A Sociolinguistic Survey Report of the Deaf People of Paraguay

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Abstract:

A rapid appraisal sociolinguistic survey of the sign language used in Paraguay, Lengua de Señas del Paraguay (LSPY), was conducted in November and December of 2008. Its purpose was to investigate the sociolinguistic situation of the Paraguayan deaf community and their use and development needs of LSPY, a language that was previously unidentified in the Ethnologue. Over three weeks, our survey team visited five deaf communities in the cities of Asunción (and the surrounding metropolitan area), Itaugua, Coronel Oviedo, Caaguazú, and Ciudad del Este. Using sociolinguistic questionnaires and participant observation, we explored the general social situation of the deaf community and sociolinguistic topics, such as ethnolinguistic identity, language vitality, and language standardization. Our preliminary findings indicate that deaf people in Paraguay share a unique ethnolinguistic experience as the Deaf Paraguayan Community. They embrace LSPY as their native language, and although it has historical connection to Uruguayan Sign Language, it is now distinct and well developed. LSPY vitality is high as deaf Paraguayans show pride in their language and cultural community, they use LSPY in central aspects of their life, and it is being incorporated more into deaf education. There is some LSPY variation throughout Paraguay, but the community is working to standardize it through interpreter training and LSPY dictionary projects. The Paraguayan deaf community wants to pursue more LSPY research and documentation so that it can gain recognition and become an official language of Paraguay.
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1 Introduction and purpose

This survey report begins with an introduction to the country of Paraguay and a summary of our survey team’s purpose, research questions, and research tools used during fieldwork.

1.1 Paraguay demographics

The Republic of Paraguay is landlocked in South America; it is bordered by Brazil to the east and north, Argentina to the west and south, and Bolivia to the north and west. According to the CIA Factbook (October 6, 2008), there are an estimated 6.8 million people in Paraguay. The largest metropolitan area surrounds the capital city, Asunción, located on the southwestern border with Argentina. The metropolitan area of Asunción contains roughly 30 percent of the total population of Paraguay at approximately 1.8 million people. The second largest city, Ciudad del Este, is located on the southeastern border with Brazil and has a population of roughly 222,000 people. See figure 1.

Paraguay has approximately 264 square miles of land (roughly the size of California) and is divided into seventeen departments. The terrain is relatively flat, with the highest elevation at 842 meters and the lowest at 46 meters. There are two main climate regions; the eastern Parana region that is warm, humid, and has heavy rainfall, and the Gran Chaco region in the west that is hot and dry, with light rainfall in the summer.

A high percentage of the population lives off of subsistence farming. Although there has been some modest economic growth in the last five years, a 2007 estimate reports that roughly 5.6 percent of the population is unemployed and, according to the CIA Factbook, 32 percent live beneath the poverty line. The Friendship
Mission indicates a number even greater than that, with as many as 43 percent living beneath the poverty line and 60 percent of those not being able to support even basic needs (Global Ministries 2008).

According to Ruffinelli (2008), a recent government study indicates that only 3.2 percent of the Paraguayan population has access to the internet, the vast majority of whom live in the capital city. This number is roughly four times lower than the world average and the lowest percentage of any country in South America. The primary religion practiced in Paraguay is Christianity, with 90 percent adhering to the Roman Catholic faith and 95 percent of the population is ethnically Mestizo (mixed Spanish and Amerindian). There are two official languages in Paraguay: Spanish and Guarani.

1.2 Research purpose, question, and tools

For this survey, our team investigated the sociolinguistic situation of the Paraguay deaf community and their needs and desires for language development using a rapid appraisal (RA) method of sociolinguistic survey. Rapid appraisal surveys gather information to provide an overall perspective of the language community situation in a relatively short amount of time. The purpose of this survey was to find out more about the sign language used in Paraguay, reported as being a distinct indigenous sign language to Paraguay but not yet present in the Ethnologue (Gordon 2005), and its use by the Paraguayan deaf community. The primary research question (RQ) was:

RQ: What is the sociolinguistic situation of the deaf community in Paraguay, including ethnolinguistic identity, language standardization and vitality, and language attitudes toward local sign varieties?

