

Review of: "The Noisy Silence of villagers with Deafness of Dhadkai, Jammu, India: A Case Study"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

29 December 2022

Tensions of studying losses and gains in deaf-hearing communities. Reflections

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Reviewer feedback and reflections:

Disclaimer: Some of the original formatting has disappeared in the copy paste process. I will be happy to share the original pdf version of my review.

This manuscript holds significant promise for (at least) the following scholarly domains: most importantly the multidisciplinary areas of Deaf Studies and the Educational Sciences, but also issues of accessibility and development, rural upliftment, empowerment and democracy, etc.

The study of deaf-hearing people's interactions across settings without the entanglements of ideologies of the "correct" communication modality (oral/verbal or manual/signing) – a stance that has marked the deaf literature and deafness scholarship for over a century – is witnessing increasing attention. This can be understood as a "third position" that focuses on tensions of studying the entangled losses and gains in the lives of deaf-hearing communities across time.

In the following I provide feedback and reflections for the authors. Before that, and in a spirit of openness, I provide a brief positionality statement that shapes my feedback and reflections to this manuscript. The comments presented, framed as tensions, are offered in the spirit of pointing to areas that are in need of refinement. These tensions arise through an engagement with the authors points of departure and the presentation of the study. At an overarching level, there are issues that distract from what the study presented in the manuscript sets out to do and what it then goes on to do. This

means that in its present version and format the promise of making a relevant contribution to the scholarship lies latent in the manuscript.

I am a language user who uses several oral/verbal, written and signed languages both in my professional and in my personal life. I work and live in Sweden, but also across other geopolitical settings (this includes the sub-continent of India). I have a strong multidisciplinary and multi-theoretical gaze that shapes my academic work. I publish, edit and review extensively and my domains of expertise include Deaf Studies, Educational Sciences, Language Sciences, Gender Studies, Ethnicity and Migration Studies, Communication Studies, Decolonial perspectives, Ethnography.

The manuscript is structured as follows: an abstract and keywords followed by an *Introduction* (Section 1) in pages 2-3 and a sub-section 1(a) titled *An Introduction to Deafness* on page 4. This is followed by Section 2 titled *Review of some Related Studies* (page 5). Section 3 and subsection 3(a) – cover half of page 6 – are titled *About the Study* and *Objectives of the Study* respectively. Section 4, titled *Methodology*, covers half of page 6. Its two subsections 4(a) and 4(b), presented on page 7 are titled *Study Sample* and *Description of the Tool used in the Study*. Section 5 starts on page 8 and is titled *Findings and Conclusions*. Its three subsections cover pages 8 to 20: 5(a) is titled *Objective 1: To understand the ecological and sociocultural context of the target population of this research* and is presented across pages 8-12; 5(b) runs between pages 12-19 and is titled, *Objective 2: To explore the challenges faced by the people of Dhadkai, with special focus on people with deafness and their access to education*; and 5(c) is titled *Recent advancement in Dhadkai* (end of page 19-most of page 20). Subsections 5(a) and 5(b) have further subsections that are differently marked (italicized or bolded) and numbered: three in 5(a) and four in 5(b). Maps and photographs are presented in subsections 5(a) and 5(b). Section 6 is titled *Major Findings of the Research* (pages 19-22). It has nine bolded bullet points. The final Section 7 is titled *Conclusions* (end of page 22-23). It has a bolded heading called *Suggestions*. The manuscript ends with a list of *References* and has a separate list of *Website References*.

While the aim of the study presented in the manuscript is upfronted explicitly and is used as a structuring device to present the findings (titles of subsections 5(a) and 5(b)), what the manuscript presents goes beyond its aims, and perhaps therefore misses delivering what it sets out to do. This is not unproblematic, and the authors should consider revising their specific aims or stick to the present aims in what they present in the manuscript. The aims presented on page 6 stand as follows:

- To understand the ecological and sociocultural context of the target population of this research
- To explore the challenges faced by the people of Dhadkai, with special focus on people with deafness and their access to education

Clarity regarding the “target population” calls for being specific. The deaf people in the village of Dhadkai? Everyone in the

village of Dhadkai? The district of Doda where the village is located? The state of J&K where the village is located? The nation-state of India? Given word-count constraints that the authors appear to be cognizant of, it is unclear why demographic and other information regarding the sub-continent of India, the state of J&K and the district of Doda where the focused village is located, are presented. This distracts from what the reader is led to believe based on the present aims. The title of the manuscript points to a case study of deaf people in a specific village, Dhadkai. Zooming into that is what is relevant for the study object.

This issue of clarity regarding the study object has furthermore consequences for *the what* that is focused upon in Section 2 (*Review of some Related Research*). No information is made available regarding how the specific studies that are presented were identified. Their relevance to the aims too is not completely clear. It remains unclear, for instance, why a study of deaf-blindness is included in Section 2. Of particular concern is the omission of research conducted on the very few communities – past and present – where hearing people lived together with large numbers of deaf individuals. Studies of such communities exist from spaces as diverse as Thailand, Mexico, Egypt and the most celebrated studies are of Marthas Vineyard off the coast of Massachusetts, USA. There is also an omission of scholarship on deaf issues, deaf education, the status of Indian Sign Language (ISL), the many different Signed Languages that must exist in the rich tapestry of the sub-continent of India. Significantly missing is also the rich and important scholarship that problematizes the “great divide” in research on deaf issues, i.e., the medical model and the sociolinguistic model. While this paper does not have to cover everything, it needs to touch on these areas with the intent to connect to what it says it is doing.

