambiguous 'insider' conversations, and some confusion for 'outsiders' (Napier, McKee and Goswell, 2006).

Significant variation within sign languages, arising from numerous sociolinguistic factors, can also be confusing for sign language learners. Croneberg (1965) broadly divides sign language variation into two categories. ‘Horizontal’ variation refers to regional (dialectal) variation, which can be ascribed to social networks of Deaf people, such as would be seen around Deaf residential school areas. This includes variation due to local innovations of signs. In contrast, ‘vertical’ variation results from *separation* into specific social groups due to social stratification. This includes social factors such as status (defined by Croneberg as the economic level, occupation, leadership and education of signers), age, ethnicity, gender and religion.

In the New Zealand context, McKee (1996) also identifies significant NZSL variation arising from sociolinguistic factors, such as region and age. Napier, McKee and Goswell (2006) state that NZSL has significantly more variation than New Zealand English, which implies the need for ‘good’ NZSL interpreting students to access a wide range of signing styles in the Deaf social context.

L2 sign language learners must also develop pragmatic competency within the target language community. Not only must learners become aware of their own pragmatic behaviours, they must also internalise culturally Deaf pragmatic behaviours (Kemp, 1998; Jacobs, 1996; Mindess, 1999). They state that it is essential for those who use a second language professionally, such as interpreters, to become “paradigm shifters”. That is, they must have a strong grounding in Deaf culture and pragmatics in order to firstly negotiate meaning, and secondly to convey the message correctly within the culturally appropriate framework. Jacobs asserts that this ability separates merely adequate interpreters from highly skilled interpreters. Insufficient cultural and pragmatic knowledge of L2 learners forces Deaf communicative partners to ‘interpret’ the message (Jacobs, 1996).

## **2.9 Learner investment within the sociocultural context**

As noted previously, Toohey and Norton (2003) believe that learner investment, in terms of time and effort expended in the target language community, either constrains or enables learner access to social practices, networks and resources, in addition to

shaping personal social identities. According to Jeavons (1999), McKee and McKee (1992) and Peterson (1999), the personal time and effort invested by the L2 learner in the Deaf social context significantly contributes to formal language learning success and general L2 competency.

ASL [American Sign Language] learning cannot take place without a great investment of time and energy (Peterson 1999, p. 193-194).

## **2.10 Addressing the research gap**

This study was motivated by the reduction of Year One formal language teaching hours (from 450 hours in 1992 to 288 hours in 2009) offered in the NZSL interpreting programme at AUT. The purpose of the study was to discover how NZSL learners in the programme compensate for reduced formal input through developing autonomous learning strategies to access L2 learning opportunities offered by the Deaf community.

Existing studies investigate the insights of adults formally learning natural sign languages as L2s (Jeavons, 1999; McKee & McKee, 1992; Peterson, 1999). One common theme was that classroom learners tended to experience significant difficulties in accessing opportunities to interact in Deaf social contexts. These difficulties appeared to relate to certain sociological, psychological and sociolinguistic factors.

Kemp (1998) and Kyle & Woll (1985) highlight the importance of sociological and psychological factors for sign language learners. They conclude that L2 sign language competency is closely related to the degree of learner acculturation into Deaf communities. They also point out that the degree of learner identification with target language users, and the resulting social and psychological distance between learners and Deaf people, has a strong bearing on L2 competency. Several sign language researchers have identified psychological factors, which facilitate or restrict learners interacting with Deaf people in the Deaf social context (Kemp, 1998; Kyle & Woll, 1985; Jeavons, 1999; McKee & McKee, 1992; Peterson, 1999; Quinto-Pozos, 2005). These factors include, but are not limited to, learner attitudes, motivations and

language anxiety. Quinto-Pozos (2005) asserts that social-psychological factors, relating to interpreting students learning sign languages, need to be investigated further. Sociolinguistic difficulties, when interacting in the Deaf social context, are also experienced by formal sign language learners. McKee and McKee (1992) assert that a wide range of sociolinguistic factors, including language variation and code-switching, must be learned in the Deaf social context in order to achieve high sign language L2 competency.

Some ASL programmes have attempted to bridge the gap between classrooms and communities by incorporating structured compulsory 'service learning'. Learners are required to regularly participate in Deaf community activities for mutual benefit. They learn how to meet Deaf linguistic and cultural requirements, and simultaneously contribute to the collective (Monikowski & Peterson, 2005; Reading & Carlstrand, 2007). The New Zealand interpreting curriculum does not include service learning, although students are required to complete a minimum number of observation hours in the Deaf community, and later undertake an interpreting practicum in the community.

It is clear that researchers generally agree that good sign language learners must supplement formal learning with authentic interaction within Deaf communities (McKee & McKee, 1992; Monikowski & Peterson, 2005; Napier, McKee & Goswell, 2006; Peterson, 1999). However, apart from suggestions regarding 'service learning', there is a significant gap in existing research and literature.

Within the New Zealand context, some sign language research has investigated linguistic, lexical and sociolinguistic aspects of NZSL (Collins-Ahlgren, 1989; McKee & Kennedy, 1999; 2005; McKee & McKee, 2007) and one study has investigated issues surrounding NZSL tutors formally teaching NZSL as an L2 (McKee, 1996). However, with the exception of Napier, McKee & Goswell's (2006) study, no research has yet been conducted on NZSL L2 learning within the Deaf social context. This thesis attempts to partially address this research gap within the NZ context.



## **2.11 Chapter summary**

This chapter has reviewed the literature on ‘good’ language learners, both of spoken and sign language learners, with particular emphasis on the sociocultural perspective. L2 learner autonomy was investigated, especially with regards to developing strategies to determine and access opportunities arising from the use of material and social resources. A marked gap in research was noted, related to L2 sign language learning from a sociocultural perspective. However, existing information suggests that culturally appropriate interaction within Deaf communities significantly contributes to successful sign language learning.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study and the methods used to collect and analyse the data.

## **Chapter three**

### **Research methodology**

#### **3.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter provides an overview and rationale of the research methodology selected for this study. The research design and process are described and ethical considerations discussed. In addition, the participants and the context in which the study was conducted are identified, together with the role of the researcher. Data collection, data coding and analysis methods are then discussed and the limitations of the study identified. Finally, the chapter is briefly reviewed.

#### **3.2 Introduction**

A primary consideration of this study was to investigate the ‘insider’ impressions of students who had recently completed an intensive two-year Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting at AUT’s School of Languages. This programme is unique within New Zealand. The collection of data, in the form of semi-structured interviews, was conducted immediately following final exams and exam moderation meetings, while the course was fresh in the students’ minds. The interviews were designed to elicit insights and opinions from the students’ perspectives, as to the most effective strategies in learning New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) as an additional language in informal settings outside the classroom environment. The interviews were guided by selected, open-ended questions and the participants were strongly encouraged to offer their own views on how best to learn NZSL as an additional language and to reflect on their own experiences of what was effective or not effective.

In particular, the study attempted to answer the following four research questions:

- What factors contribute to independent language learning of NZSL?
- What factors hinder independent language learning of NZSL?
- What opportunities do NZSL learners have for learning NZSL outside class?
- What learning strategies outside of the classroom benefit NZSL learners?

### **3.3 Justification for methodology**

There appears to be very little research, either quantitative or qualitative in design, which has attempted to investigate sign language learning opportunities in the contexts of the respective sociocultural Deaf communities and the independent strategies of adults learning sign language as a second or additional language. In particular, there is a dearth of qualitative studies, a gap in the research agenda that has prompted McKee and McKee (1992) to argue for the need of further qualitative research relating to sign language teaching and learning.

In general, existing studies on sign language learning as a second language are predominantly quantitative in nature and depend largely on questionnaires to draw out classroom learner's viewpoints (McKee & McKee, 1992; Peterson, 1999; Jeavons, 1999). Smith (2003), investigating the literacy teaching strategies of Deaf teachers in New Zealand, also based her research design around the collection of quantitative data; however, she also supplemented this information with follow-up interviews.

Quantitative research designs using questionnaires have a number of limitations. First, questionnaires arguably restrict participant input (McKee & McKee, 1992; Peterson, 1999). Second, a limited pool of possible participants affects the quantity of data able to be collected and implicates the reliability and validity of the study (Neuman, 2000). Therefore, to ensure that data was both sufficient in quality and quantity, in the present study a more in-depth, qualitative approach was called for.

Based on a review of the literature, the researcher decided that conducting semi-structured interviews, using key open-ended questions, was the most effective way of discovering interviewee opinions, attitudes and values with the least amount of interviewer interference. Creswell (2003), for example, points out that semi-structured interviews involve asking open-ended questions that are few in number and are intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants. In semi-structured interviews, key questions can be asked, but the interviews also allow for flexibility such as altering the sequence of questions, as well as the opportunity to probe for additional information in follow up questions (Fielding & Thomas, 2001). This flexibility allows the interviewer to pursue areas of particular interest as they might

occur incidentally. As May (2001) states, this means the interviewer has the potential to turn the interview into a dialogue by requesting clarification and elaboration.

As this study was set in a cross-cultural, bilingual setting, that is, NZSL and English, participants were also given the option of responding in their preferred language, to encourage freedom of 'speech' and to encourage the participants to express their views and insights as freely as possible. A recent ethnographic study of Deaf adults learning English literacy as a second or additional language (Thompson, 2004) provided a useful model. Thompson's study also employed semi-structured interviews in the participants' language of choice to elicit data, which was then examined for emerging themes. The study raised a number of concerns involving ethics and challenges surrounding the collection of data, which have similar implications for the study presented in this thesis.

### **3.4 Ethical consent**

Full ethical approval was sought and granted from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee. A comprehensive Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form were devised (see Appendices A and B), which clearly outlined the nature of the study and potential risks to the participants (Neuman, 2000), namely the risk of identification. In addition, the details of the study were explained in NZSL and in spoken English by an appointed gatekeeper (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Participants were asked on several occasions if they had any questions or concerns and were clearly advised that they had the right to withdraw from the study, and to sight the transcript before analysis to confirm, change or delete any data they so wished anytime prior to completion of data collection.

The Deaf Community is a small one, and the sign language interpreting programme is unique in New Zealand. Therefore, considering the limited number of potential participants for the study, there was a significant risk that despite confidentiality, participants were likely to be identified within the Deaf community. The consent form outlined the participants' rights and asked for confirmation that they had understood the perceived risks and benefits of the study, in particular the risk of identification.

The consent form also identified the right of participants to ask for clarification and to withdraw all or part of their contribution if they so wished.

The risk associated with identification was reinforced verbally by the gatekeeper. In addition, prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher again clearly outlined the risk to the participants and explained to them that every effort would be made to mask individual identities, for example by grouping responses under themes, rather than by individuals.

Participants were also advised that all material would remain strictly confidential between the concerned participant, researcher, supervisors, interpreter and transcriber. On completion of study, relevant material would be held at AUT in a locked cabinet for seven years, and then destroyed, as required by the institution. In addition, the interpreting and transcribing parties were required to sign confidentiality agreements (See Appendices D and E). All the participants stated that they understood the implications of their involvement in the study and willingly gave informed consent.

### **3.5 Stakeholders**

#### **3.5.1 Researcher**

The researcher is deaf, and fluent in both New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), Australian Sign Language (Auslan) and to some degree, other foreign sign languages, and in addition, is proficient in written English. The researcher has been committed to the education of Deaf people, and the education of people who work within the Deaf community for many years. She has been heavily involved in the Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting programme since 1992, and has had a major impact in the education of Deaf students through her work with Kelston Deaf Education Centre (KDEC).

The researcher taught all six participants in the NZSL papers and the Deaf Studies papers for the first eighteen months of their two-year programme, but was not directly involved with their instruction in the subsequent six months, during the time the interviews were conducted. However, the researcher does possess a relatively high status in the social hierarchy of the Deaf community, and plays an important role as a

language and cultural advisor between the participants and the Deaf community. Thus, despite the clear advantages of being familiar with the participants, a potential limitation to this study could be the perceived power differential between teacher and participants.

### **3.5.2 Gatekeeper**

To ensure that the students did not feel in any way pressured to participate in the research, contact was made through an informed third party, an appointed gatekeeper (Mackey & Gass, 2005). At the time of the study, the gatekeeper was the Programme Coordinator of the Visual Languages section at the School of Languages, and had absolutely no involvement with the research project. She was invited to participate as the gatekeeper for several reasons. Firstly, she was in daily contact with the students and had developed a rapport with them. Secondly, she was interested in the possible findings of the research, perceiving a direct benefit to the programme and therefore future students. Thirdly, the gatekeeper had undertaken academic study herself, and had a strong understanding of what research entailed. The gatekeeper approached the students, explained the concepts and aims of the project in spoken English, discussed the perceived risks and benefits with the students, and invited them to become involved and to signal their acceptance by directly contacting the researcher. Six out of ten students volunteered. Four students indicated their interest, but regrettably declined, as they would be leaving Auckland on completion of their studies and would not be available for the interviews.

### **3.5.3 Participants**

Participants were selected on the basis of being full-time students and on their willingness and availability to participate. At the time of this study, twelve students were enrolled in Year Two of the AUT University Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting programme. Two of these students were part-time students, and for this reason, were not invited to participate. The remaining ten full-time students in the second year programme were all invited to participate in the study on the completion of their study programme. Of these ten students, six registered their interest and availability to participate.

#### **3.5.4 Sign language interpreters**

Participants were given the option of conducting the interview directly with the researcher in NZSL, or responding in spoken English. All six participants chose to discuss their views in spoken English. Subsequently, an independent, experienced and qualified NZSL interpreter was employed to mediate between the researcher and the participants. The interpreter was chosen on account of her familiarity with the research process, particularly involving the Deaf community, adherence to the Interpreter's Code of Ethics, and familiarity in working with the researcher. The researcher conducted the interviews in NZSL, which was simultaneously interpreted into spoken English. The participants responded in spoken English, which was also simultaneously interpreted into NZSL. Therefore, both the researcher's "voice" (through the interpreter) and the participants' own voices were captured on audio-cassette. The same interpreter worked with the researcher throughout both the pilot interviews and authentic interviews of the main study, as outlined below, to ensure consistency and familiarity with interview techniques.