We investigated this question through the use of participant observation and sociolinguistic questionnaires (SLQs). Observation sites included places such as deaf association meetings, religious services, schools, adult deaf-educational events, disability marches, and deaf family’s homes. Wordlists were also gathered during this survey but will be described and reported in a subsequent paper. For a detailed description of the SLQ, see appendix A.

During our survey fieldwork, thirteen SLQs were gathered from participants that identified themselves as deaf Paraguayans. Of these, seven were male and six were female, ages ranged from 19 to 53, number of years of education ranged from 0 to 14+, and the SLQs were gathered in five locations. See table 1 for SLQ participant metadata:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of Years of Education</th>
<th>Elicitation Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14+</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Coronel Oviedo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Caaguazú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Caaguazú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ciudad del Este</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ciudad del Este</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ciudad del Este</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Itaugua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Itaugua</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout this report, reference will be made to SLQ participant responses to the sociolinguistic questionnaire. Not all questions were answered by every participant, so the number of participants is given for any information included in this report from questions not including all thirteen participants. This rapid appraisal survey report describes preliminary findings about the Paraguayan deaf community and a larger and more representative sample of deaf participants is needed to better understand the holistic Paraguayan deaf community.

2 Disability and deafness in a Paraguayan context

The Paraguayan government has supported disabled people by enacting laws that insist on the dignity of all citizens, disallow discrimination, and specifically protect persons with physical disabilities. In 1991, the Instituto Nacional de Protección a Personas Excepcionales (The National Institute for Protection of Exceptional People) helped establish a law that strove “to protect exceptional persons in an integral manner to neutralize their disadvantages and to give them opportunities to carry out an equivalent role in the community as ordinary persons, with their own effort.” (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2002, p. 18). Article 58 of the 1992 Constitution guarantees healthcare, education, recreation, and professional development to facilitate full social integration, and that the state will organize programs for prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and integration for disabled people (DGEEC 2002). Law 2.479/2004 calls for 2 percent of all public office employees to be people with disabilities but, as of 2006, deaf people were still fighting for the application of this law (ABC 2006-09-25).

Paraguay requires nine years of compulsory education for all students, yet lack of adequate resources make this difficult to achieve. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (2002) indicates that, as of 1997, 96 percent of the overall population receives primary education, 61 percent some secondary education, and only 10 percent has any type of higher education. However, according to the US Department of State (2008), half of all children with disabilities are not attending school. In addition, the DGEEC survey of the central district showed that, in 2002, 42 percent of the disabled population had not completed 1 year of education, compared to 12 percent who had not, in the general population (DGEEC 2002). Of those that do go, the quality of special education services offered to the disabled community is low, because there are not enough materials or resources to successfully train teachers or provide for special education centers (Japan International Cooperation Agency 2002).

Countrywide literacy rates indicate that 94 percent of the Paraguayan population age 10 and above can read and write. However, the “number of illiterate persons with disabilities or persons with disabilities without appropriate abilities to compete in the labor market” is increasing because of the lack of successful special education services (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2002, p. 22). According to the DGEEC 2002 national census, only 57 percent of the disabled population is literate. This census also indicated that only 31 percent of disabled people were employed and that the average monthly salary of disabled workers was 667,000 Guaranís (roughly $120 USD) when the official minimum wage salary was listed as 975,000 Guaranís (about $175 USD). In addition, lack of literacy impacts people’s ability to participate in general political processes. Paraguayan law mandates that, in order to vote, one must be literate enough to express oneself in writing. This means that just under half of the disabled population cannot participate in electoral decisions (IPU.org 2008).

2.1 Disability and deaf populations

According to the National Census of Population and Housing, conducted by the Head Office of Statistics, Asunción and the central area of Paraguay have the highest numbers of people with disabilities in the country, with the central area having almost twice as many as the capital city. It does not seem to make a difference, however, whether a person lives in a rural or an urban area – disability numbers are roughly
the same in both. The majority of people with disabilities are children and youth and the overall number of people with disabilities is anticipated to be steadily growing because of lack of resources to provide effective disability preventative measures in the growing general population. (Japan International Cooperation Agency 2002).