The Methodology of the study presented in the manuscript needs to be streamlined so that the reader can benefit from understanding what types of data/materials were created by which of the two authors, which languages were used in the creation of the data/materials – ISL? Local signing? Gojri? Etc. Information regarding the signing abilities of one of the authors needs to be upfronted earlier in the manuscript since this is an important dimension of data generation in the present study. A sense of the purportedly rich data/materials created needs to be made available in a stringent manner – perhaps in a table that presents an overview of the data types and amounts. How many days of fieldwork did one or both authors engage in? How were the data generated – through audio and/or video recordings? What was the nature of notes that were written? In which language/s were these compiled? What were the lengths of the interviews? What was the nature of the participant observations that were carried out? In which settings were these carried out (schools, homes, marketplaces, fields, etc.)?

It is unclear as to why deaf individuals could not be asked to provide the sociocultural information that the authors were interested in. Why could only hearing individuals provide this information? The manuscript appears to give the impression that note-taking supports building trust (subsection 4(b)) – if so, this needs to be argued for. Information regarding the fieldwork details are presented in different parts of the manuscript. It would help the reader if these could be brought together, and a logical description is followed to support clarity. The data/materials need to be made transparent and the selection of interview excerpts for this study argued for. How the analysis was conducted needs to be made more

transparent too. Themes emerge ideally in a non-linear fashion in qualitative analysis – what did the authors do to identify them? Perhaps re-thinking the titles of subsections 5(a) and 5(b) would do justice to qualitative analysis, since aims seldom correspond to what emerges in the complexities of fieldwork.

Another organizational issue in the manuscript is single subsections in Sections 1 and 3. The subsections could be built into the main section text. Also being consistent in the formatting throughout the manuscript would support readability. For instance, it is unclear why some subsections are italicised, others bolded, and others numbered in Section 5. Similarly, Sections 6 and 7 have different ways of presenting information. Presentation of pictures of informants (particularly in open access platforms) can require stringent ethical approval. The relevance of these as well as other pictures to the study is unclear since these are not always discussed in the text.

While the issues presented above relate primarily (not only) to making the organization of the manuscript more stringent, a more serious issue relates to the lack of analytical framing in the manuscript (some comments above raise this issue as well). Many studies in the deafness scholarship continue to implicitly build on ideological assumptions that are not spelled out. The study presented in this manuscript is not an exception. Theorizing needs to be critically attended to in at least two ways. *First*, analytical connections need to be made relevant to the authors chosen aims. *Second*, key concepts need to be connected to other concepts that exist with regards to studies of marginalized groups and deaf issues (like deaf-Deaf, inclusion-exclusion, marginalization processes, language and socialization, etc.). Some references where scholars attend to themes similar to this manuscript's interests (and the various vocabularies that exist) in their fieldwork explorations are presented at the end of my feedback and reflections. In other words, I am suggesting key references relevant for the work presented in the manuscript that could spur the authors to widen their understanding of the domain they hope to contribute to.

I invite the authors to consider adding some theorizing, highlighting which of the two hegemonic models they align their work with: medical model or the sociolinguistic model. I also suggest a report that transcends this binary and that pushes for a “third position” in Deaf Studies. Making the studies theoretical framing explicit is significant for a number of reasons, not least since both authors are hearing individuals. As hearing scholars – one of whom is reported to be a user of ISL – their positionalities vis-à-vis the area of scholarship they are engaging in is also critical. This is particularly important since the manuscript appears to take on a *charity approach* towards marginalized individuals – rural citizens and deaf individuals.

The role of the Indian Army in the support of the marginalized deaf (and hearing?) individuals is fascinating. The authors could engage with this more. Is the Indian Army tasked to do such work in times of peace?

The language used in the manuscript needs careful attention on two planes: from a readability angle and from a hearing

hegemonic angle. As a hearing signer myself (I use Swedish Sign Language in my working and private life arenas). As a scholar in the Deaf Studies domain, I will raise a cautionary flag on how one views and writes about deaf people. The (mis)use of adjectives like “suffering”, “mute” and a vocabulary of “pain” and disadvantage builds on an un-theorized deficit perspective. These discussions have a long history in the scholarship and need to be taken seriously in the second decade of this century. Issues regarding problems of starting a family or needing to hear to know where a (deaf) person is (pages 20-21) are presented in a counter-productive manner, not least since there is information regarding a multiply disabled deaf woman who is married. Deaf people are *visually-oriented*, and if anything, their sense of localisation is highly developed. Information regarding the profiles of the cases interviewed, observed, etc. needs to be presented in the methods section to allow the reader to understand the information presented later in the findings section.

