Foreword

Now that it has been done; now that two sociologists have given us a detailed picture of the sociolinguistic impact of a residential school for the deaf – it seems like such an obvious thing to do that one wonders why it had not been done before. Even more so than for the hearing child, the residential school is the very heart and soul, the veritable center, of the social experience of deaf children. No wonder then that it is there that "sign" is entrenched as both a co-creator and byproduct of an authentic ethnocultural identity and tradition. Evans and Falk show us "sign" is *indexically* related to the culture of the residential school, how it is *symbolically* related to the culture of the residential school, and, finally, how it is *part and parcel* of the culture of the school.

As with other utterly powerless and peripheral minorities, the question has been posed whether deaf children "belong" to their own culture or whether they "belong" to the hearing culture that surrounds them and controls them, particularly in their after-school years. If the latter option is favored, then the culture of the residential school may not provide the best corridor to the mainstream world, nor are its cognitive and other accomplishments more than pitifully inadequate by the standards of that world. However, if the graduates of such schools may be said to constitute a speech community of their own, with a repertoire of varieties, each with indigenous norms, then the residential school for the deaf can also be endonormatively evaluated and its language viewed relative to the socio-cultural desiderata of its own culture. Both of these options are explored by Evans and Falk. Their ethnography is as much an ethnography of the language-in-culture type as those we have become accustomed to in connection with hearing children.

However, it is more sociologically informed than most of the foregoing and, therefore, brings into play an entire literature that is enriching for the sociolinguistic enterprise. Unfortunately, although minority cultures may be studied and understood as if they were self-contained and self-validated units, they are nevertheless frequently far from being such operationally. The ambiguity in connection with "whom the deaf child belongs to" is, therefore, repeated in connection

with the deaf school itself and deaf culture as a whole. Evans and Falk highlight this double or triple ambiguity. As a result, no one can read their book without becoming aware of the burdens and complications that characterize the life of the deaf child, burdens and complications that the child's language reflects and that the school briefly compensates for, but life-long burdens and complications after all. For making all of this clear to us from a sociolinguistic perspective we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to this book and to its authors.

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