Deaf population estimates in Paraguay vary widely. The National Head Office of Statistics estimates 85,000 deaf people from their national census in 1990 (Japan International Cooperation Agency 2002). The 1992 national census, conducted by the Dirección General de Estadística, Encuestas, y Censos (DGEEC), showed that just under 1 percent of Paraguay’s population, approximately forty thousand people, have a disability, 0.1 percent (approximately 4,100) were categorized as deaf-mute, and 0.06 percent (approximately 2,400) were categorized as deaf (Sosa 2003). Ten years later, in the 2002 national census, fifty-one thousand people were reported to have some kind of disability, again just under 1 percent of Paraguay’s population. About 900 people were reported as deaf and 2,300 as hard of hearing, for a total of 3,200, making up 6 percent of the disabled population (DGEEC 2002). Paraguay Deaf Missions (2008) suggests a Paraguayan deaf population of ninety-one thousand, and the Ethnologue (Gordon 2005) as many as 316 thousand.

Of these deaf population estimates, it is unknown exactly how many use sign language. Dr. Soper’s deaf population estimate (2008), which takes into consideration a country’s gross domestic product and how that could influence the health environments of each country and the total number of deaf people who may use a sign language, indicates that Paraguay may have had approximately fifteen thousand signing deaf people in 2000. Deaf contacts in Paraguay also indicated numbers close to fifteen thousand.

2.2 Deaf social access

According to the Centro de Sordos del Paraguay (CSP) association, deaf and hard-of-hearing Paraguayans encounter many difficulties in accessing general societal privileges. For example, they indicate a lack of adequate preventative services that identify hearing loss, find education largely inaccessible to them, feel that their sign language is repressed, and struggle with a lack of support service resources, leading to a myriad of communication barriers limiting deaf people’s access to the hearing world. In addition, deaf people believe they are marginalized economically by societal discrimination when trying to find employment, participate in social activities, be involved in the politics of the country, or live independently with equal opportunity. The Centro de Sordos del Paraguay (2002) asserts that they are disabled by societal barriers more than a sensory deficiency and aspire to the following:

- A quality education with the inclusion of sign language as an education resource.
- The official recognition of their sign language.
- The development of sign language interpreters that would serve as support in health care, employment, education, justice, and other services.
- Access to technology such as hearing aids, subtitled television, and communicative devices.
- The involvement of the association in representing deaf people when policies and programs aimed at disabled or deaf people are being developed (Centro de Sordos del Paraguay 2002).

Eight of eleven questionnaire participants indicated that most hearing people are not supportive of deaf people. In particular, hearing people may discriminate against deaf people in the workplace and make fun of people who use sign language. Participants indicated that hearing people can best support the Paraguayan deaf community by learning Paraguayan Sign Language (Lengua de Señas del Paraguay (LSPY)) and how best to communicate with deaf people.

Some deaf people indicate that, as the economy improves, their opportunity for gainful employment also improves (especially in the two largest cities: Asunción and Ciudad del Este). Deaf people currently find
employment as mechanics, clerks in supermarkets, mailing services, carpentry, tailoring, electric services, computers, painting, construction, and other jobs that focus on manual labor.

Deaf questionnaire participants indicated the following list of needs for the development of the Paraguayan deaf community:

- Unity in and between deaf associations and religious organizations.
- More connection with deaf people in other countries to learn from shared experiences.
- Better medical care to diagnose hearing loss in children at younger ages.
- Deaf people to learn LSPY earlier and more fluently.
- Better education (using LSPY) in deaf schools.
- Better employment.
- Equality between deaf and hearing people.
- Increased LSPY and deaf cultural pride in the deaf community.
- LSPY recognized as an official language.
- LSPY materials.
- Better and more LSPY interpreters.

2.3 Interpreter services

According to questionnaire participants, there may be as many as fifty skilled LSPY interpreters in Paraguay. However, many deaf people will refer to any hearing person who signs as an “interpreter.” Reportedly, most interpreters still learn LSPY through interaction with deaf friends and family. Although there are no specific interpreting schools, a national association of interpreters, or an official code of ethics, deaf associations do offer some training for hearing signers who want to work as interpreters in association offices or in other domains, and interpreting as a profession is growing.

