

Linguistic Ethnography and Police Procedures: Interviewing the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community during Record Construction



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Empirical evidence suggests that communication among deaf individuals is easier than it is in spoken languages. However, this procedure has not been thoroughly examined in peculiar situations such as police interrogation. This study, like a few others (Russell, 2002; McCay & Miller, 2005) takes a linguistic approach to investigate the challenges that arise when police interview members of the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. This is with the base for highlighting their potential real-world implications, thereby providing mitigative mechanisms. Drawing on Rock and Katz's traditions, the study uses ethnography (a hallmark–qualitative research) to gather the views of sign language users from the Deaf Federation of South Africa and police officers who do not share a language. The objectives of the study are a) to determine the challenges that arise when deaf and hard-of-hearing people report criminal incidents to the police, b) to establish how these challenges impact evidential value in the police report, and c) to determine the possible strategies (if any) that can be adopted to extenuate these issues. Papers such as this are significant in that they generate spinoffs on how the government, through policies and practice, take issues of language development seriously to mitigate the circumstances of possible marginalisation.

Biography:

Dr. GL Babili is currently affiliated with the University of Johannesburg's African Languages Department, where he teaches communicative competency studies, translation theory and practice, as well as grammar and literature in Sepedi. His research interests are mostly focused on the interactions between members of the legal professions, such as police officers, and English second language speakers. He has written several research papers, including "Police Written Discourse: Analysing Notable Glitches in Police Reports" and "Police Interviews in Non-Native Context: Misconstructions and Possible Solutions."