#### **3.5.5 Transcriber**

The audiotapes were professionally transcribed into written English for verification by the participants and for subsequent analysis. The transcriber was selected on the basis of another academic's recommendation of her previous excellent standard of work. This transcriber had also transcribed previous semi-structured interviews involving Deaf people, and was therefore more familiar with the sociocultural dynamics of the interview setting.

### **3.6 Stakeholders documentation**

The participants were approached through the gatekeeper, as previously discussed. The gatekeeper was given copies of the participant information sheets and participant consent forms, which were approved by the AUT Ethics Committee. A blank timetable was also forwarded to students, so that interested parties could indicate their preferred times, dates and venues for scheduling interviews with the researcher. In order to maximise the participant's comfort levels, they were given the choice of two interview venues. The first was the 'home' classroom located in the AUT University. The second venue was the local office of the Deaf Association of New Zealand. All

six indicated their preference for their familiar home classroom. In addition, both the NZSL interpreter and the transcriber were asked to sign confidentiality forms.

### 3.7 Data collection

Figure 3.1 outlines data collection and data analysis.

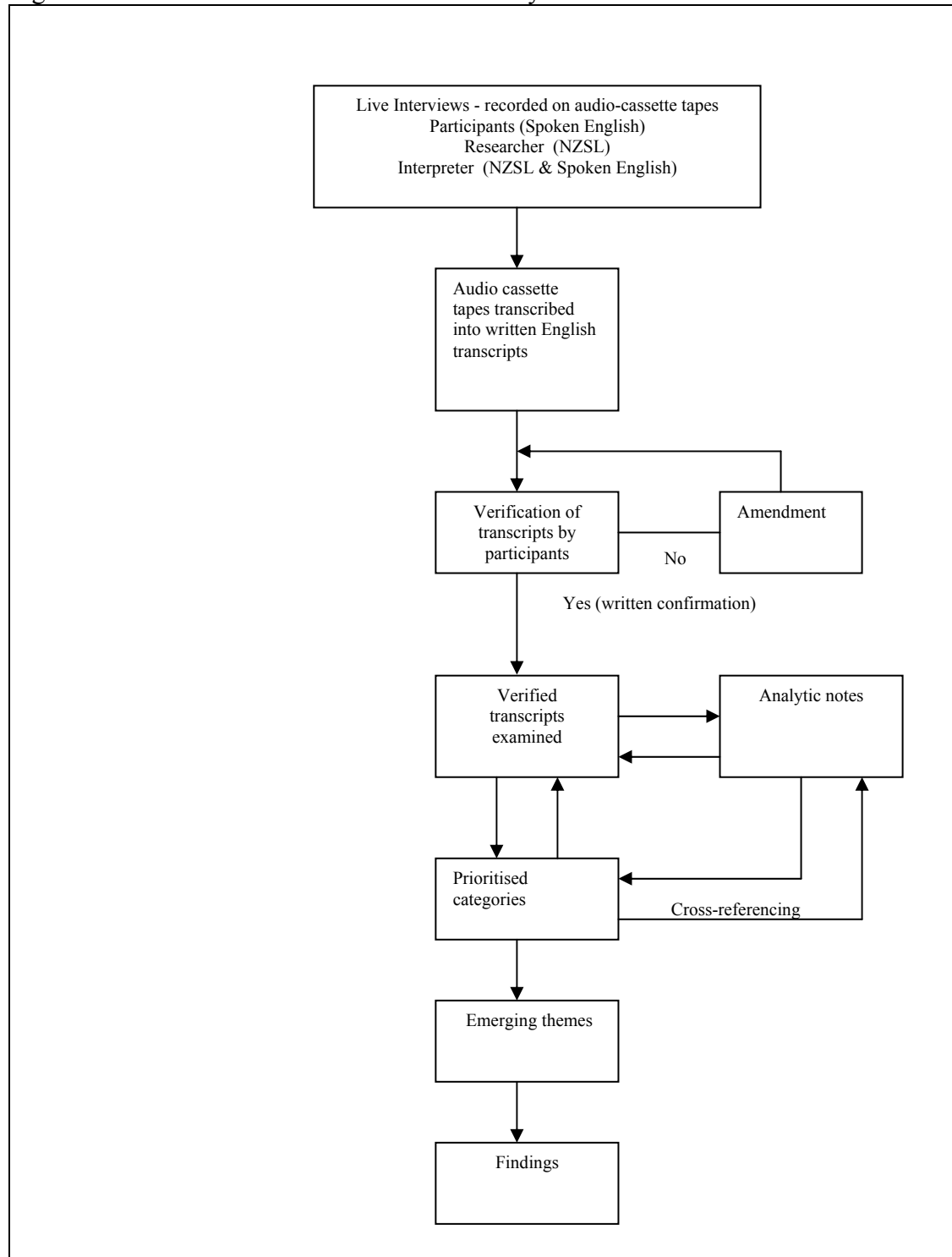


Figure 3.1: Flowchart diagram of transcript verification process and research process



### **3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews**

As discussed above, data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews, which were interpreted into spoken English for the purpose of recording on audio-cassette, and later transcribed for analysis. The interviews were designed to be semi-structured to ensure that while guided by the key questions, participants also had the freedom to express their opinions and insights as fluidly as possible. Semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher the flexibility to move with the participants thoughts, to adapt the sequence of questions, to probe for further information where appropriate, and to pursue concepts of particular interest (Fielding & Thomas, 2001). As May (2001) states, this method affords the interviewer the potential to transform interviews into a dialogue by clarifying and elaborating answers. In order to capture as much valid data as possible, a semi-structured interview approach, asking carefully selected open-ended questions, was chosen as this approach allows for the elicitation of rich, in-depth insights into the opinions, attitudes and values of the interviewees (Creswell, 2003). Of particular interest was the possibility of eliciting the participants' unique perspectives and discovering unexpected information.

### **3.7.2 Interview schedule sheet**

The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview schedule sheet (see Appendix C). The interview schedule was made available to all participants prior to the interview in order to facilitate the interview process and ensure that the data collected were rich.

### **3.7.3 Pilot interviews**

Due to the potentially small pool of participants, it was essential to maximise the quality and richness of data gained through the interviews. For this reason, pilot interviews were conducted to identify and rectify any potential problems (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The potential problems were expected to relate to interlanguage issues; that is, the potential problems of working in a bilingual setting. Two volunteers were sought and two pilot interviews were conducted.

To parallel the interviews of the main study as closely as possible, the pilot interviews were set up in the AUT University home classroom. This was also the preferred interview venue for all six participants. The volunteers for the pilot interviews were two professionally qualified NZSL interpreters, who were available between their paid interpreting work at AUT University. Both were former students of the Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting programme. The volunteers took part with the understanding that the interview process (not their actual performance) would be critiqued, and that the content of the interviews would remain completely confidential. They were given the interview schedule to review prior to the pilot interviews. The researcher's two supervisors were also invited to attend, primarily to give feedback on interviewing techniques. The interviews were audiotaped and checked for sound clarity but were not transcribed for analysis. The pilot interviews also gave the researcher and the NZSL interpreter an opportunity to work together.

Some interesting themes relating to NZSL learning opportunities within the Deaf community emerged from the pilot interviews. One volunteer mentioned that the Deaf Club, in her opinion, was not the best place to learn NZSL and advised NZSL learners to participate in groups of Deaf people with similar interests. She preferred activity-based NZSL learning opportunities, such as pottery making. The second volunteer, however, said that regular visits to the Deaf club were extremely important when learning NZSL. From these two interviews the researcher learned that there appeared to be at least two different orientations for learning NZSL in the Deaf community: activity-oriented learning and people-orientated learning.

Conducting two pilot interviews was of great benefit. Firstly, having the opportunity to become familiar with the researcher's goals, aims, and questions meant that the interpreter was able to fine-tune the questions in the interpretation process prior to entering the authentic interviews for the main study. Secondly, the pilot interviews gave the researcher the 'feel' for asking questions to elicit information without leading the participant. It was important to determine the boundaries relating to the number and types of questions asked and the degree to which the researcher could expand, especially at the probing level. For this, the pilot interviews were necessary

and supervisor feedback was invaluable. Finally, pilot interviews raised the researcher's confidence levels prior to conducting the authentic interviews.

#### **3.7.4 Interview setting**

There were many factors to consider when designing the interviews for the main study, including interviewing techniques, the first or preferred language of the participants, the interviewing procedures working between NZSL and English, and familiarity with the selected technology.

A further extremely important factor was the choice of venue and its suitability as the interview setting. Important considerations of a bilingual setting included the constraints of working between a visual-gestural language and a spoken language, and the need to facilitate face-to-face interaction between the researcher and the participants. The interpreter was also placed slightly behind the participant so as to be effective but as unobtrusive as possible. This promoted an uninterrupted line of sight between the interviewer and the interviewee. In addition, the interviewer was able to read the interpreter's signs and see the interviewee with her peripheral vision, which is an important politeness strategy of Deaf culture. To cut eye contact is generally regarded as rude, and wishing to signal the end of the conversation.

The placement of furniture was therefore very important for comfort and to facilitate fluent conversation (Figure 3.2 shows a "birds-eye" view of researcher, interpreter and participant). Likewise the audio-cassette recorder was placed to be unobtrusive, yet able to capture the voices of the participants and the interpreter clearly. Lighting was also carefully considered in terms of seeing faces clearly, reducing glare, and promoting visually restful backgrounds. For this reason, blinds were partially drawn to eliminate glare, good overhead lighting was used, and the participants were situated with the plain blinds as a background. The interviewer was also situated with a plain wall as a background. The participants had experienced similar scenarios working with an interpreter for face-to-face interviews, and within their practicum components of training. Similarly, the participants were also experienced with audiotape use, as tools for continuing professional development as interpreters.

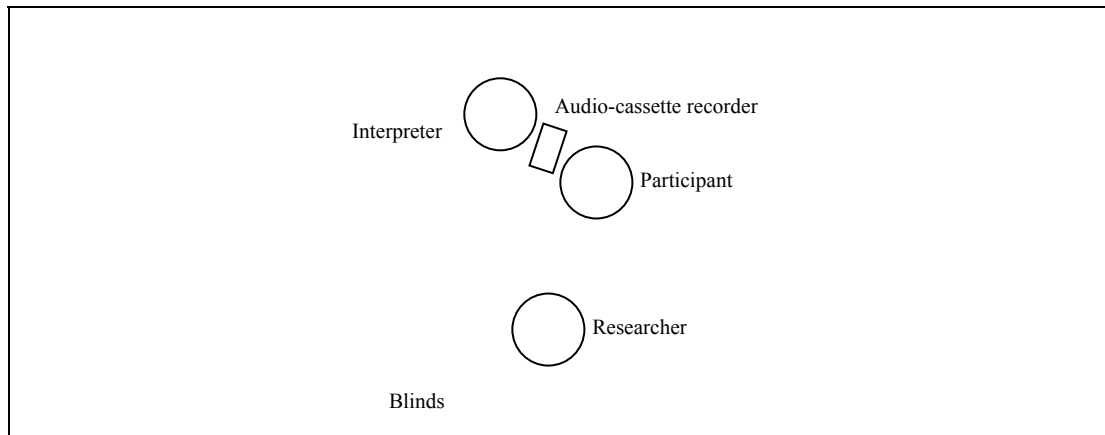


Figure 3.2: *Placements of researcher, interpreter and participants for audio recording purposes*

### 3.7.5 Interviewing techniques

Although the researcher was familiar with interview procedures as part of her teaching responsibilities, her role as a researcher required a new approach. The researcher extensively investigated reflective interviewing techniques (Richards, 2003), conducted pilot interviews and integrated feedback from the supervisors into her design before developing the final model.

Practice for the interpreter and researcher was required, to become familiar with the semi-structured interview schedule before conducting the authentic interviews. Written questions were translated into NZSL by the researcher, and then the interpreter interpreted NZSL into spoken English questions. In addition, additional probing questions were practised, and strategies devised for the interpreter to let the researcher know when the audio-cassette needed changing. The cuing of technology, being audio and not visual, was considered to be an additional responsibility of the interpreter. This meant that all audio cues were communicated to the researcher so that she remained in control of the audio-tape technology. Therefore it was important for the researcher and interpreter to have a good working relationship with a great deal of trust, to ensure the process went as smoothly as possible, and to ensure that the researcher's 'voice' was not diluted.

### **3.7.6 Main study interviews**

Prior to the interviews of the main study, the interview schedules were given to participants so they could reflect on the questions and gather their thoughts in their own time. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants and recorded on audio equipment. Each time an interview was completed, the master tape was copied and then stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. The copy was correctly labelled and sent to the professional transcriber.

### **3.7.7 Transcripts**

The tapes were then transcribed and the transcripts returned to the participants for amendment and verification (see Appendix F). Two of the transcripts indicated 'inaudible' comments notes, as a result of participants mumbling or speaking too quickly. However, most interviews were fully transcribed. All the participants commented that they appreciated the opportunity to verify their transcripts, and only a few made amendments.

## **3.8 Data analysis**

The researcher's choice of method allowed her to introspectively study the qualitative research data and search for emerging themes. The methods followed were similar to a previous study which investigated 'insider' viewpoints of Deaf NZSL users who were learning written English as an additional language (Thompson, 2004). Thompson's study also employed semi-structured interviews conducted in the participants' language of choice to elicit data, which was then examined for emerging themes.

As mentioned previously, the interviews were semi-structured, and related to four guiding questions designed to elicit ideas and opinions from the six participants. After each interview, the researcher hand-wrote her impressions and briefly recorded salient points. The data collected by audio-recording the individual interviews, were sent to a transcriber in order to provide a comprehensive typed record. On receipt of the transcripts, participants were asked to verify and amend them if necessary before any analysis was performed. When signed off by the participant as being accurate and

true, the researcher spent a great deal of time familiarising herself with each participant's transcript. The researcher created analytical memos to record overviews of each transcript, recording her impressions, and summarising individual responses under the four main questions (Neuman, 2000, p. 365). These were meant to record initial reflections only, and to be a quick cross-referencing system, rather than to document detailed data (for example, see Appendix G).