There is some dissension between the two main associations in Asunción, the Centro de Sordos del Paraguay (CSP) and the Asociación Paraguaya de Sordos (APS) about the best way to train and use their interpreters. Reportedly, deaf people have very strong opinions about which interpreters they will use and may refuse to watch an interpreter if they belong to a different association, commenting that they do not understand or like the interpreter.

It is reported by most that the CSP focuses on training interpreters to be the conduit of information, does not allow them to speak for themselves while in the interpreter role, direct association proceedings, and prefers that they not voice when they sign. The CSP provides free sign language interpreting for its members and is a resource center for interpreting services. Reportedly, the Paraguayan government supports these services in part through the Instituto Nacional de Protección a Personas Excepcionales (INPRO) and the Dirección Nacional de Beneficencia (DIBEN). The Jehovah’s Witnesses have a large group of interpreters that work in their religious services and they occasionally hire out their services to the CSP when additional interpreters are needed. The CSP had a sign language class in the fall of 2008, at their center in Asunción, that is leading to the training of more interpreters (ABC 2008-10-14).

In contrast, the APS encourages their interpreters’ involvement in the development of APS events and leadership, interpreters tend to simultaneously sign and voice when communicating in a deaf context, and they will actively participate in conversations even while in the interpreting role. The APS started a two-semester sign language interpreter training program in Asunción in September of 2007. They used an LSPY dictionary that had over 2,000 signs arranged alphabetically, called the Diccionario de Lenguaje de Señas, as course material (ABC 2007-09-09). In October of 2008, they certified twenty-eight people to work as teachers and/or interpreters for deaf students in private and public schools. This program was supported by the Centro de Información y Recursos para el Desarrollo (CIRD), the ministry of education, and USAID (ABC 2008-10-20).
3 Language use

Deaf people in Paraguay are surrounded by a trilingual situation: Spanish and Guaraní are both official languages of Paraguay; the Paraguayan deaf community uses LSPY. Little research has been done to date on LSPY, and the *Ethnologue* (Gordon 2005) does not list a sign language for Paraguay. In 1986, Wilfried Lichtenberger began research into LSPY and published the first dictionary in 1989, with the assistance of the CSP and deaf schools. In 1991, the Paraguayan government financially backed a sign language class that lasted for 3 months but seems not to have continued after the first session (AATI 2001). Today, LSPY has no officially recognized status in the government and can go by a variety of names, including Lengua de Señas del Paraguay, Lengua de Señas Paraguaya, Lenguaje de Señas Paraguayo, and simply Señas Paraguayas.

There are differing perspectives in the Paraguayan deaf community about whether deaf people should speak and sign simultaneously or sign only without voice. It appears that the larger cities tend toward sign-only communication, while smaller towns lean toward encouraging simultaneous voicing and signing by both deaf and hearing people. In addition, older deaf people seem to put more emphasis on speaking, especially with hearing people.

Of the SLQ participants, ten indicated that they both sign and speak and three indicated that they sign only. SLQ participants also indicated that roughly half of the deaf population in Paraguay uses LSPY while the other half attempt to communicate orally or in writing. However, deaf people feel less comfortable reading and writing in Spanish and/or Guaraní than using sign language. Of ten respondents, nine indicated that those that do sign, sign well, or very well, while literacy skills in Spanish or Guaraní are mostly only okay or not good. See figure 2.

![Figure 2. Signing and reading/writing levels self-assessment of deaf participants.](image)

From our observation, it appears that in mixed groups of hearing and deaf, speech is given more priority and dominance than signing. Hearing people who are leading meetings will pay more attention to deaf people who use their voice and expect that, when they speak, other hearing people will also pay more attention to a spoken conversation than a signed one. In addition, deaf people seem familiar and comfortable with allowing any deaf or hearing person who is speaking to have the floor.
3.1 Language acquisition

The SLQ participants indicated that the age at which they acquired LSPY varied greatly from infancy to over 20 years of age. See figure 3.

![Figure 3. Age of LSPY acquisition of deaf participants.](image)

Deaf people indicate that they primarily learn to sign from their deaf friends, but some learn at school, deaf associations, or church. Most hearing parents of deaf children do not learn to sign. There are at least fifteen deaf families in Paraguay (deaf parents with deaf children) where deaf and hearing children acquire LSPY naturally from their parents.

