CODA culture, identity and language use

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Abstract

Children of Deaf adults, also known as CODAs, are a rare group of people in the general population, but are approximately 85-90% of the population of Deaf families. Some of the research and literature is focused on their language and how they use it. Other studies also investigate and discuss their identity in both the hearing and Deaf communities, and how CODAs view themselves. This literature review will discuss these two subjects, as well as talk about some of the methods researchers use to gather this information and about their being bicultural. There will also be discussion about what researchers don’t know about CODAs, and gaps in the research.
Introduction

Research has been done regarding children of Deaf adults, hereafter known as CODAs. However, this research, at times, can be hard to find. Most of the research and study of CODAs concerns language, and a CODA’s bilingualism. This is an important feature of a CODA, but there are also other components to them, such as their identity. Most CODAs have difficulty with finding their identity, because they have access and deal with two worlds. This paper will discuss the languages used by CODAs, as well as examine the difficulty CODAs face in identity building. It will also state what is missing in the studies done, as well as gaps in the literature.

Methods

A main method of finding out the linguistic information is doing the studies at certain locations. It shows how a CODA uses his or her language on a daily basis with their parents. Many of the papers reviewed had a same constant, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Locations of studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>interview at school</th>
<th>interview at home and observed interaction</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critchley</td>
<td></td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogaerde &amp; Baker</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Murphy &amp; Slorach</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pizer, Walters &amp; Meier</td>
<td></td>
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<td>×</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, although some studies mentioned contacting schools (Critchley), none of the interviews were conducted there. In her paper, Erin Toohey did her own research of a CODA’s language using tapes from Gallaudet University. One of the young subjects was sometimes taped
in a daycare setting, and this is the only other instance the author of this paper has seen where the research was not taped at home.

Another method that was shown throughout is what the researchers used to obtain the data of CODA’s speech. All of the studies used something to gather speech sounds, but they all had different ways of getting it. The table below (Figure 2.) shows which study used which method of obtaining speech. It must be noted that there are a wide range of ages in these studies, from infancy to adulthood, which contribute to which process of obtaining speech was used.

Figure 2. Ways of producing speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>toys</th>
<th>questions</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edmund Critchley</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bogaerde &amp; Baker</td>
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<td>Murphy &amp; Slorach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pizer, Walters &amp; Meier</td>
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</table>

**Language**

A large portion of the research is centered on how a CODA speaks, and how they use language. Researchers question whether they learn language at the same time as child with hearing parents would, as well as seeing if they have any language deficiencies with their speech. Also, because every child is different, and every learning situation is different, there are a range of results on language and CODAs.

Most CODAs learn English as their second language, ASL being their first. Researchers question whether this hinders CODAs speech, and how they use language. Various parts of
research is focused around the age of children babbling and uttering sounds, and if they are doing this action or not. Some research states “that in a few instances, babbling appeared to flounder at 6-7 months but never ceased completely… However, in the majority of cases, babbling proceeded normally…” (Critchley 1964). On the other hand, in the same paragraph he states that one child, whose parents studied the oral method, had the same utterances and errors as his parents, and the same errors were also found in his spelling (Critchley 1964). Other research, uses children slightly older, but seeks the same information about a child’s utterances (Murphy & Slorach 1983; Toohey; Pizer, Walters & Meier).

Other research states that some children have better cognition than language production (Murphy & Slorach 1983). This means that they are acquiring language better than they are using it (The Free Dictionary). This finding suggests some CODAs are not using spoken language at home, and only using ASL. Since ASL and English have two different grammars, a CODA may not be using English correctly.

In a study about children from the Netherlands and their families, researchers were trying to determine if they code-mix or code-switch words and phrases. The families have Deaf parents, Deaf children, and CODAs. The findings show that the parents code-mix NGT and Dutch, the Deaf children do not yet code-mix, and the CODAs are completely bilingual and have the same code-mixing utterances and signs that the parents do (Van den Bogaerde and Baker 2006). This is interesting, because one would think that the CODAs would be more in favor of Dutch than NGT.
It has not been determined in all of the studies above, as well as other studies this author has found but not used, which language the children are using at home. It is unclear if they are just signing at home, or if they are simultaneously talking and signing.