The transcript of each participant was examined independently and repeatedly. As propositions emerged, each concept was allocated a distinctive colour tab. Each transcript was examined from start to finish several times, with each reading resulting in more propositions (Mackey & Gass, 2005), identified by participant and page number. For example, one participant's comments, identified on page 6 of the transcript under the pseudonym of Jane, were recorded as (J6). The propositions were then sorted into emerging broad topics from which sub-categories later developed as more data was analysed. The data from all participants was processed in this way, and their data combined under the broad topics, complete with specific references for easy cross checking later. For example, Jane's comments on page 3, relating to her personal learning strategies, recorded as (LSJ3) could be checked with the transcript for verification and analytic memos for easy cross-referencing. The allocation of propositions to the emerging topics was sometimes problematic, with one reference relevant to two or more categories.

For example, Jane (LSJ3) discussed her preference for analysing video NZSL clips with a peer, as she felt safe dissecting the language 'remotely' with no fear of giving offence in a 'live' situation. This information falls into several categories. Firstly her preference for working with a classmate falls under the learning strategies category of people resources, secondly her learning preference for working with video samples falls under the learning strategies category of material resources. In addition, this information also falls into the barrier category in that she was somewhat reluctant to interact with Deaf people. In this situation, the data was recorded in all relevant categories.

Subsequently, the categories were prioritised taking into consideration the apparent importance indicated by the frequency of participant references. These prioritised categories were continually triangulated with the analytic memos and indexed transcripts for verification, reliability, and validity. The data under each category was then examined for sub-categories in a similar way, the themes analysed, summarised and recorded in the findings section of this thesis.

### **3.9 Research limitations**

A number of limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. Firstly, it was possible that given the researcher's status within the Deaf community, and her intimate involvement with establishing and teaching the NZSL interpreting course, that the students might have been reluctant to voice a critical perception, or to indicate problematic components of the programme.

Secondly, the researcher has been involved as a teacher and programme coordinator of the AUT University Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting, and was very familiar to the participants in a distinct role from that of researcher. Therefore, it was possible that the participants would be sensitive to the perceived power differential between lecturer and students, affecting or limiting their responses (Neuman, 2000). However, despite teaching these participants throughout year one, and semester one of year two of their studies, the researcher was not involved with them in a teaching capacity in their final semester. Furthermore, the participants were asked to volunteer after their final exams and exam moderation meeting, and were assured by the gatekeeper that participation or lack of participation would in no way reflect badly on them. It was interesting to note that all ten possible participants were enthusiastic about participating in this research, although four were unable to do so as they returned to their cities on completion of the programme. This would tend to suggest that discomfort was minimal.

Thirdly, data collection involved two languages, spoken English and NZSL, and two distinct modalities. Working with both NZSL and English demanded flexibility in data collection, and increased the possibility of semantic errors. For this reason,

amplification of concepts by re-framing questions and reflective listening, was important to ensure clarity between the researcher, the participant and the interpreter. However, the participants, being trained interpreters, were able to check the interpretation against their own understanding at the time of the interview, and through examining their transcripts at a later stage. However, it is interesting to note that the only amendments made to transcripts by the participants were additions where their voices were inaudible, and one participant opted to remove some data that would identify her, for confidentiality reasons. Therefore, it would seem that any ambiguities in the data, caused through the process of verification, were minimal.

Fourthly, the study was on a small-scale, involving only six participants. Consequently, due to the limited potential pool of interpreters qualifying in the selected period, there was a strong possibility that participants would be identified. However, the researcher attempted to minimise the risk of identification and mask the participants by grouping answers, and working with aliases for transcription purposes. Also participants were clearly advised verbally and in writing, prior to the interviews, that there was a strong possibility that their identities would be recognised. Although this risk was emphasised, all the participants were happy to continue, and one participant even said that she did not want to use an alias.

Finally, with such a small sample size, any findings cannot be said to be conclusive without duplicating studies, or being generally applicable to other populations. However, it is hoped that this study will provide a small piece of the jigsaw.

### **3.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter described the methodology selected for this study. A brief rationale of the methodology employed in the study was discussed and the research process described. Ethical considerations were then outlined. The participants and the context in which the study was conducted, and the role of the researcher, were then identified. Individual semi-structured interviews were described as the primary means of data collection. The special requirements of this unique bi-lingual, bi-cultural setting were discussed, with special attention to the effective, confident working relationship



between the researcher and interpreter. Other important factors were raised concerning the appropriateness of the physical interviewing environment, interview techniques and the significance of clarification and validation strategies to ensure data accuracy. The methods of data coding and analysis were then identified and described. Finally, this chapter identified the limitations of the study. The next chapter will examine the research findings.

## **Chapter four**

### **Findings**

#### **4.1 Chapter overview**

Chapter four presents the findings of the study. The findings are organised under four main themes: Deaf people as a social resource; hearing people as a social resource; material resources; and personal learner factors. These four themes offer an understanding of the factors, which facilitate and hinder the independent learning of NZSL, offer opportunities for NZSL learning outside the formal instruction of the classroom, and contribute to successful language learning strategies.

#### **4.2 Introduction**

All six participants reported developing learning strategies to access NZSL learning opportunities outside the formal instruction of the classroom. These strategies revolved around their use of social and material resources (Palfreyman, 2006), in terms of L1 (Deaf) and L2 (hearing) NZSL users, and visual media. The participants especially tailored their strategies to facilitate entry to, and interaction within, the Deaf social context, while accommodating personal preferences.

#### **4.3 Social resources (Deaf people)**

The practice of students learning NZSL directly from Deaf community members is strongly encouraged by the AUT lecturers, as participation in such ‘communities of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) can supplement formal learning. As previously mentioned, all six participants autonomously accessed NZSL learning opportunities through interacting with Deaf people within various contexts. These learning opportunities fell into two distinct categories. Participants interacted with:

1. Deaf people in social settings. These included
  - Deaf oriented settings
  - Deaf-hearing social settings
  - Hearing oriented settings

2. Deaf providers of NZSL learning support
  - AUT Deaf lecturers
  - Deaf NZSL tutors in private settings

According to all six participants, the most beneficial NZSL learning opportunities occurred within Deaf social settings. Deaf social settings are defined here generally as places where Deaf people routinely use NZSL as their preferred language. These settings can be divided into three categories: Deaf oriented settings, Deaf-hearing social settings and hearing oriented settings. These types of settings will be described below.

Deaf oriented settings are Deaf friendly environments that are predominantly ‘Deaf-determined’. In these environments, cultural, linguistic, political and social values are shared within a ‘Deaf world’. Deaf-oriented settings are popular culturally Deaf gathering places, which are frequented by a wide range of NZSL users. Examples include Deaf clubs, Deaf sporting venues, Deaf special event venues, and Deaf churches. These organisations welcome the voluntary services of individuals who support Deaf values.

The term ‘Deaf-hearing oriented settings’ is used here to describe places where both Deaf and hearing people interact comfortably with a more or less equal power differential. Venues include private or public establishments, where Deaf and hearing people issue and accept invitations, such as cafes, cinemas, party venues and private homes.

Hearing oriented settings are defined here as mainstream society settings where Deaf individuals or groups interact socially with hearing people in a ‘hearing-friendly’ world. Interaction opportunities may occur in these settings through chance encounters or naturally sharing common environments. Settings are exemplified by workplace environments, mainstream sporting venues and shopping centres.

### 4.3.1 Deaf people in Deaf-oriented settings

There are a range of Deaf-determined organisations within New Zealand, which cater for Deaf people and support Deaf cultural, social, political and linguistic values. These are generally non-profit organisations, with varying levels of hierarchies, and depend largely on the goodwill of volunteers to operate. Volunteers are predominantly Deaf people, but hearing people are also selectively welcomed. These organisations host special events, which also provide potential learning opportunities for NZSL learners. These events are exemplified by annual Deaf Sports events, and camps that are specifically for young Deaf people. Such opportunities are invaluable because of the potential for interaction with a variety of signers across regions and possibly nationally. Organisations specifically raised by the participants have been briefly outlined below.

#### *Auckland Deaf Society (ADS) the “Deaf Club”*

The most popular and largest Deaf oriented setting, discussed by all six participants, was the Auckland Deaf Society clubroom, known generally as the “Deaf Club”. The Deaf Club holds social gatherings at least once a week and provides a regular meeting place for local Deaf sports clubs, interest groups and individual members. It has close affiliations with other Deaf clubs within New Zealand and world-wide, and provides an ‘open’ welcome to local, regional and international Deaf visitors, in addition to NZSL learners. Significant learning opportunities are accessible in this setting due to the wide range of NZSL variation, including exposure to various dialects and social situational repertoires, and periodical exposure to foreign sign languages. One participant described the Deaf club as a “gateway” into the Deaf world in terms of information, language usage and a myriad of potential social NZSL networks for further language learning opportunities.

Going to Deaf Club on Friday nights was great ... it was kind of a gateway (K4).

#### *Wellington Deaf Society (WDS)*

WDS provides a similar setting to ADS, in the Wellington region. All six participants visited WDS whilst celebrating the official passing of the NZSL Act in parliament.

### *Deaf church*

Several Deaf church congregations exist in the Auckland region, either independently or associated with other (hearing) congregations. One participant became involved with a large core group of supportive Deaf parishioners within a hearing church. Deaf oriented church services were conducted once a month by Deaf people and interpreted from NZSL into English. Three times a month, hearing oriented services were conducted in English and interpreted into NZSL. This setting also provided access to several interest groups, which were conducted in NZSL and occurred at least three times per week. Activities included weekly NZSL translation team meetings, ladies groups and study groups. This participant stated that she was able to access unique, unequalled learning opportunities in this environment.

It would have been great if there were more [equally valuable] opportunities outside the church setting (B5).

### *The Deaf Association of New Zealand (DANZ)*

The Deaf Association of New Zealand (DANZ) is a ‘Deaf-determined’ organisation that provides a political ‘voice’ for Deaf people throughout New Zealand. DANZ has several regional branches which co-ordinate services for Deaf people, including community support and interpreting services, which are utilised by a broad cross-section of Deaf people. Important functions of DANZ include working with other national Deaf-determined organisations and providing accessible information networks. DANZ promotes NZSL and Deaf awareness, and employs a mixture of Deaf and hearing staff, who are either paid or working as volunteers. Three participants volunteered to work with DANZ.

#### **4.3.1.1 Learner strategies relating to Deaf people in Deaf-oriented settings**

All six participants accessed learning opportunities within Deaf oriented settings and developed three main types of learning strategies. Firstly, these participants frequented established Deaf environments, such as the Deaf club. Secondly, they developed social relationships with Deaf people, and thirdly, they broadened their social networks within the Deaf community.

### *Frequenting established Deaf scenes*

All six participants highlighted the importance of regularly socialising with Deaf people in established Deaf oriented settings. They reported that becoming familiar with both Deaf people and Deaf environments through repeated encounters, promoted NZSL acquisition, learner confidence, comfort and a sense of belonging. Through regular attendance, learners also became ‘familiar faces’ and began to recognise more and more Deaf people.

...as the environment became more familiar, it became easier to go there by myself (Z6).

Four participants regularly attended various publicised Deaf social gatherings. Four participants also frequented the Deaf club and reported feeling comfortable and gaining confidence as this environment became more familiar. They appreciated entry into a Deaf ‘habitat’ where they could see a range of Deaf people interacting freely, and were honoured by their friendly inclusiveness. One also routinely visited Deaf Club as a default venue when not attending other significant Deaf events. Another participant attended Deaf related activities at her church at least three times a week. She reported developing a sense of feeling ‘at home’ as she became familiar with the Deaf parishioners and the setting. However, she commented that this comfort did not extend to other Deaf environments.

Familiarity with Deaf people was also promoted through other strategies. Three participants developed strategies to mingle with Deaf people within the proximity of familiar people, such as classmates, Deaf teachers and Deaf tutors. When meeting well-known NZSL users for the first time, one participant felt a level of familiarity with them as she had previously observed video samples of their signing.

Deaf Club was just fantastic ...because the Deaf people there are generally well known (K3).

### *Developing social relationships*

Five participants began social relationships with Deaf people as a result of the warm welcomes they received into Deaf environments, four through connections made at the Deaf club, and one through socialising regularly in a church group.

As mentioned previously, four participants deeply appreciated the welcoming environment of the Deaf Club and commented that Deaf club members were instrumental in fostering participants' motivation to become qualified interpreters. They reported benefiting from the supportiveness, encouragement and approachability of the members, in addition to being privy to cultural information.

Deaf Club is really ... a regular place to go and feel increasingly comfortable. ... [We] met so many people [at the Deaf club]. Everyone was very keen to welcome us. As a result, we got to know a great deal about what was going on in the Deaf community (K4).

As I began to feel confident using more signs, it became easier to randomly start talking to someone...we would also be approached by Deaf people, and more would join in ... (Z7).

I actually found a few times that I'd end up going [to the Deaf club] and sitting in one place the whole night, and yet I'd still talk to a whole lot of people (Z7).

This willingness of Deaf club members to include NZSL learners and share information promoted the growth of social relationships and the beginnings of social networking within the Deaf community. One participant particularly wished to develop closer friendships with Deaf people in order to “understand, know and feel comfortable in the company of Deaf people”. On reflection, the same participant said, “I would take every opportunity I could...”

As I got to know more people, I found that there were lots of [familiar] people who I wanted to talk to, but ran out of time (Z7).

The fifth participant was welcomed into a church environment. Through regular involvement she developed lasting social relationships with Deaf churchgoers. She reported accepting numerous social invitations to a variety of church-related NZSL activities.

### *Developing social networks*

Five participants extended their social relationships with Deaf people into social networks. They continually developed and reinforced their social networks within Deaf oriented settings, utilising new and existing Deaf contacts. Involvement in social networks extended their personal comfort zones and exposed them to a wide range of NZSL usage including sign variation, jargon and popular genres. A further advantage of social networking was access to cultural information, which enabled learners to determine significant Deaf happenings & future potential NZSL learning opportunities.

The participants volunteered for positions with Deaf organisations to help develop their NZSL and knowledge of Deaf culture. The concept of volunteering aligns with the Deaf value of reciprocity, where an individual contributes to and benefits from the collective. As a result of volunteering, and working alongside key Deaf people, they established and evolved social identities, which led to positive positioning, and expansion and reinforcement of social networks within the Deaf Community. These social networks led to further potential learning opportunities.