3.2 Language attitudes

Paraguayan deaf people are proud of their unique language and indicate that they freely sign in public with no shame. Positive language attitudes may be expressed toward LSPY varieties that are perceived to be more pure than LSPY varieties that have more contact with other sign languages. For example, people in Asunción may say that the deaf community in Ciudad del Este incorporates too much Brazilian Sign Language but that people in Asunción sign pure LSPY, while those in Ciudad del Este remark that deaf people in Asunción sign more Argentine Sign Language and not real LSPY.

Deaf people use Spanish, Guaraní, and LSPY to varying extents in their daily life. When asked about whether it was more important for a deaf person to sign or write/read in daily life, four out of nine participants said that it is more important to sign than to write/read, and the others responded that they are equal or that it depends on the situation. This mix of perspectives on the importance of the use of various communication techniques for deaf people was again reflected in their perception of important qualities in deaf leaders. See figure 4 for responses from eleven SLQ participants on the importance of various characteristics when appointing leaders in the deaf community.
According to these questionnaire responses, the Paraguayan deaf community values signing and speaking in their communicative preferences, but considers high education and literacy to be of less value. What is most important to deaf people in Paraguay is that their leaders share their experience of being deaf.

### 3.3 Language variation

Out of twelve questionnaire respondents, eight indicated that not all deaf people in Paraguay sign the same, while four indicated that all Paraguayan deaf people sign similarly. Seven out of nine SLQ participants indicated that they want LSPY to be standardized so that communication would be easier for deaf people all over the country and teachers could more easily learn LSPY and incorporate it into their classrooms.

Deaf people indicate that region, age, and association connections are the primary factors affecting LSPY variation. Schools, a typical deaf place that influences sign language variation in some countries, is not reported to be an important factor because they have only used or allowed sign language in the classroom in the last few years and students from the various schools often interact in other social contexts.

There is quite a bit of mobility within Paraguay in the triangular area between Asunción, Ciudad del Este, and Encarnación (see figure 1), but outside of this triangle, deaf people are more isolated and may sign very differently than within the triangle. Perceived regional variations are primarily dependent on a city’s location near a bordering country. Cities that are located on the borders of Brazil or Argentina are perceived to share more similarities with the sign language of that country than LSPY varieties in central Paraguay do. However, six out of ten SLQ participants indicated that LSPY is different from sign languages in any other country. The other four indicated that it shares some similarities with Uruguayan Sign Language, Bolivian Sign Language, and Argentine Sign Language.

However, even more than regional variation, deaf and hearing members of the Paraguayan deaf community indicate that age and association connections are the primary impact on an individual’s use of LSPY. Thus, while differences in LSPY vocabulary (such as technological terms and place names) are seen in young vs. old, differences are also seen in and among associations.

Some people believe that older deaf people and the CSP, which tends to attract the older deaf adults, may sign more similarly to Uruguayan Sign Language. This could be because early Paraguayan deaf education was influenced by educators and signers from Uruguay and the older generation have maintained these influences at the CSP. However, Raymond and Cindy Hodgins, who previously worked in the Uruguayan deaf community for four years before moving to Paraguay, where they have worked for the last year,
indicated that there is very little (they estimate approximately 30 percent) similarity between the LSPY and Uruguayan Sign Language (personal interview, December 10, 2008). In contrast, the APS, which primarily attracts the younger deaf generation, uses a sign language variety more heavily influenced by Spanish than the older generation. For example, older people may use the sign “tener” (English: “to have”) to communicate the meaning of the Spanish word “hay” (English: “there is/are”), but the younger generation has developed and is using a separate sign for “hay” in their signing. Some people say that this variation has more to do with differing education levels; the younger generation is more highly educated and is incorporating their Spanish knowledge into their signing.

3.4 LSPY development

According to SLQ participants, the only LSPY dictionaries or materials available in Paraguay have originated from Asunción. Allegedly, each deaf association in Asunción is trying to make its own dictionary, possibly due to conflict over a previous dictionary project. The first dictionary, the Manual Mimico Paraguayo, was made by Lichtenberger in 1989, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture. In 2005, Manual Lenguaje de Señas Módulo 1, a second LSPY dictionary, was published in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). All questionnaire participants indicated that they would use any LSPY materials available.