In addition to connecting with existing relevant scholarship that has explored the target group that the authors are focused upon, including studies where fieldwork has focused on the important intersections of deaf and rural peoples, the language of presentation needs some work in order to make the manuscript more accessible for an international readership. Indian committees, ministries, institutions, etc. (Sections 1, 6 and 7) need to be made accessible (in addition to websites, highlighting their relevance for the points that the study is making could be attended to).

The language of presentation needs address as well. I align with efforts to decolonize the scholarship in various ways and thus do not subscribe to the need for some hegemonic English in a manuscript. I would rather call for a communicative stance wherein the authors could try to make their language accessible to other scholars.

Finally, and in summary, I would like to mention that I feel that the manuscript merits publishing *after* it has been revised fundamentally. It does, as I mentioned at the start of my reflections, have the potential to contribute with new insights that are (at the moment) not communicated in an adequate manner. The authors presentation of their methodological work appears to be done in an ad hoc fashion. The reader needs to have an overarching understanding of the authors’ fieldwork, the authors’ positionality in the sites of engagement, what unexpected issues emerged, dimensions of methodological problems, etc. A re-organization of the manuscript will enable both making the main focus clearer and assist in unpacking some problematic deficit assumptions that presently colour the study presented in the manuscript.

There is need to make explicit the ethical framing that the authors have used. Information regarding formal ethical approval (for data generation, etc.) should also be made available in the next version of the manuscript.

At an overarching level, I have concerns regarding the presentation of the content and hope that the reflections and feedback I have presented in this review will support to make the manuscript stronger and importantly, connect to previous relevant scholarship.

Books, book chapters and doctoral thesis (most should be available online; I will be happy to share pdf’s in case you cannot access some items):

Bagga-Gupta, S. (2017) Signed Languages in Bilingual Education. In: S. May (General Ed), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*. O. García and A. M.Y. Lin (eds) Volume 5: *Bilingual and Multilingual Education*. (131-145). Rotterdam: Springer. https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-02258-1_12

Bagga-Gupta, S. (2004): *Literacies and Deaf Education. A theoretical Analysis of the International and Swedish Literature*. Forskning i Fokus/Research in Focus nr 23. The Swedish National School Agency.

Groce, N. E. *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*. Harvard University Press. ISBN 978-0674037953

Holmström, I. (2013). *Learning by hearing? Technological framings for participation* (Doctoral dissertation) Örebro University, Sweden. <http://oru.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A646591&dsid=-1533>

Tapio, E. (2013). *A nexus analysis of English in the everyday life of FinSL signers: A multimodal view on interaction* (Doctoral dissertation). Jyväskylä University, Finland.
https://www.academia.edu/16645518/A_nexus_analysis_of_English_in_the_everyday_life_of_FinSL_signers_a_multimodal_view_on_interaction

Selected journal articles of minor/major relevance (only online resources suggested here)

Bagga-Gupta, S. (2019). Languageing across time and space in educational contexts. *Language Studies and Deaf Studies. Deafness & Education International*. 21(2-3). 65-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14643154.2019.1594081>

Messina Dahlberg, G. & Bagga-Gupta, S. (2019). On the quest to “go beyond” a bounded view of language. Research in the intersections of the Educational Sciences, Language Studies and Deaf Studies domains 1997-2018. *Deafness & Education International*. 21(2-3). 74-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14643154.2018.1561782>

Bagga-Gupta, S. (2017). Going beyond oral-written-signed-virtual divides. Theorizing languageing from social practice perspectives. *Writing & Pedagogy*, 9(1). 49-75. <https://doi.org/10.1558/wap.27046>

Kelly, R., Dufva, nH., & Tapio, E. (2015). Many languages, many modalities: Finnish Sign Language signers as learners of English. *AFinLAN yearbook*, 73(1), 113–125. Retrieved from <http://ojs.tsv.fi/index.php/afinlavk/article/view/49371/16537>

Koivistoinen, H., Kuure, L., & Tapio, E. (2016). Appropriating a new language learning approach: Processes of resemiotisation. *Apples – Journal of Applied Language Studies* 10(2), 105–117. doi: 10.17011/apples/urn.201612145091

Tapio (2019). The patterned ways of interlinking linguistic and multimodal elements in visually oriented communities. *Deafness and Education International*. 21(2-3). 133-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14643154.2018.1561781>

Report on “Third Position” (available Open Access)

Bagga-Gupta, S. (2020). A third-position regarding a one-school/society-for-all. On “making the impossible possible” and “driven for culture, young-people and coffee”. En tredje position angående en-skola/ett-samhälle-för-alla. Att "göra det omöjliga möjligt" och "strävan efter kultur, ungdomar och kaffe". In Bagga-Gupta, S. & Weckström, P. (Eds.) *On 3rd positions in democratic contexts. An education-for-all, culture-for-all and a society-for-all. Om 3:e positioner i demokratiska kontexter. En-utbildning-för-alla, kultur-för-alla och ett samhälle-för-alla*. Research Report Nr 11. (in English and Swedish), Jönköping University, School of Education and Communication. ISBN-nr: 978-91-88339-22-5. : <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hj:diva-48145>