I've volunteered with the Deaf Association [in various capacities] to meet more people. Hopefully they were getting to know who I was, while I was learning NZSL and learning information (Z3, Z4).

#### **4.3.1.2 Communicative strategies within the Deaf social context**

All six participants sought exposure to a variety of L1 signers, language variation, topics and vocabulary in order to develop receptive and expressive NZSL competency.

These learners also reported the benefits of supporting formal education with practical experience to develop communicative and pragmatic competency. They developed culturally appropriate strategies to introduce themselves socially, interrupt, clarify and seek feedback politely with Deaf individuals and groups.



### *Learner confidence*

All six of the participants reported facing learning challenges as a result of experiencing low confidence levels and feelings of discomfort in the social context.

Being in a completely Deaf environment was a new experience for me that really challenged my confidence (Z7).

Three participants reported experiencing confidence challenges when introducing themselves and joining groups of Deaf people. Two shy participants found it difficult to communicate with people generally, and were particularly out of their comfort zones when contributing to conversations with Deaf people.

[It was] a little bit harder [to introduce myself] at Deaf Club because I didn't know people... [I'm] a bit shy ( J6).

I suppose it's like going to a party... sometimes everyone else is in groups and it's hard just to break into conversations.... to start with I didn't feel like I had the skills (Z6).

The third attributed her confidence challenges, when meeting Deaf people, to her concerns about personal NZSL competency levels.

I had this fear of turning up [at Deaf club] and no one wanting to talk to me, because my signing wasn't good enough ...I suppose because sign language isn't my first language, I haven't always felt that confident [using it]... there were things that I would have been keen to do but I didn't feel that I was ready for it (Z6).

Three learners developed strategies to build confidence. Firstly they decided to attend Deaf events regardless of hesitancy. They realised that confidence would improve as they got to know more people and so they decided to meet Deaf people regularly. Secondly, the learners realised that their confidence would improve with their NZSL competency. Competency improved through interaction with Deaf people, which reinforced the need to mix in the Deaf community. As the learners' exposure to Deaf people increased, so did their confidence.

### *Asking questions/ clarifying*

Four participants reported challenges relating to asking questions, and clarifying linguistic aspects with individual Deaf people. Three reported feeling worried that their questions would appear foolish. Consequently, they took fewer 'risks' and contributed less to conversations.

That was probably my biggest difficulty, actually getting out and going to the events in the first place, meeting people and asking questions....I've been shy for so long that it was just really difficult to overcome. It probably held me back a lot in my first couple of years, because I just did not want to do anything [risky]. (K8, 9)

These participants developed strategies to facilitate clarification. They realised that they needed to ask questions in order to improve, and decided to do so despite their apprehensions.

I thought I would ask really stupid questions... but actually being able to bite the bullet, go to the events and ask questions, even if I felt stupid, didn't matter. It is better that you know than wonder for the rest of your life... (K8)

The same three participants also reported the challenges associated with clarification of group conversations.

Sometimes I felt rude interrupting group conversations to ask for clarification if I was unsure what was being said. I didn't want people to get sick of me (J3).

They developed strategies that balanced their desire to understand with the desire to be culturally appropriate and polite. The participants learned through trial and error how to politely interrupt and clarify meanings. Some initially practised clarification in one-to-one conversations.

Conversations would flow a lot faster amongst a group of Deaf people. In 'one on one' conversations, I found that it was a lot easier to ask questions (R5).

However, in group conversations, three participants reduced the number of clarification requests to preserve the conversational flow. As a result they interacted less, observed more, and gave affirmative 'listening' feedback.

I found that in a group situation [involving] a lot of Deaf people, I would be less likely to ask questions... [I'd] just stand back a little bit more, and watch (J5).

The fourth participant developed a different strategy to facilitate clarification. She identified herself as “just a learner” in Deaf company. She reported repeatedly seeking explanations from “considerate” Deaf conversationalists, to the point of slight embarrassment.

Sometimes I asked Deaf people to repeat themselves, or to slow down, up to ten times. For me it was a natural part of the learning process. I just said that I was learning (A3).

As a result of successfully clarifying meanings, these participants significantly reduced communicative misunderstandings and increased NZSL comprehension.

#### *Participating in group conversations*

All six participants experienced difficulties comprehending group situations. The larger the number of conversationalists, the more difficult comprehension became.

Five participants reported experiencing challenges relating to the speed of information transfer in group situations. Rapid turn-taking and cross-talk required rapid ‘eye tracking’. Inevitably they reported missing some information as a result.

Conversations would flow a lot faster amongst a group of Deaf people (R5).

Three participants reported developing different coping strategies. One focussed on the gist of the conversations, in an attempt to stay abreast of the subjects and content discussed. Two realised that information was naturally paraphrased and repeated by various Deaf people as active ‘listeners’, and so were able to piece together most of the information.

...in a group of Deaf people signing fast to each other ...if you miss one [person’s signing] you can look at another’s (A5).

One participant reported that group conversations could also be very lengthy. She saw this as a positive aspect, as it meant the longer streams of signing allowed her longer learning opportunities.

### *Code-switching*

Two participants sought out challenging communication opportunities within Deaf social settings, where they reported that Deaf people moved up and down the language continuum, code-switching from NZSL to contact English. They felt that Deaf people would at times 'dumb down' their signing to a level they assumed was appropriate for hearing learners. Sometimes the code-switching resulted from the learners repeatedly seeking clarification, in which case the Deaf people would simplify and slow down their signing to accommodate. One participant observed older signers signing amongst one-another and code-switching when talking with her, by not using their hands and using strong mouth patterning and vocalisation. Conversely, they also reported the challenges associated with understanding fluent NZSL users who signed at a fast pace.

Both participants reported that comprehension of NZSL as a result of code-switching was at times extremely challenging, and yet they both appreciated the exposure to these diverse types of language use. They were both determined to comprehend and participate in these conversations, and reported persevering and benefiting as a result. They balanced the need to understand with the need to keep conversations flowing. The participant, who was communicating with older Deaf people, resorted to lip-reading.

...it was amazing to see the variety of Deaf people who didn't use sign language at all, completely oral Deaf, and then at the other end of the scale, people who were fluent NZSL users...I would watch older Deaf people use a little bit of sign when they were signing with other Deaf people. But when they were talking to me, they completely dropped their hands. They just spoke [verbally] to me, which was interesting and challenging... I really had to concentrate on lip reading, and trying to pick up verbal clues ... Another group of people used crazy fast NZSL and there was me trying to keep up! (B5).

### *Practical NZSL extension*

Four participants had particularly high personal expectations and aimed to match their NZSL competency to their first language competency in terms of fluency, vocabulary, grammar and syntax. They were also extremely aware of English language interference during the early stages of producing NZSL.

Initially my signing syntax was fairly dominated by English...I've had to work hard to change these habits to become more fluent in NZSL (K7).

Four participants developed communicative strategies within the Deaf social context. Firstly, they purposely socialised with a variety of Deaf people on a regular basis. One was very dedicated, using every face-to-face interaction opportunity with Deaf people to reset NZSL language learning goals, which she would achieve through practising and practising at home. She exemplified the attitude “Just do it!”

...just through practice... just through being involved I realised what worked for me and what didn't, and I guess I'm a people person really ... It's better to meet face to face (B6).

Secondly, the four participants perpetually self-monitored, and compared their performance with that of peers and Deaf people. Thirdly, they utilised the feedback received while conversing with Deaf people and integrated the corrections received into their productive output.

Although all six participants reported that interaction within the Deaf social context was the best way to learn NZSL, four specifically used these opportunities to analyse and improve their NZSL performance in the social context.

### **4.3.2 Deaf people in Deaf-hearing oriented settings**

As raised previously, the findings reported a number of settings in which NZSL was used. Deaf-hearing settings include venues where Deaf and hearing people interact on equal terms and communicate in NZSL. Invitations for informal social encounters may be initiated by either Deaf or hearing participants, or by AUT University.

### *On-campus at AUT University*

As mentioned previously, AUT conducts formal NZSL interpreting education within the Visual Languages Section (VLS). However, there are additional possible NZSL learning opportunities outside structured hours for autonomous students. The programme curriculum includes lectures in NZSL provided by invited Deaf speakers.

Deaf people who visited us during this course were so valuable for observing, giving feedback, helping you analyse what you've understood and for indicating if what you've said in a situation is right or wrong (R10).

Deaf students also enrol in certain Deaf-related papers. In addition, the VLS encourages Deaf students who are enrolled in other University papers to socialise freely in this 'Deaf-friendly' environment. The AUT VLS provides visitors, Deaf students and hearing students, entry to affiliated settings, such as the 'home' classroom, student lounges and other facilities outside of timetabled classes. As a result, learners have the potential to interact socially with a number of NZSL users within the AUT environment. This initial interaction is often continued outside AUT.

### *Off-campus social encounters*

One shy participant reported feeling safe in a neutral environment in the company of student peers and Deaf people. She accepted invitations from Deaf people, to meet up socially in cafes with her classmates. She reflected that this was particularly useful in boosting her personal confidence and comfort levels, as well as boosting language competency and Deaf-related information.

[Initially] I had quite low confidence so having that safe environment, amongst my classmates, was very important. As a result, I met a lot of Deaf people, became friends, went out with them and learnt bits and pieces as we went along ... As I went on I got more confidence, got out there, did things and met more people... I wanted to have people come to *me*; that sounds really awful but in my safe environment I had people that I knew, as well as new people I was meeting (K3).

She became increasingly autonomous, interacting with familiar Deaf people, making new Deaf friends and developing further informal social networks over time.

### *Off-campus organised activities*

A regular annual timetabled activity for NZSL interpreting students is a compulsory AUT total immersion NZSL Deaf camp, which extends from a Friday to a Sunday. These camps are conducted offsite and provide valuable learning opportunities. Approximately one third of attendees are invited Deaf people and Deaf lecturers, the remaining two thirds being hearing students and lecturers.

Familiarisation with Deaf ‘faces’ at AUT increased confidence and comfort levels, eased initial introductions and promoted learner autonomy by providing a social platform from which to access, and interact in, future encounters. In addition, this social networking resulted in students accessing cultural information.

I found it easier to introduce myself to Deaf people [at AUT] (J6).

One shy participant deliberately worked on this aspect by scaffolding from ‘known to the unknown’ people and environments to develop her personal confidence and comfort levels. The same learner reported attending the compulsory NZSL total immersion camp, and particularly enjoyed the opportunity to interact more deeply with Deaf people for extended periods of time.

Lengthy events [such as NZSL total immersion camp were good because you had more time to spend with Deaf people, and engage with them on a deeper level (K3).

The AUT programme included compulsory attendance at key Deaf events, and compulsory personal journal entries relating to students’ observations of language and cultural issues. Three participants reported deliberately extending their participation with related Deaf people in order to gain extra benefits in terms of NZSL acquisition and making the most of limited discretionary learning time.

I maximised my first year [compulsory] reflective observations by seeking out a variety of Deaf people (R5).

There were advantages for the participants entering the Deaf social context, and to some extent the Deaf-hearing social context, but there were also barriers, many of which were overcome through the learner strategies described above. These participants reported low levels of confidence and comfort when meeting unfamiliar Deaf people in unfamiliar Deaf oriented settings. They also experienced initial difficulties in developing social networks and social identities in the Deaf world. Other barriers included limited time, finances and the responsibilities associated with personal commitments.

### **4.3.3 Deaf people in hearing-oriented settings**

Hearing-oriented settings are defined here as mainstream (spoken language) environments, such as the work-place or sporting venues, where Deaf people occasionally interact with hearing people, either by design or by chance. Hearing oriented settings provided valuable learning and social networking opportunities. Three participants' strategies included making the most of repeated encounters and shared interests, building familiarity, and maximising naturally occurring opportunities to interact socially.

All three participants encountered Deaf people within their working environments: one as work colleagues and two as customers within the retail industry.

I met some Deaf people at work, and I believe that it was a blessing...I mingled with the Deaf, especially at lunch time, and it was absolutely priceless. They helped me a lot in terms of language development, cultural aspects and general understanding (R4).

Work relationships extended into continuing friendships for two participants.

I did not work the second year but by this time I had cultivated quite a few friends [from my workplace] and I could meet them at Deaf club or other settings (R5).

I've met others [Deaf people] through working at a supermarket, and some of them have become quite good friends of mine who I meet in different settings... I've tried to use these opportunities (Z3).



One of these two participants also met a Deaf client as a fellow competitor within a sporting environment, which extended the friendship still further.

Opportunities gave rise to other opportunities. I have an interest in sports and have met Deaf people through badminton (Z3).

Two participants sought out friendships purely for pleasurable purposes. However, all three participants became ‘familiar faces’ within the Deaf community and benefited from enhanced personal comfort levels and increased NZSL learning opportunities.

#### **4.3.4 Deaf providers of NZSL learning support**

In addition to participation in communities of practice, as noted above, several participants raised the importance of additional learning support provided by AUT Deaf lecturers outside of timetabled hours and NZSL private language tutors. Reported benefits included enhancement of NZSL capabilities, cultural information and positive affective factors.

##### *AUT Deaf lecturers*

All six participants approached AUT Deaf lecturers beyond the formal timetabled learning hours. Three participants reported regularly accessing Deaf lecturers within the AUT setting. They sought input regarding linguistic matters, including clarification and performance feedback. One, who could not obtain immediate teacher feedback due to family commitments, developed the strategies of ‘stockpiling’ questions arising from the previous week and requesting periodical analysis of her personal expressive NZSL.

I would plan ahead when asking for teacher feedback by writing a list of questions or signs that I wished to query. I sometimes asked them to observe particular [NZSL] points and provide feedback at a later date (R8).

In addition, two participants approached lecturers for discussion on various Deaf cultural aspects and advice on upcoming events. One participant reported that Deaf lecturers were also willing to interact socially, which resulted in gaining further cultural and linguistic insights.

Two participants reported being particularly motivated by their Deaf lecturer's ongoing positive guidance and assurances within the AUT setting.

...I just needed that assurance from the Deaf teacher that "It's okay. Don't worry, you are doing fine!" and that could get me back on track... having that support from the teacher really helped and it made the difference (R8).