There have also been other publications about the sign language used in Paraguay, including the following:


4 Sociolinguistic sites

In this section, we discuss three social institutions that affect the use of LSPY in the Paraguayan deaf community: deaf associations and meeting places, schools, and religious meeting places.

4.1 Deaf associations and meeting places

Deaf people gather to drink tereré, play sports, and catch up on life in both formal and informal situations. Ten of eleven SLQ participants indicated that they would rather interact with deaf people than hearing people, primarily because of shared sign language and ease of communication and because they see deaf people being more supportive of them than hearing people.

There are seven main associations in Paraguay, three in Asunción, and one each in Ciudad del Este, Coronel Oviedo, Caaguazú, and Encarnación (see table 2).
### Table 2. Deaf associations in Paraguay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date established</th>
<th># of members (estimate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centro de Sordos del Paraguay (CSP)</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asociación Paraguaya de Sordos (APS)</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asociación Cultural de Sordos (ASOCULSOR)</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asociación de Sordos de Ciudad del Este (CDE)</td>
<td>Ciudad del Este</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asociación de Sordos de Coronel Oviedo</td>
<td>Coronel Oviedo</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asociación de Sordos de Ka’aguasu (ASK)</td>
<td>Caaguazú</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asociación de Sordos de Encarnación (CAAZ)</td>
<td>Encarnación</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these associations operates semi-independently and there is no overarching national deaf association. The presidents of these associations are considered the leaders of their local deaf communities.

#### 4.1.1 Asunción associations

There are three main deaf associations in Asunción: Centro de Sordos del Paraguay (CSP), Asociación Paraguaya de Sordos (APS), and the Asociación Cultural de Sordos (ASOCULSOR). Both the APS and the ASOCULSOR originated from groups within the oldest deaf association, the CSP. Each association has its own goals for improving the lives of deaf Paraguayans and, while some people may attend two or even three different association meetings, the associations themselves are divided. For example, at a disability rights event in 2008, all three associations were present with their own booths, but members did not appear to freely interact with each other.

The CSP is located in Asunción and is a member of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). Their presidents are deaf and are elected every three years. Attendees of CSP must have a hearing level lower than 55 dB to become members. Founded in April 1961, they were known as the Centro Sordomudos del Paraguay, until 2005. As mentioned previously, they are primarily composed of older deaf people, but they do have a subsection of youth who have their own CSP youth leadership. They have been involved in organizing various deaf marches advocating for deaf rights in Paraguay and have traditionally been the most connected with the Paraguayan government of any of the deaf associations. The CSP meets every weekend, Friday through Sunday, offering a place for deaf people to socially congregate and interact. One evening weekend gathering, we observed had more than 70 attendees. According to some, the CSP has the most influence on the language decisions of the overall Paraguayan deaf community.

The APS was founded in March of 2002, initially with USAID and the Centro de Información y Recursos para el Desarrollo (CIRD) as sponsoring organizations. However, since that funding was removed, members have been pooling their resources to maintain APS. APS presidents are elected every two years and its leadership is made up of both deaf and hearing members. In 2006, they formed a sports club called Subcomisión de Deportes de la Asociación Paraguaya de Sordos. In 2007, they coordinated their first special Christmas program in sign language, including drama, songs, and activities for both deaf and hearing children. In 2008, the APS sent a team of fifteen members who won bronze in the II Sudamericano Interclubes de Sordos de Futbol FIFA (2nd South American Deaf Club FIFA Indoor Soccer) tournament held in Uruguay. This tournament is scheduled to be held in Bolivia in 2009 (ABC 2008-10-28). In 2008, they also coordinated a vocational training and job placement service program for 100 deaf youth, ages 18 through 29. This program was done in conjunction with five organizations, including the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and CIRD (ABC 2008-09-27). The APS attracts the younger deaf generation and is growing rapidly. It seems to have the most momentum of any deaf
association in Asunción. They are focused on improving the social condition of deaf Paraguayans and are
developing closer relations with the Paraguayan government and other international aid organizations.