Identity and Culture

Many CODAs face questions about themselves growing up. Two major questions are ‘Who am I and what is my identity?’ They are in their own category of people, and have trouble integrating into both the Hearing and Deaf worlds. Often times, they have to try and navigate both worlds on their own. Sometimes, they have help, like in the case of Andres Torres, who grew up in a Puerto Rican Deaf household (Hoffmeister). He only had one aunt who was Hearing, and she was able to help him. She helped him understand where he fit in in the world, as well as where his family fit in in the Puerto Rican community. She taught him aspects of the hearing world that no one else in his family could have taught him (Hoffmeister 224).

Because they do not fit into the Hearing or Deaf worlds, CODAs experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, and confusion (Bull; Bull, Beldon, & Pickell). They are not sure where they belong, and sometimes do not have someone to guide them. They often times face some ridicule when it comes to their peers finding out about their parents (Bull; Thumann). Bull states in his article about different CODAs’ experiences with these feelings. There really isn’t a way to combat these feelings CODAs have, especially when they are going through their feelings alone.

Another aspect of identity that CODAs face is being a live-in interpreter. From an early age, CODAs are turned into interpreters, bridging the gap into the hearing world. CODAs have been known to interpret doctor appointments, conferences with teachers, and funerals.
Hoffmeister, Bull, and R.H. Miller account times when CODAs had to help their parents understand facets of the Hearing world. Hoffmeister writes, “One example of the Hearing world crossing into the DEAF WORLD is his father’s love for baseball. Ahtay (Andres) interprets baseball games in sign language as the games are relayed on the radio.” (223) Without his son, Andres’ father would not get to experience sports. Another feature of being a CODA and interpreting is they have to help when a family member dies. Bull and Miller write about their own experiences when a grandmother passed away, and how they had to help their parents with the details of planning a funeral and communicating with funeral personnel (My Deaf Culture Introduction; Deaf Hearing Boy). While one author was young, and the other older, they had to deal with something adults should be able to take care of themselves. In Bull’s case, he was learning concepts that were way ahead of his young age.

Having access to two different cultures can be difficult for anyone, but for a CODA can be exceptionally difficult. A person can be Chinese and American, and can call themselves Chinese-American, but a CODA can’t accurately say they are Deaf-Hearing. They do not have the audiological condition of not being able to hear. In a way, they have their own culture of being hearing and ‘Deaf’.

**What Don’t We Know?**

While the studies on CODAs can be very extensive, there are a few things that are missing that researchers have not yet covered. A main concept that is mentioned here and there is a CODA’s culture. They have their own distinct culture, because they are in both the hearing and Deaf worlds and cultures. But no questions have been asked about what that really means. Do CODAs have traditions and stories to tell other, younger CODAs? DO they have jokes like the
CODA identity and language use

Deaf do, such as the “Timber Story” or “Hitchhiker Story”, or something similar? Researchers spend a good time on identity, which is very important. But a main part of identity is a person’s culture, so readers are not getting that pertinent information, or the full story.

**Gaps in Research**

There are a few gaps in the research done on CODAs. A main gap is the decline in recent studies completed. For this paper, I have a number of articles that I pulled information from. However, there is a wide range of years that the articles were completed. The oldest article is from 1964 (Critchley), and the most recent is from 2012 (Pizer et. all). This is a large range of years to get information that relates to this paper, especially considering the directions were to get them from the past 3-5 years.

Another gap in research is the varying results of a CODA’s language. Half the research states that a CODA does have a speech and/or language deficiency, and the others say that their speech is perfectly fine. This finding actually makes sense. It has been said that “a person is a product of their environment”. If a CODA comes from a generational Deaf family, meaning that he or she is the first hearing person in a long time, then chances are they are not going to have a lot of spoken language input, and their speech may have a deficiency. However, if they have other hearing relatives, such as a grandparent, sibling, or aunt or uncle, then that CODA has access to spoken language and may not have anything wrong with their speech. It seems that the researchers don’t take this into account when sharing their findings.
Conclusion

CODAs are their own, rare group of people. There are not many in the world. When outside people hear about them, many questions are raised. They question what language they speak, if they speak at all. CODAs themselves have their own questions regarding their identity. After learning more about them, people come to realize that they are one in the same. After some time, CODAs learn the same thing about themselves. There is still some research to be done on CODAs, and some aspects that can be fixed for better results.

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Works Cited