Socially, three participants reported significant gains in personal confidence and comfort levels when interacting with Deaf people within the proximity of lecturers.

#### *Deaf NZSL tutors in private settings*

Deaf NZSL tutors are available to individuals wishing to improve NZSL competency in private settings. They are paid as professionals for their time. Working with Deaf NZSL tutors enables learners to access authentic NZSL models and therefore provides valuable learning opportunities.

Three participants worked with private Deaf NZSL tutors for additional structured learning, mainly in terms of NZSL development. These participants worked with tutors for set periods of time to target personal NZSL linguistic issues, to examine personal NZSL output, to provide feedback and advice, and to assist with targeting specific learning outcomes.

[Private tutors] help with extra learning and focus...(Z5).

Sometimes it's important to have extra time in a structured learning environment [with a private NZSL tutor] for language learning, guidance and confidence (Z9).

These three participants also reported benefiting in terms of increased confidence and comfort levels through working with tutors, not only in the private one-to-one situation, but also when socialising with Deaf people in the vicinity of their tutors. Specifically, the participants reported on tutor encouragement and guidance, which boosted motivation.

I felt more confident when I had private NZSL tutoring... an extra person to guide you as well as a language model (Z 8,9).

The sixth participant worked with Deaf people in a specific setting throughout the duration of the programme. These Deaf people unofficially performed the role of private tutors.

However, despite the clear advantages of working with private tutors, significant constraints included tutor availability, the costs involved, the prioritising of personal and heavy study commitment, limited discretionary time and personal motivation.

#### **4.4 Social resources (hearing people)**

In addition to Deaf people and the Deaf community providing learning resources to NZSL learners, all six participants also noted the contributions of hearing people. NZSL learning opportunities were strengthened through connections with bilingual NZSL / English hearing people, especially peers, and professional NZSL interpreters in social settings. In addition, personal support people also featured, particularly in regard to learner motivation.

##### **4.4.1 NZSL / English hearing peers**

Five of the six participants effectively socialised, studied and practised conversing in NZSL with hearing peers, either individually or in groups. Peer groups provided interaction with individuals who shared similar learning experiences. Importantly, peers provided each other with support, encouragement and solidarity throughout the learning process. Most of this interaction occurred within the AUT environment. However, there was also significant mutual peer support within Deaf-related social contexts.

##### *On-campus at AUT University*

All six participants reported benefiting from regularly interacting with one another in NZSL, within the AUT University context during non-timetabled hours. This occurred especially within the first year. They reported that benefits included the opportunity to observe others, the development of personal NZSL fluency and the opportunities to trial NZSL skills. These participants also practised processing

*concepts* in NZSL through using the language to discuss aspects of NZSL, Deaf issues, happenings, plans to go out socially or merely ‘chatting’ in NZSL.

Four participants also worked together in pairs or study groups to achieve common language learning objectives, such as monitoring one another, providing feedback and comparing competencies. In addition, they collaborated on assignments.

Some participants worked with study partners or groups to analyse video samples and to discuss linguistic, semantic and cultural aspects of the Deaf community. Two participants reported particularly benefiting from pair work relating to NZSL video samples.

All six participants reflected that working with peers boosted confidence, comfort and safety, and motivation levels. They discovered that different signing styles and fluency levels provided interesting challenges, and that the opportunity to communicate and discuss concepts in NZSL fostered motivation.

Despite the advantages of peers practising NZSL together, some barriers were also experienced. Peer error correction was not always immediate or completely accurate during signed social ‘chats’. Additional constraints related to the increased study pressures during year two, which allowed for less informal NZSL interaction with peers.

#### *Off-campus*

At times, all six participants decided to attend Deaf social environments with peers, and commented that mutual social support increased personal levels of confidence and comfort.

Three participants particularly motivated one another to attend unfamiliar Deaf social environments, either meeting there or travelling together. At events, they stayed within close proximity of one another to ensure ‘safe’ familiar conversational partners, mutual support and encouragement.

It is motivating to attend events if you know someone else is going with you (Z7).

The participants reported becoming more autonomous as they became known to Deaf people through regular interaction.

#### **4.4.2 NZSL / English interpreters**

The participants observed professional NZSL interpreters working in social settings, as a programme requirement. Two participants created opportunities to informally discuss a range of topics with qualified interpreters regarding linguistic and cultural issues. Discussions included personal insights, problem solving techniques, cross-cultural experiences, NZSL grammar and lexicon, and ways to express certain concepts in NZSL. These participants reported gaining significant benefits from these discussions.

Interpreters helped us a lot to learn strategies as well as signs for certain things and concepts... meeting other people who had been through the course was really helpful (K4).

#### **4.4.3 Interpreter mediated learning within a single setting**

Another participant reported deriving significant learning benefits from prolonged informal 'mentoring' and scaffolding from professional interpreters within a church setting. The interpreters promoted this participant to initially undertake interpreter training, whilst supporting her NZSL language learning and practical experience. Interpreter support also boosted her levels of motivation and confidence. In terms of field related support, the interpreters provided mediated learning support such as guidance, advice and scaffolded NZSL learning opportunities, feedback and interpreting coaching.

This participant observed interpreters interpreting church services from English to NZSL three Sundays out of four, and from NZSL to English on the remaining Sunday. As a result she saw many associated genres and began to understand the complexities of the setting-related interpreting role.

With strong interpreter encouragement, this participant accepted invitations to firstly observe and, later, during the second year of her formal studies, work with the church song translation team. This team comprised interpreters and bilingual Deaf people who conducted regular translation workshops. They met at least twice a week to negotiate the meanings of religious songs and translate them with an eye to vocabulary, meaning, clarity of propositions and signs, and rhythm.

I started to get involved with the translation team, and then began to interpret small segments of songs. I was very nervous at the start of it but the interpreters were really encouraging (B3).

The interpreters scaffolded this participant into the interpreting role, exposing her to increasingly complex assignments and a range of genres, as her skills evolved. As previously mentioned, this included supporting her increasing involvement as an active translation team member. Towards the end of her studies, the participant was supported to modify songs herself, seek feedback from the team, perform rehearsals and finally present the end product at church services. She did, however, emphasise that her contribution was translated earlier, rehearsed and then presented, and was not therefore NZSL ‘interpreting’.

We’d translate [songs] into sign language and I’d go home and I’d practise and I’d practise and I’d practise until I felt that I was confident. Then I’d get up on Sunday and I’d be able to sign it while the people were singing it. So it wasn’t really interpreting at that time.

This participant also accepted invitations from the interpreters to incrementally interpret notices and small segments of the services. Initial examples included “Welcome to church everybody. It’s good to see you here”. As her formal and informal training (with the church interpreters) progressed, her confidence strengthened. She attributed this to increasing familiarity with setting-specific vocabulary and meanings, in conjunction with careful scaffolding.

Throughout this process, the participant’s social identity underwent significant change, as she evolved from being an observing NZSL learner, to an active translation team member and contributor, to an apprentice interpreter. By the time her formal AUT studies were completed, this participant was confident and ready to step into a

professional interpreting role, which she accredited to the interpreter mentoring and the strong support of the Deaf people within her church.

#### **4.5 Material resources**

In addition to social resources, which related both to opportunities for language use with Deaf people within and outside the Deaf community, and the support provided by hearing peers, material resources were also identified by participants as being crucial for language learning. The most important of these are videos, firstly, those made for NZSL instruction and extension work by AUT, and secondly, those made by the participants of their own NZSL production. To a lesser degree, participants also made use of the Internet, films and library facilities.

##### **4.5.1 Videos for NZSL instruction and extension work**

All six participants reported accessing the AUT library and the self-directed video lab in order to view NZSL video resources to increase comprehension and to increase exposure to NZSL variation. In the home setting, however, only three participants reported utilising these resources regularly, even though this setting would provide considerably more flexibility in terms of access and study time.

Five out of six participants reported the benefits of accessing videos. These benefits included watching a wide range of authentic NZSL language samples in a comfortable, safe environment, at a preferred pace, rewinding and watching again at will in order to re-examine the data. These factors boosted NZSL competency levels and learner confidence. The five participants reported utilising video resources more extensively when unable to socialise with Deaf people due to time constraints, particularly during year two. One participant reported regularly accessing NZSL video material during class breaks.

Whenever I had spare time in between classes or self-study time, I would go to the library and ... see videos, when I couldn't meet a Deaf person face to face (R3).

I tried to make effective use of my time using course video resources (Z4).

These participants reported analysing these videos both individually and in collaboration with peers. One participant particularly appreciated learning in a ‘safe’ environment where she could discuss linguistic aspects with peers without fear of offending signers.

It was helpful to watch videos of people signing, discuss aspects [privately] with peers and analyse NZSL, without feeling rude or intrusive (J3).

[Video resources were] really useful because I could watch them in my own time and ponder over things. If I missed information I could go back and try to figure out the meaning (K6).

Another participant enjoyed analysing ‘creative’ sign language genres such as storytelling and humour, which are perennially popular within the Deaf Community. She stated that as these genres included well-known subject matter and because the stories and jokes were often enriched and embellished with repeated telling, it was possible to compare many different versions. She appreciated and noted the different styles, details, additions, perspectives and creativeness of different signers using the same basic material.

... Deaf people have many different ways of explaining Deaf stories and jokes ...each person has their own ‘take’, and adds little bits of information. I learnt quite a bit about how to change things around ... to make [one’s own expressive] language creative and exciting (K5).

However, the sixth participant indicated a strong preference for regular authentic interaction with Deaf people, rather than relying on video materials. She reported finding video materials de-motivating, and consequently only viewed the videoed NZSL samples once. In contrast, five participants reported frequently watching, re-watching and analysing recorded NZSL samples for different purposes including comprehension, shadowing, linguistic analysis and acquiring cultural information. One participant learned by “seeing and doing” and found that her comprehension significantly improved through shadowing signers and answering written questions. Two participants in particular learned a great deal of peripheral information about Deaf people and their culture through examination of these resources.



Despite the advantages reported, video resources were also problematic for five participants, who felt that AUT held insufficient NZSL language samples for autonomous learning.

Although we have seen video samples of a variety of signers, I would like to see more recent clips and a greater quantity in general (A6).

They raised a need for improved recording quality, increased quantity, and a broader range of videoed signers and genres. One participant felt there were insufficient English language transcripts for personal clarification of NZSL videos. Two participants were frustrated by the lack of immediate teacher clarification. Three participants also reported watching many videos ‘early’ during self-directed learning in the first year of the programme, which meant that they “switched-off” when using the same resources the next year due to over-familiarity.

Because we’d seen the majority of videos in the first year, the videos we used during the second year for interpreting practice were too familiar (A5).

#### **4.5.2 Self-made videos**

Five out of six participants emphasised the importance of autonomously accessing video recording technology at the AUT self-directed video lab, in order to visually document and analyse personal expressive NZSL samples. However, only four participants reported regularly utilising this lab to increase expressive NZSL competency.

Five participants developed strategies to utilise video recording technology in order to cyclically record and analyse their personal NZSL. They recorded, analysed and monitored personal progress against their peers, incorporating one another’s feedback. As a result, they targeted and achieved personal linguistic improvements. One participant, who analysed authentic NZSL storytelling and joke genres, targeted personal linguistic improvements by formulating and recording her own versions, which she compared and contrasted with the originals.

However, despite the learning opportunities and advantages these video resources and technology offer, there are also a number of associated limitations and constraints. Due to the nature of self-directed learning, one participant experienced difficulty operating the AUT video lab equipment and tended to rely on peers for assistance. Access to video recording technology was difficult for two participants. They experienced difficulties accessing the self-directed video lab within the allocated timetabled hours. As a result they bought personal video recording equipment. Accessing technology was especially problematic for one family-oriented participant. In order to overcome time pressures and to maximise learning opportunities, she studied and utilised the available resources at AUT during breaks. Purchasing video recording technology enabled her to meet assignment deadlines, target linguistic improvements and establish a very early, regular, quiet, uninterrupted study time.

#### **4.5.3 Internet, films and libraries**

Three participants proactively identified and accessed additional learning opportunities by utilising AUT and public libraries, relevant films and the Internet to access foreign sign language materials. These materials were predominantly foreign sign language samples, to enhance understanding of sign language and Deaf culture. These participants devised a range of associated strategies. Two participants compared visual samples of foreign sign languages with NZSL in terms of vocabulary, phrases, grammar, stories, poetry, jokes and translations, which resulted in an enhanced understanding of the various linguistic aspects of sign languages. The third enjoyed analysing films with Deaf themes to enhance personal understanding of cultural norms.

The same three participants also accessed written material resources through books, dictionaries and articles for additional information relating to sign language, Deaf people and culture. Learning strategies reported by these participants included proactively reading, comparing and continually seeking out information relating to second language learning strategies, linguistics, sign language linguistics, Deaf culture, the development of various sign languages and pertinent research articles. All

three reported being limited by insufficient availability of additional supportive materials.

Despite the advantages of using material resources, all six participants reported that the use of video samples had limitations. They believed that it was essential to learn NZSL directly from Deaf people within the Deaf cultural context.

#### **4.6 Learner factors**

In addition to the importance of resources in facilitating independent NZSL learning, a number of important learner factors emerged from the data. Each of the six participants drew on personal factors that influenced their choice of strategies and contributed to successful NZSL learning outside the classroom context. These factors included prior language and culture learning, attitudes, beliefs and values, motivation, preferences for interacting with Deaf people, choice of learning materials and use of learning time.

##### **4.6.1 Foreign (spoken) language learning and associated cultures**

Three participants had previously learned two or more foreign (spoken) languages through formal education and being immersed in the cultures. All three were interested in, and had some insights into, the rules and cultural norms associated with other languages.

I like learning about various cultural factors, which enable me to go somewhere else and speak in someone else's language... It's very interesting (A1).

They were particularly interested in NZSL as the window to the Deaf world and a new set of experiences.

##### **4.6.2 Prior exposure to sign language learning**

Five participants had formally learned NZSL in community or tertiary education classes prior to entering the AUT programme. One learned a foreign sign language whilst living overseas. All six had also informally learned some sign language

through socialising with Deaf people. One, in particular, had spent considerable time socialising within an overseas Deaf community.