The Asociación Cultural de Sordos (ASOCULSOR) was founded in 2004. It is the smallest of the
associations in the capital and is connected with the Cultural Cooperative, which raises money for some
type of cooperative development. They have held a computer class in which forty-nine deaf people
participated and focus on educating deaf children in cultural pursuits, computers, and other types of
activities. They are also beginning to connect themselves with outlying community’s associations for
sports and other social activities.

### 4.1.2 Associations outside the capital

Ciudad del Este’s deaf association (CDE) seems to be primarily connected with the CSP in Asunción. On
the weekend, when we visited them, roughly fifteen members visited our impromptu meeting. According
to other sources, there are as many as four hundred deaf people who attend this association’s meetings.
The current and previous presidents are both quite young; the members we met were also young. Because
it is the only deaf association in the second largest city in Paraguay, it is quite plausible that its numbers
are as high as reported.

The Asociación de Sordos de Ka'aguasu (Caaguazú) was founded in October 2006 and is currently feeling
the pressure of dwindling numbers. Previously, there were as many as twenty-five members but that
number has decreased over the last few years to only ten. According to the association president, there is
another group of deaf people meeting in Caaguazú that is contributing the decrease in association
members. He reported that they are connected with the Asunción deaf community and will follow their
lead in the use of LSPY. However, there has been some pressure from the APS to become united with
their association in Asunción, which has led to tension between the two associations. This deaf
association’s main goal is to provide a place for deaf men in the community to play sports together.

The Asociación de Sordos de Coronel Oviedo offers a variety of services for their deaf members,
including interpreters, support services, teaching sign language, fighting for the legal rights of deaf
people, educating deaf adults about health care issues, helping local deaf people find employment, and
working together with other associations to better deaf Paraguayan life.

The deaf community in Encarnación just recently established their first deaf association, the Asociación
de Sordos de Encarnación (CAAZ). Although it is currently managed by hearing members of the
community, deaf leaders are being trained and hope to assume leadership in 2009. There has been some
tension between the CSP and the APS in Asunción regarding which of them will have the strongest
connection with CAAZ. So far, CAAZ’s activities have revolved around gathering the youth together for
social activities and education opportunities that build their capacity to lead independent lives.

### 4.2 Deaf schools

All schools in Paraguay have historically been oral schools, supporting the use of speech and lipreading in
the classroom with no sign language, and being run by hearing teachers. However, just in the last few
years, international awareness of the benefits of sign language has created an environment in which
schools feel pressured by the international community and, in part, by the Paraguayan government to start
utilizing some sign language in school. Thus, some teachers are beginning to learn LSPY and increasingly
using it in the classroom. See table 3 for a list of known deaf schools in Paraguay, four of which are
“Antonio Provolo” schools (located in Asunción, Ciudad del Este, Concepción, and Encarnación).
### Table 3. Deaf schools in Paraguay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date established</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primera Escuela Paraguaya de Sordos</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escuela Especial Nº 6 Fonoaudiología Paraguay- Uruguay Rosa Peña</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instituto Antonio Próvolo</td>
<td>Asunción</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escuela Especial Nº 10 Instituto “Antonio Próvolo”</td>
<td>Ciudad del Este</td>
<td>Early 1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escuela Básica Nº 6873 Privada Subvencionada &quot;Fortunata Greiner&quot;</td>
<td>Concepción</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayito de Luz</td>
<td>Filadelfia</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centro Educativo Antonio Próvolo</td>
<td>Encarnación</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Primera Escuela Paraguaya de Sordos (First Paraguayan School for the Deaf) was established in Asunción in 1962 by Global Ministries, based in Indiana (USA). As of 2007, more than one hundred students were attending this school, there were thirty-five staff members, and the MEC was helping by providing a free snack for the students (making it now a combined private and public school). It also offers hearing, speech, and psychological services to the community at a low cost. According to one letter published by Global Ministries in July 2008, this school is trying to establish additional deaf schools in other cities (Godoy 2008, ABC 2005-10-31). This school has a special literacy program for further education of older deaf students and offers secondary school (grades 7 through 9) opportunities.