#### **4.6.3 Linguistic attitudes to NZSL**

All six participants viewed NZSL positively as a distinctive, complex language, and used positive descriptive adjectives such as ‘amazing’, ‘intriguing’, ‘curious’, ‘interesting’, ‘unique’ and ‘beautiful’. Two participants, who had encountered sign language at an early age, were raised in family environments that demonstrated particularly positive attitudes towards sign language.

Four of these reported a personal understanding, at the beginning of the programme, that NZSL was a complete visual spatial language, unique in modality, language structure and thought processes. Although another reported her preconception that NZSL was a manually coded form of English, she reported revising this assumption early in the programme, as she began to appreciate the uniqueness and complexities of NZSL. Two participants were excited at the challenges of learning to communicate in a different modality.

[NZSL] was a language where I could communicate using a different modality...it's a completely different [visual] language unlike anything I have ever learned before (K1).

#### **4.6.4 Attitudes, beliefs and values towards the Deaf community**

All six participants perceived the Deaf community as a cultural and linguistic minority group. Four believed in promoting mutual benefits, aligning with the Deaf value of reciprocity. These participants wished to contribute their time to the Deaf community in exchange for NZSL learning opportunities, firstly as volunteers and later as professional interpreters. Two of these explicitly stated that rather than ‘helping’ Deaf people, which they saw as condescending, they wanted to support Deaf values through becoming professional interpreters. One of these, and one other, strongly believed in the equality and empowerment of Deaf people, asserting that Deaf people had the right to access societal information in their own language. They

felt a personal responsibility to become the best interpreters they could, in order to contribute to the community.

It is not about me... There is a greater cause out there...The responsibility is on me because I think who else is going to do it? There are only a few (B7,8).

#### **4.6.5 Learner motivation**

The six participants were motivated to learn NZSL by various factors, including interaction with Deaf people, an increasing appreciation of Deaf culture, and a linguistic interest in the language. Following Norton and Toohey's (2001) concept of investment, four of the six participants were particularly 'invested' in learning NZSL informally, as they spent considerable time and effort in the Deaf social context. These four all contributed their time to the Deaf community whilst receiving NZSL language learning 'returns'. In terms of successfully completing the programme, the prospects of gaining NZSL interpreting qualifications and working as professional interpreters were also powerful motivators. However, much of the impetus to continue learning NZSL stemmed from the learning support provided by others, and in particular, the support and encouragement of Deaf people and the Deaf community.

##### *Interaction within the Deaf sociocultural context*

All six participants were motivated by interacting with Deaf people in the social context. They reported enjoying communicating in authentic situations, which gave purpose to learning NZSL, and supported their formal learning. They developed strategies to meet a variety of Deaf people to gain exposure to a range of NZSL communicative styles. As Rubin (1975) points out, good language learners actively practise communicating in the target language community. Three participants developed strategies to explore common interests with Deaf people, such as sports and interest group activities. This encouraged them to participate more deeply in conversations. Norton and Toohey (2001) emphasise that good learners effectively draw on their own world knowledge and cultural knowledge to share and contribute as conversational partners.

### *Appreciation of Deaf culture*

Although two participants were already familiar with Deaf culture, four became increasingly aware and appreciative of Deaf culture, as a result of mixing socially.

The more you got involved, the more 'hooked' you got on Deaf people (B7).

They reported that insights into Deaf culture were unlocked through interaction and using NZSL, and that NZSL and Deaf culture were inseparable. The participants developed strategies to become more entrenched in the culture and to develop social relationships with Deaf people in order to learn more NZSL.

### *Linguistic interest in NZSL*

As previously mentioned, three participants were experienced language learners. These three described themselves as life-long learners, with a passion for language learning. They were motivated to learn NZSL by a linguistic fascination with the language.

Although I like languages in general, right from the start I've been really interested in sign language... [Learning NZSL] was purely a linguistic motivation ...It's always intrigued me ... NZSL is a very unique language. That's my motivation (A1).

All three were interested in the new learning challenges associated with the complexities of NZSL as a visual-spatial language. They developed strategies relating to the analysis of NZSL, how it was constructed, how it worked and how it was used. They especially enjoyed comparing and contrasting various NZSL genres, individually and with others. Naiman et al. (1978) assert that good language learners "exploit" languages systemically and have a good awareness of language learning processes. These participants reported being stimulated by observing, analysing and trialling NZSL, both in the social context and from recorded NZSL samples. All three developed strategies to continually self-monitor and analyse their own developing NZSL competencies, using L1 NZSL users as language models.

### *NZSL interpreting qualification and vocational interests*

All six participants were motivated to achieve the NZSL interpreting qualification, despite differing reasons for entering the programme. Initially, some had entered the programme in order to gain an interpreting qualification, while others perceived the programme as a way of becoming fluent in the language. However, during the second year of study, all six became motivated to work as professional interpreters.

Initially, I didn't consider that the logical conclusion of the programme would be to work as an interpreter. I really loved the language. ... Later though, as I progressed through the programme I realised that I eventually wanted to become an interpreter (K1).

The participants' reasons for becoming interpreters were varied. Some were motivated by the thought of working with a variety of people and settings with flexible hours, some saw interpreting as a way to empower a minority group, while others appreciated the potential for life-long learning and the opportunity to continue learning the language.

Career-wise, I looked at interpreting as [an] interesting, unique career path, that provided a great deal of variation, and which was potentially fulfilling and satisfying. Interest and keeping my career goal in mind kept me focussed ... I viewed interpreting as life-long learning in a job that involved meeting a variety of people (Z2).

Many developed strategies to establish short-term, achievable learning goals to meet programme learning outcome requirements. These participants derived motivation from reaching these interim milestones, and resetting incremental goals. All six participants were significantly motivated to develop the high levels of NZSL competency needed to achieve the interpreting qualification.

### *Learning support within the Deaf social context*

All six participants reported that the primary motivation to continue learning NZSL stemmed from the support and encouragement of L1 Deaf people, and to a lesser degree, L2 hearing people.

All felt welcomed into general Deaf environments, such as the Deaf club, where social interaction with Deaf people allowed for conversational language practice.

Three participants also derived significant motivation from NZSL Deaf tutors, through receiving regular one-to-one NZSL practice and personal linguistic feedback.

Within a social Deaf interest group, one participant was motivated to achieve a high NZSL competency level by Deaf and hearing group members. Firstly, she was motivated by regular discussions with Deaf translation team members who operated as informal NZSL language tutors. She described them modelling NZSL and shaping her expressive output. Secondly, she was also motivated by professional interpreters who informally scaffolded her NZSL learning.

Classroom peers also motivated four participants, through providing mutual social support. Firstly, these participants were motivated by practising NZSL with their peers in 'safe' environments. Secondly, they would regularly commit to attend Deaf events together, either travelling as a group or meeting at the venues. This provided the impetus to go, and an element of conversational 'safety'.

#### **4.6.6 NZSL learning time management**

In common with most L2 learners, these participants experienced the regular pressures of balancing study, family, work or personal commitments, with language learning requirements. Five of the six participants reported limitations regarding informal NZSL language learning time and three of these devised specific time management strategies.

Firstly, they sought NZSL learning opportunities that would simultaneously satisfy more than one objective. This was exemplified by one participant who formed relationships with Deaf people at compulsory course-related Deaf events, sought out these contacts at other Deaf venues and simultaneously assimilated as much cultural information as possible. She also volunteered in key Deaf organisations, not only for language learning purposes, but also to enter specific Deaf networks. Another participant pursued contact with Deaf people who shared a belief system. Time that was already committed to this interest was invested in a specific Deaf setting, which offered multiple language learning opportunities and access to Deaf social networks.



Another shy participant, while attending a compulsory Deaf silent camp, used the opportunity to develop social relationships and communicate in depth with unfamiliar Deaf people.

Secondly, they used their time wisely by evaluating and prioritising events that appeared to offer the best potential NZSL learning benefits. Variables, which affected prioritisation, were the degree of cultural and linguistic immersion, the size of the event, the setting, the attendees, language variation, genres and the potential for social networking.

I prioritised special Deaf cultural events, such as the storytelling competition or the Deaf-blind conference. I tried to make effective use of my time (Z4).

I made the maximum use of course-related [NZSL learning] time by attending different events in different settings, which helped me to meet a variety of Deaf people (R5).

Three participants reported difficulties finding time for informal language development, especially during the intensive second year of study when the programme focus shifted from NZSL language acquisition to the interpreting process. Study priorities altered to meet course requirements and assessments. The three participants reported feeling stressed because of the reduced discretionary time for interaction within Deaf social contexts and learning time with NZSL private tutors.

Honestly I didn't do much [NZSL practice in the second year]. I found the program quite stressful ...we had very little time for live practice (A5).

It was difficult undertaking such an intensive two-year course...we seemed to have been cramming so much into it. The second year required so much more than language competency, it focused on the very different interpreting skills required (R5, 6).

Four participants also expressed concern over significantly reduced social interaction time within the Deaf community as a result of working hours. For this reason, during the second year of study, one participant resigned from her employment to 'create' additional NZSL learning time. The others attempted to maximise their learning time by negotiating flexible working hours or arranging time off well in advance.

In order to compensate for decreased interaction, three participants increased the use of material resources, such as recorded sign language samples held in the AUT Visual Languages Section.

However, restricted timetable access to supportive technology at AUT was also problematic. Two participants resolved this issue by purchasing personal equipment for home use, enabling them to accommodate other commitments and study whenever possible. For example, one of these participants had significant family commitments and established a language learning time from one o'clock to three o'clock every morning.

#### **4.6.7 Preferred learner pathways into the Deaf social context**

The six participants reported that they chose learning pathways into the Deaf community depending on the degree of social intimacy they felt comfortable with. Three participants, recognising themselves as visual learners, felt comfortable using sign language to communicate with Deaf people and liked attending Deaf events with activity-based NZSL learning.

Two shy participants preferred to socialise in safe comfortable environments with familiar people. They took time to cross from familiar comfort zones to unfamiliar territory which will, in all probability, be less comfortable. In contrast, two other participants were naturally sociable, early risk-takers, enjoyed communicating with a variety of people and were willing to make language mistakes.

It depends upon what kind of person the learner is, if the learner can make himself/herself get out there and interact with people, then that's good. ...the only way to really gain confidence is to take [up] the challenge (B10).

Three analytically minded participants particularly enjoyed the linguistic components of learning NZSL and created language learning opportunities. For example, all three studied the dynamics of the Deaf community, selected potentially useful Deaf events, contacted key people and offered their services as volunteers. As a result they simultaneously experienced NZSL variation, absorbed cultural information, developed identities within the Deaf world and explored networking opportunities.

#### **4.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter has outlined the NZSL language learning opportunities and learner strategies described by six NZSL interpreting learners. Particular emphasis has been given to independent learning within the Deaf social context.

All six participants reported that the majority of their informal NZSL learning occurred within the Deaf sociocultural context. Interaction with Deaf people exposed the learners to authentic language usage and the cultural norms of the Deaf community. The learners entered the Deaf world in different ways. Some followed the most comfortable or 'safe' routes, while others followed potentially 'risky' but language-rich learning opportunities in Deaf-oriented settings. Learner motivation and confidence increased with the frequency and depth of interaction, time spent with Deaf people, including NZSL 'mentors'. Of key importance for all six participants were the social relationships and networks developed with L1 users, which facilitated access to an array of NZSL learning opportunities.

Peers provided significant social support in terms of solidarity, NZSL practice, and motivation to meet and interact with Deaf people. One participant, who was committed to a particular social network, was intensively mentored by NZSL interpreters as an 'apprentice' throughout the duration of the two year programme.

Material language learning resources, such as NZSL video samples and equipment were also useful, when interaction with Deaf people was not possible.

Chapter five will discuss the significance of these findings and present conclusions. Limitations of this study will also be identified, and recommendations for both the AUT NZSL interpreting programme and future research will be outlined.

## **Chapter five**

### **Discussion and conclusion**

#### **5.1 Chapter overview**

The previous chapter reported various autonomous NZSL learner strategies and the NZSL learning opportunities arising outside of the classroom context. This chapter discusses the significance of the findings and raises several implications for independent NZSL learning. Some recommendations relating to the design of NZSL interpreting programme will be made. Finally, the chapter identifies the limitations of the study and proposes areas for future research.

#### **5.2 Discussion**

Five key learning strategies, utilised by NZSL learners outside the classroom context, emerged from the findings:

- Analysing personal language learning needs and taking action to meet these needs.
- Supplementing formal NZSL learning with interaction within the Deaf community.
- Establishing social networks.
- Developing confidence.
- Developing and sustaining motivation.

All six participants reported that the greatest NZSL learning took place within the Deaf sociocultural context. Learner involvement in the Deaf community, particularly within Deaf social networks, resulted in significantly improved linguistic, pragmatic and sociocultural competency. Learner interaction with Deaf people also helped learners to develop supportive language learning strategies, including how to boost personal confidence and motivation levels in unfamiliar territory.

##### **5.2.1 Analysing language learning needs and taking action**

Two thirds of the participants evidenced two strong characteristics throughout the entire language learning process; the ability to analyse their language learning needs,

and the ability to take effective action. They identified and analysed personal language learning needs, sought or created NZSL learning opportunities arising in the Deaf social context, devised personalised NZSL learning strategies, followed through with targeted action, evaluated the productiveness of their approach, and modified their learning strategies as necessary. This interpretation concurs with both Norton and Toohey (2001) and Palfreyman (2003), who claim that good L2 learners identify and utilise the language learning resources offered within target language communities. The analytical learners evidenced a similar cycle for utilising material language learning resources. However, when working with material resources, 'action' involved using visual media, rather than interacting within the Deaf social context.

### **5.2.2 Supplementing learning within the Deaf sociocultural context**

According to Ellis (1994), good language learners actively seek authentic communication opportunities in the target language. For this reason, they need to develop social strategies to promote communicative competence and cultural understanding in order to engage in discourse with authentic L1 users. NZSL and Deaf culture are intertwined and can only be fully comprehended through experiencing the Deaf world. While formal learning provides a useful starting point for language learning, on its own it is insufficient. Autonomous learners interact with L1 users regularly and utilise the NZSL learning opportunities offered in real-life situations. In doing so, they internalise an understanding of authentic NZSL usage, pragmatic behaviours and Deaf culture. Through interaction, learners also become exposed to ever-widening language learning opportunities.

There are two reasons why learners need exposure to sign language learning opportunities in the Deaf community. Firstly, NZSL is a visual spatial language, which is transmitted 'face-to-face'. This visual-spatial aspect means that it is important for learners to develop strategies to maximise real-life practice opportunities to develop receptive and expressive NZSL. Similarly, learners are likely to benefit from developing pragmatic competency with individuals and groups through interaction with a variety of L1 users in a range of situations. In doing so,

they are likely to learn how to enter conversations appropriately, interrupt, clarify, take turns, apologise, take leave and give listening feedback. Rubin (1975) highlights the importance of spoken language L2 learners using communicative and social interaction strategies amongst L1 users. This would seem to be particularly true for sign language L2 learners. As NZSL has more variation than NZ English (Napier, McKee & Goswell, 2006), it is important for learners to examine sociolinguistic variation and extend personal NZSL repertoires considerably through meeting a variety of Deaf people in different settings.

Secondly, it is important for learners to analyse the structure and dynamics of the Deaf community, including social networks and Deaf-oriented organisations, as well as gaining access to cultural information. As Napier, McKee and Goswell (2006) suggest, it is important for learners to interact with Deaf people regularly and on an on-going basis, to receive and understand this ‘first hand’, highly contextualised information. Access to highly contextualised information also leads to more extensive language learning opportunities.

Good NZSL learners therefore create and tailor individual strategies to incorporate linguistic and cultural learning within the Deaf sociocultural context, and commit to significant interpersonal communication with Deaf people.

### **5.2.3 Establishing social networks**

As raised earlier, the most effective way for L2 learners to develop NZSL competency is through interaction in the Deaf social context. The degree to which learners can access the Deaf sociocultural context is largely determined by the extent and depth of their social networks. These either facilitate or restrict access to L2 learning opportunities, which include ‘insider’ information and resource sharing. Continued involvement in Deaf social networks is especially important for sign language learners who wish to become professional interpreters with a firm grasp of the range and depth of NZSL.

The NZSL learners in this study achieved access to social networks by creating and expanding connections into social relationships. Five of the six participants achieved

basic entry to networks through attending popular ‘open’ Deaf venues such as the Deaf Club. The sixth participant, while occasionally visiting the Deaf Club, became committed to a Deaf social network when first entering the programme. Through regular attendance at Deaf venues, these learners became socially visible, or ‘familiar faces’ and developed “Deaf” social identities. As Norton and Toohey (2002, p. 123) have argued, the identities of L2 learners are ‘socially constructed’. The learners extended their social networks by accepting and offering invitations, progressing from known contacts and settings into unknown territories. Some analysed how Deaf social networking operated at private and organisational levels and became selectively involved. Others, such as the sixth participant, understood the Deaf value of reciprocity and offered to share personal resources. All six participants entered either Deaf broad/shallow social networks or narrow/deep social networks, which exposed them to NZSL learning opportunities.

The term ‘broad/ shallow social networks’ is used here to describe people who are interconnected in a general way across a range of settings. Tajfel (1974) describes these networks as groups of ‘weakly tied’ people. Romaine (1984) uses the term ‘looser networks’ to describe broad/ shallow social networks. Tajfel points out that people within broad/shallow networks may be less likely to share resources, and yet they might have access to a wider range of resources, due to membership in a range of different social networks. Romaine identifies considerable language variation amongst ‘looser’ networks, which has positive implications for learners who wish to develop broad L2 repertoires.

Drawing on Tajfel (1974), the findings of this New Zealand based study indicate that NZSL learners can benefit from entering ‘broad/ shallow’ social networks in many ways:

- They gain exposure to a wide range of Deaf people with the potential to facilitate entry points to multiple social networks.
- They gain exposure to language variation across contexts and locations, and therefore a variety of potential language learning opportunities.

- They gain access to wider Deaf community information (social, political and organisations) and resources.
- They become socially ‘visible’, and establish a generally recognised identity, within the Deaf world.

The term ‘narrow / deep social networks’ is used here to describe social connections that are characterised by strongly bound personal relationships. These networks are less diverse but are more in-depth than broader networks. Tajfel (1974) sees these relationships as a type of ‘kinship’ with complex ties. Tajfel adds that these networks tend to be intimate, supportive, durable, based on frequent contact and include a relatively high degree of mutual resource and information sharing, albeit within a narrower context.

Again drawing on Tajfel’s (1974) analysis, the findings of this study, relating to NZSL interpreting students, indicate that learners can benefit from entering ‘broad/shallow’ social networks in many ways:

- They gain exposure to smaller groups of Deaf people with the potential for deep and /or durable friendships, with likely shared interests and values. These opportunities involve privileged access to local social groups and private settings, and are often invitation-based.
- They gain exposure to group and sub-group language variation and setting specific terminology, with the potential for in-depth language learning opportunities.
- They gain access to privileged information and group resources with possible expectation of reciprocal returns, increased learner participation and responsibility.
- They gain potential access to social support and mediated learning support.
- They have the potential to become a recognised member of a particular group, which influences their identity and social positioning within the Deaf world.

These NZSL learners accessed social networks in different ways and at different rates. Learners who develop and maintain strong social networks are likely to gain



privileged access to the sociocultural aspects and linguistic richness of the Deaf community, and thereby strengthen their sign language competencies.

#### **5.2.4 Developing learner confidence**

According to Price (1991), learner confidence is an important contributing factor to L2 learning success. Oxford (1990) also raises the importance of (spoken language) L2 learners developing confidence-building strategies within the L2 sociocultural context. All six NZSL learners in this study experienced a lack of confidence at times in Deaf-oriented settings. This affected their choice of language learning pathways and was especially problematic at the beginning of the language learning curve. However, two thirds of the participants developed and implemented four main strategies to boost personal confidence levels when interacting with Deaf people in the Deaf sociocultural context. These strategies included entering the Deaf social context early, interacting regularly and over a long period of time, taking language learning risks and finally, seeking mediated language learning and scaffolding opportunities.

Regardless of their personalities and preferences, all of the participants stressed the importance of entering the Deaf social context as early as possible to make the most of informal language learning. This attitude is characterised by a comment made by one of the participants in the study:

Bite the bullet! A lot of people who come on this course are quite nervous when they start, but they need to get over it and just do it (K9).

Regular long-term interaction within the Deaf community, and developing familiarity with both L1 users and Deaf-oriented settings, promoted increased learner confidence levels. Developing familiarity was especially important for more reticent learners. One strategy was to become a 'familiar face' through regular attendance at Deaf-oriented venues, and to begin building social networks with Deaf people. Another strategy was to view NZSL user video clips, prior to meeting Deaf people in person. This promoted a 'one-way' sense of familiarity, allowing learners to contextualise the signer and to be exposed to their signing styles.

Taking language learning risks and extending comfort zones also boosted learner confidence. Most of the learners felt more comfortable initially when interacting with Deaf people in the vicinity of peers or NZSL tutors. Interacting with Deaf people in 'safe' environments promoted a sense of success, and encouraged learners to move into less familiar territories, seeking new people and new environments. The good NZSL learners deliberately sought out a variety of unfamiliar Deaf people and language usage. Once again, these learners emphasised the importance of taking risks as early as possible in the language learning process.

Finally, several learners sought access to mediated language learning and scaffolding opportunities. This included requesting assistance from paid private tutors, unpaid Deaf people and interpreting mentors, to improve NZSL competency, which also contributed to significantly boosted confidence levels.

### **5.2.5 Developing and sustaining motivation**

As Ellis (1994) states, L2 learner motivation is a major contributing factor to successful language learning in that it determines the effort expended by the learners. These six NZSL learners realised that language learning motivation was important for the following reasons:

- To maintain their interest in NZSL and Deaf culture.
- To foster ongoing interest in Deaf people (L1 users).
- To promote NZSL competency levels through increased learner participation in the Deaf community.

The NZSL learners in this study nurtured their personal language learning motivation by developing and implementing four main strategies. These strategies included socialising with Deaf people, seeking mediated language learning opportunities, seeking peer support and finally, creatively comparing and analysing material resources.

As previously indicated, L2 learners can boost personal motivation levels by enjoying linguistic and cultural immersion in the target language community. Many of the

NZSL learners in this study derived motivation from entering the Deaf social context, and practising NZSL with Deaf people as much as possible. They used social encouragement from Deaf people to develop social networks through becoming ‘familiar faces’, and accepting and issuing social invitations. They also exchanged social information and sought out data about Deaf events and happenings. Several learners offered to contribute their time and resources to the community, such as volunteering in Deaf organisations. They learned about communication, culture and language in real ‘live’ communities of practice, which fed their motivation to continue learning.

Vygotsky (1978) states that mediated learning revolves around social relationships in which the more capable individual scaffolds language learning and boosts learner motivation levels to achieve higher language competency. Many of the NZSL learners sought mediated learning opportunities from fluent NZSL L1 (such as NZSL tutors) and L2 users (such as qualified interpreters). One sought mediated learning within a single setting, where she received an enormous amount of ongoing input from Deaf translation team members and interpreters. In general, increasing NZSL competency also motivated the learners to trial their skills in the Deaf social context. In addition, the expectations of informal ‘teachers’ motivated learners to continue expending high levels of language learning effort.

All six learners utilised peers to boost personal motivation levels. They shared experiences, provided mutual solidarity, and encouraged one another to attend events and mix with Deaf people within proximity of one another. Most of the participants also derived motivation from practising NZSL and discussing aspects of NZSL together.

Many of the NZSL learners supported personal motivation levels through analysing linguistic aspects of videoed NZSL samples, and on occasion, samples of foreign sign languages. These learners enjoyed comparing and contrasting genres, and identifying creative signs. One in particular enjoyed trialling creative signs, gleaned from viewing material resources, when interacting with Deaf people.

Overall, it appears that ‘good NZSL learners’ are primarily motivated to continue expending language learning effort as a result of developing positive social relationships with Deaf people, more experienced L2 users and peers.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

This study was designed to elicit insider perspectives from NZSL interpreting learners about learning NZSL outside of the classroom context. Particular emphasis has been given to learner strategies and NZSL learning opportunities, especially within the social context of the Deaf community. The study was guided by four research questions:

- What factors contribute to independent language learning of NZSL?
- What factors hinder independent language learning of NZSL?
- What opportunities do NZSL learners have for learning NZSL outside class?
- What learning strategies outside of the classroom benefit NZSL learners?

Seven main conclusions emerged from the findings. In order to be successful L2 NZSL learners, NZSL interpreting students need to:

#### ***1. Analyse learning needs and implement strategies***

It is important for NZSL interpreting learners to identify their language learning needs, analyse which language learning opportunities meet these needs, develop appropriate learning strategies, take action to access these opportunities and finally, assess the success of their approach at regular intervals.

#### ***2. Create opportunities for learning NZSL in the Deaf sociocultural context***

It is extremely important for NZSL interpreting learners to supplement formal education with time spent in the Deaf social context. Firstly, learners can benefit by learning NZSL directly from L1 users. Through exposure to a range of Deaf people in Deaf-oriented settings, learners also encounter sociolinguistic variation and are well placed to access additional situated NZSL learning opportunities. Secondly, all language is culturally embedded, and therefore is best experienced in context. As learners learn and use NZSL within the Deaf cultural context, they develop pragmatic

competency, assimilate cultural information and are able to develop relationships with L1 users. Regardless of learner personalities and confidence levels, ‘good’ NZSL learners enter the Deaf sociocultural context early, interact with Deaf people frequently over an extended period of time, and develop and extend social networks within the Deaf community.

### **3. *Develop social networks***

NZSL interpreting learners benefit from establishing and extending social networks in the Deaf community through gaining access to language learning opportunities, cultural information and Deaf community resources. In addition, strong social networks provide social and language support.

### **4. *Engage in mediated language learning***

NZSL learners benefit from seeking mediated language learning opportunities with NZSL tutors, other L1 users and L2 interpreters (L2 users). Learners may request tuition from private (paid) NZSL tutors. Learners may also ‘apprentice’ themselves to Deaf interest groups, and mutually exchange resources. An example of this occurred in a Deaf church setting, where one learner was offered significant mediated learning opportunities by bilingual Deaf people and trained interpreters. This learner was offered membership in a variety of activities, including a translation team which regularly analysed, discussed and interpreted concepts. She benefited from the team modelling NZSL, allowing her to publicly trial translations, monitoring her performance and providing her with detailed feedback. She accessed this mediated learning opportunity through showing a strong commitment and by regularly participating in group activities over a long period of time.

### **5. *Develop confidence***

Learner confidence, when interacting with L1 users, is important for developing NZSL competency, as good NZSL learners supplement formal learning with NZSL acquired in the Deaf sociocultural context. Learners can deliberately cultivate confidence by using five main strategies:

- Enter the Deaf world as early as possible.
- Socialise frequently with Deaf people.

- Develop and extend social networks within the Deaf community.
- Seek mediated learning.
- Take language learning risks.

#### **6. *Develop and sustain motivation***

It is important for NZSL learners to develop and sustain language learning motivation, in particular by developing positive social relationships with Deaf people and experienced L2 users.

#### **7. *Make use of NZSL material resources***

As mentioned above, NZSL learning time within the Deaf sociocultural context is extremely important. However, learners also benefit from observing and analysing signing styles, language variation, genres and cultural information captured and recorded as visual material resources.

### **5.4 Implications of the study**

To date, there has been insufficient research on adult L2 sign language learning outside the classroom context. This study has attempted to address this gap in the literature and to stimulate further studies of the acquisition of sign language as a second language.

This study was also motivated by a concern that a reduction in learner / lecturer contact hours within the AUT NZSL interpreting programme would compromise graduate NZSL competency. A steady decrease in formal NZSL teaching hours necessitates a compensatory increase in autonomous NZSL learning hours, predominantly in the context of the Deaf community. This research, which presents the ‘inside’ perspectives of autonomous NZSL interpreting learners, is relevant to NZSL learners in terms of highlighting informal NZSL language learning opportunities and learner strategies. In addition, it is hoped that this research will inform teachers and associated stakeholders in the NZSL interpreting programme, and raise the potential for curriculum enrichment. In a global sense, the conclusions of this study may also be of use to autonomous L2 sign language learners and stakeholders in sign language interpreting education around the world.

## 5.5 Recommendations for curriculum

With regard to the NZSL interpreting programme, the study makes two main recommendations related to the curriculum development and resourcing of the programme.

The first main recommendation is that the curriculum of AUT's Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting programme is enriched by incorporating more information about autonomous NZSL learning strategies and opportunities for learning outside the classroom context, with a particular emphasis on the use of material resources and social resources.

### *Material resources*

It is recommended that the curriculum includes information designed to facilitate the use of material resources for autonomous NZSL learning, including:

- How best to access and utilise available material resources and create new materials.
- How to develop the analytical skills to:
  - Compare and contrast NZSL with foreign sign languages.
  - Compare and contrast the New Zealand Deaf community with others.

It is also recommended that curricular material is supplemented to enhance autonomous NZSL learning by expanding the existing corpus of NZSL video resources, supplementing the corpus on a regular, ongoing basis and facilitating learner access to material resources and up-to-date visual technology.

### *Social resources*

It is recommended that the curriculum includes information designed to facilitate autonomous NZSL learning within the Deaf social context, including:

- How to identify personal learning needs and how to develop personalised learning pathways.

- How to develop metacognitive, motivation-building and confidence-building strategies in addition to strategies facilitating learner interaction within the Deaf social context.
- How best to access and utilise the available social resources, and how to create NZSL learning opportunities within the Deaf social context.
- How to identify and investigate the social dynamics of the New Zealand Deaf community to facilitate access to potential language learning opportunities.

The second main recommendation is that the compulsory fieldwork component of the curriculum be extended from one semester to two semesters. Mandatory fieldwork involves NZSL interpreting learners becoming involved in a number of Deaf settings and recording their insights. Arguably, as this study has suggested, learners cannot develop interpreter levels of NZSL competency without significant interaction within the Deaf social context. Early entry into the Deaf social context and regular interaction over a prolonged period of time will improve L2 competency.

## **5.6 Limitations of the study**

This study clearly has limitations, which makes it difficult to generalise the findings to other contexts in which sign languages are learned by L2 interpreting learners.

Firstly, only six participants were interviewed, which means the sample group was small. In addition, the participants were all female and of a similar age. The findings of the study may have been different if a number of males were among the participants, or if the participants were in a different age bracket. In addition, the insights were elicited from a single intake of NZSL interpreting learners, which means that the findings relate to a brief ‘snapshot’ of time.

Secondly, the participants in this study mainly interacted with Auckland-based members of the New Zealand Deaf community. Auckland boasts the largest population of Deaf people in the country, and as such has a significant amount of available resources and therefore potential NZSL learning opportunities. NZSL



learners in contact with different regional Deaf groups are likely to discover that NZSL learning opportunities vary from region to region, in tandem with resources.

Finally, the researcher, as an informed ‘outsider’, was seeking to reflect the perspectives of the hearing ‘insiders’. However, as an ‘inside’ member of the Deaf community, it is possible that the researcher’s own views were inadvertently represented in the findings. In addition, the researcher previously taught the participants on the NZSL interpreting programme. This may have resulted in the learners perceiving a power differential between themselves and the researcher, impacting to some degree on the data reported.

### **5.7 Recommendations for future research**

The findings of this study highlight the need for further research in the area of informal sign language learning for interpreting students.

As with many other cultural-linguistic groups, language usage changes over time, as do the available informal language learning opportunities. Further research, at set intervals, investigating the informal language learning practices of learners passing through the NZSL interpreting programme, would provide an insight into the changing availability of language learning opportunities in the Deaf community. The resulting information would be of benefit to future learners in shaping their learning needs, in terms of available resources offered within the Deaf community.

Secondly, the perspectives of L2 sign language learners could be investigated further through the use of quantitative surveys. The surveys, based on the findings from this study situated in the New Zealand context, could specifically investigate autonomous sign language learning strategies and informal learning opportunities utilised in other sign language interpreting programmes. The resulting quantitative data could then be supplemented qualitatively through the use of semi-structured interviews and/or online journals.

Thirdly, mediated learning strategies appeared to be important for many of the NZSL learners in this study. Further qualitative research, such as ethnographic designs investigating mediated learning practices from the perspectives of different stakeholders, including the learners, Deaf people, academic centres and interpreters, is strongly recommended. Such research would be of immense benefit to L2 sign language learners, and to language learning providers involved with sign language interpreter training and curriculum development.

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## Appendix A: Participant information sheet

# Participation Information Sheet



**Date Information Sheet Produced: 30 October 2006**

**Title of Research Study:** The acquisition of New Zealand Sign Language as a second language for students of an interpreting programme: The learners' perspective.

### **Invitation**

My name is Lynette Pivac and I am a student at the AUT University, currently completing an MA in Applied Language Studies in the School of Languages. As part of my studies, I am undertaking a research project into the learning experiences of NZSL students. As you are a student of the Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting programme at the AUT University, I would like to warmly invite you to take part in this project. It must be stressed that your participation in the research project is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

### **What is the purpose of this research?**

I would like to investigate how learners best learn NZSL and what strategies they consider maximise their language learning outside the classroom environment. The findings will enable teachers in the NZSL interpreting programme to understand the factors involved in independent language learning from the learner's perspective. This information will help teachers to develop appropriate learning tools to meet their learners' needs in the future and guide NZSL learners in independent learner strategies.

### **How was I chosen for this invitation?**

As a full-time member of the Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting, you have been asked to participate in this research project.

### **What will happen in this research?**

I would like to talk to you about your experiences as a NZSL student. I am particularly interested in the strategies that you use outside the classroom to enhance your command of NZSL. The interview will be conducted with a NZSL interpreter so you will be able to respond to my questions in English. The interview will take no longer than an hour and will take place either at AUT University or the office of the Deaf Association whichever you prefer. You are very welcome to bring a support person to the interview with you should you wish to do so. The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed. The transcription will then be returned to you to read. You will be able to make any changes to the transcript that you like.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

As I was your lecturer for eighteen months, you might feel a little embarrassed discussing your learning strategies with me. You are also aware that I moderate your final exam papers and might be concerned about this.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

I am very interested in how students learn NZ Sign Language and I am looking for patterns in their learning experience to help other students. The interview will take place after moderation has been completed so whatever you say can have no effect on your final mark. I will not know which students have volunteered for the interview until moderation has been finalised.

**What are the benefits?**

I hope this research will help provide guidelines and advice for future students. In addition, lecturers may be able to utilise the research findings to improve the programme.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

This is the only programme of its kind in New Zealand and there are only ten full-time students in the current final year cohort. Therefore it is quite possible that you could be identified. However, I will be looking for trends and patterns that emerge from the interviews and will not be focusing on individual responses. Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The only cost is your time and transport.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You have two days to consider this invitation.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you wish to participate in this project, please hand the completed consent form to Shizue Sameshima, the programme co-ordinator of the Visual Languages Section at AUT University.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

A report of this research will be provided to all participants if desired.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns about the nature of this research should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Kevin Roach, Email [kevin.roach@aut.ac.nz](mailto:kevin.roach@aut.ac.nz) Ph. 921-9999 ext 6050. Concerns regarding the conduct of the researcher should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz) 921 9999 ext 8044.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

**Researcher Contact Details:** Lynette Pivac, Email: [lynette.pivac@aut.ac.nz](mailto:lynette.pivac@aut.ac.nz) Text 021 259 2697

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:** Kevin Roach, Email: [kevin.roach@aut.ac.nz](mailto:kevin.roach@aut.ac.nz) Ph. 921 9999 ext 6050

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 14 December, 2006 on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number 06/210.*

## Appendix B: Consent form

# Consent Form



**Project Title:** The acquisition of New Zealand Sign Language as a second language for students of an interpreting programme: The learners' perspective.

**Project Supervisor:** Kevin Roach

**Researcher:** Lynette Pivac

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research study (attached information sheet dated 30 October 2006).
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this research anytime prior to completion of data collection without being disadvantaged in any way. If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- The information for the interview is to be confidential. My name will not be mentioned in the report. However, I understand that it might be possible for a third party to identify me from this research, although all efforts will be made to mask my identity.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_  
(please tick one)

**Participant's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's contact details (if appropriate)**

\_\_\_\_\_

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 14 December, 2006 on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number 06/210.*

*Note: The participant should retain a copy of this form.*

## **Appendix C: Interview schedule**

# **Interview schedule**

### **Personal motivation for learning NZSL**

- Please describe what first motivated you to learn NZSL?
- What external factors motivated you to learn NZSL?
- What are your personal motivations for learning NZSL?

### **Opportunities for learning and using NZSL outside of the classroom**

- How did you seek to improve your NZSL outside of the classroom?
- Please explain what strategies worked, and what strategies did not work, for you when learning NZSL outside of the classroom?

### **Any barriers to learning NZSL outside of the classroom**

- What were some of the difficulties you encountered when learning NZSL outside of the classroom?
- How did you overcome these difficulties?

### **Personal experiences / background influencing your learning of NZSL**

- What personal experiences or background have helped you to learn NZSL?
- What personal experiences or background have hindered your NZSL learning?

### **Any suggestions/ advice to future NZSL learners**

- Reflecting on your experience, what suggestions or advice can you give to future students regarding how to improve their NZSL outside of the classroom?

### **Any other comments**

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

# Confidentiality Agreement



*For an interpreter.*

**Project Title:** The Acquisition of New Zealand Sign Language as a second language for students of an interpreting programme: The learners' perspective.  
**Project Supervisor:** Kevin Roach  
**Researcher:** Lynette Pivac

- I understand that the interviews meetings or material I will be asked to translate is confidential.
- I understand that the contents of the interviews, meetings or materials can only be discussed with the researcher.
- I will not keep any copies of the translations nor allow third parties access to them while the work is in progress.

**Translator's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Translator's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Translator's contact details (if appropriate)**

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**Project supervisor's contact details (if appropriate):**

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*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 14 December, 2006 on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number 06/210.*

*Note: The interpreter should retain a copy of this form.*

# Confidentiality Agreement



*For someone transcribing data, e.g. audio-tapes of interviews.*

**Project Title:** The Acquisition of New Zealand Sign Language as a second language for students of an interpreting programme: The learners' perspective.  
**Project Supervisor:** Kevin Roach  
**Researcher:** Lynette Pivac

- I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
- I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researcher.
- I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them while the work is in progress.

**Transcriber's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Transcriber's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Transcriber's contact details (if appropriate)**

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**Project supervisor's contact details (if appropriate):**

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*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 14 December, 2006 on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number 06/210.*

*Note: The typist should retain a copy of this form.*

## **Appendix F: Permission for transcripts - Participants**

### **Permission for transcripts - participants**

I have checked the transcript of my interview and I am happy for Lynette to use the information in her research study

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix G: Partial excerpt of analytical memo (identity masked)

Participant: *(identity masked)*

Research questions	Initial reflections from numerous readings of transcript
4. What learning strategies outside of the classroom benefit NZSL learners?	<p><b>Building self-confidence</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Careful choice of safe environments.</b> Nervous about making a first move, so select ‘safe’ neutral environments to be able to interact with familiar and new Deaf people.</li> <li>2. <b>Safe environment.</b> Increase familiarity with settings and Deaf people e.g. ADS. through repeated visits &amp; interaction with a variety of people, which help to increase confidence. More inclined to go to big Deaf events after regular attendances at ADS when confidence grew. Highlight that Deaf people are very positive and encouraging to interpreting students.</li> </ol> <p><b>Utilising support and encouragement from Deaf people</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. <b>Meeting new Deaf people.</b> Very useful to have Deaf visitors at AUT. Frequently discuss class assignment aspects, cultural or language learning issues with them</li> <li>4. <b>Using extra-curricular activities for safe interaction with Deaf people.</b> AUT weekend camps “fantastic” for meeting and chatting with Deaf people. Plenty of leisure time – chatting, playing games and activities</li> <li>5. <b>Social networking for cultural information.</b> AUT University and Deaf club are good places to acquire information about upcoming Deaf events, e.g. camps. This is how we got to know a lot about happenings in the Deaf community.</li> <li>6. <b>Exposure to authentic NZSL use – Meeting Deaf people in authentic situations really beneficial for analysis of different signing styles.</b></li> </ol> <p><b>Utilising support and encouragement from others</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Group support for socialising.</b> Informal social group outings with classmates e.g. coffee. Mutually supportive and helpful – very beneficial to discuss Deaf related issues as shared experiences with classmates, which stimulated learning.</li> <li>2. <b>Group support for study.</b> Group work insightful to compare variation in signing styles and different perspectives.</li> <li>3. <b>Group support for discussion.</b> Enjoyed discussing issues and aspects of signing that arose from classroom learning. e.g potential for immediate clarification and problem-solving. E.g. shared language-learning experiences with peers. Classmate support very useful.</li> <li>4. <b>Student mentors.</b> As a first year student, meeting second year students was very helpful.</li> </ol>

	<p>5. <b>Ex-students.</b> Meeting other people who previously completed programme was very helpful to discuss expectations and learning strategies</p> <p>6. <b>Experienced interpreters.</b> As a second year student, meeting qualified interpreters was extremely helpful. E.g. discussion of interpreting strategies and signs for certain things or concepts.</p> <p><b>Utilising material resources</b></p> <p>1. <b>Watching videos.</b> Analysing various signing styles, really helpful and challenging</p> <p>2. <b>Learning materials.</b> Gain interesting perspectives from analysing Deaf stories and Deaf jokes; incorporate insightful cultural information and creative features of sign language. “Loves” the creative and exciting side of sign language - Deaf people create stories from the same base material and express in different ways.</p> <p>3. <b>Self-directed learning.</b> Useful to access both audio and visual resources and analyse own grammar exercises, vocabulary exercises, fingerspelling.</p> <p>4. <b>Take-home learning video materials.</b> Have own time to watch narratives and analyse; review and clarify meanings</p> <p><b>Maximising time</b></p> <p>1. <b>Free time between classes.</b> Free time generally spent in student lounge, especially at lunchtimes, which provided excellent opportunities to discuss class performance</p> <p>2. <b>Video camera at home.</b> Flexible home study to watch own video work performance, analyse signing and identify targeted improvement.</p>
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