Escuela Especial Nº 6 Fonoaudiología Paraguay- Uruguay Rosa Peña is another deaf school in Asunción. It was founded by the Asociación de Damas Uruguayas in 1964 and offers grades 1 through 6. As the school grew, the MEC began to oversee the school, with the association still contributing to the school in various ways, and now it is a completely government-run public primary school. Scholarships were provided for Paraguayan teachers to specialize in deaf education by receiving training in Uruguay, Mexico, and Spain (ABC 2006-12-04). Currently, they have seventy deaf students and two deaf adult staff members. Over the last 2 years, they have started to embrace the total communication method of teaching and encouraging students and teachers to communicate through both speech and signing. We were able to meet with a director of this school and she indicated that the school’s primary goals are to provide more educational training for teens, educate parents on early educational intervention for their deaf children, increased deaf literacy, a better system of transportation for deaf children to go to school, encouraging deaf associations and the deaf community to become more unified, and persuading the government that, instead of deaf students needing to become bilingual in Spanish and Guaraní (as is current educational policy for all Paraguayan children), they should instead become bilingual in Spanish and LSPY.

The Instituto Antonio Próvolo began in 1972 in San Lorenzo (a south-eastern suburb of Asunción) and now operates four schools for deaf children throughout Paraguay. In the early 1980’s, they also started a school called Escuela Especial Nº 10 Instituto "Antonio Próvolo" in Ciudad del Este. In 1994, they founded the Escuela Básica Nº 6873 Privada Subvencionada "Fortunata Gresner" in the city of Concepción, and in 1999, the Centro Educativo Antonio Próvolo in the city of Encarnación (Instituto Antonio Próvolo 2008). They are all private Catholic schools. According to some of our sources, the Próvolo schools are the least open to the use of sign language in the classroom.

There are four different educational opportunities for deaf Paraguayans that support signing in the classroom. In the Chaco region, there is one deaf school available; a boarding school in Filadelfia called...
Rayito de Luz. It was founded in 1996. They teach sign language to their students and it is funded by private and government sources (ABC 2008-11-05). In 2008, the APS offered vocational training through sign language for deaf adults and plan to continue this effort. Some deaf students in Ciudad del Este commute to a deaf school in Foz do Iguazu, Brazil because it uses sign language. Some deaf people in Ciudad del Este are bilingual in Brazilian Sign Language and LSPY because of their time there. Finally, the Centro de Apoyo Educación Inclusiva (Center for the Support of Inclusive Education) helps integrate students into hearing schools with interpreters and other supportive services. This primarily happens after grade 9, but very few deaf students remain in school long enough to be involved.

4.3 Deaf religious meetings

Deaf people in Paraguay attend religious services for a number of reasons, according to our questionnaire participants, including a desire to grow spiritually and spending time with family. Deaf people may go to services that are signed or spoken (with or without interpreters), but it seems that the primary factor affecting their continued attendance is the quality of the signing or interpreting in the service. Although the primary religion of Paraguay is Roman Catholicism and there was at one point an interpreted mass in Asuncion, when our team visited in 2008, there were no interpreted masses available in Paraguay. Currently, the largest numbers of Paraguayan deaf people attend Baptist and Jehovah’s Witnesses religious meetings. According to one questionnaire participant: “All of the churches sign differently from each other - the Jehovah’s Witnesses sign the most like the associations, and the Catholics and Mormons sign almost not at all.”

The Jehovah’s Witnesses are active in Paraguay and there are reports that as many as one hundred deaf people attend the Jehovah’s Witness church in Asunción. Some people indicate that the Jehovah’s Witnesses have better signing than the Baptists, which is why they are growing. However, it is also reported that the Jehovah’s Witnesses sign differently than the rest of the community because they are fairly isolated and do not interact much with people outside of their religious circle.

The Primera Iglesia Bautista de Sordos Manos de Vida y Luz is a Baptist deaf church in Paraguay that has been meeting for nine years (YouTube 2008). Since May 2006, they have met in the Convención Bautista del Paraguay, located in Asunción. They have both a hearing pastor and a deaf pastor, Gustavo Benitez, who was officially ordained in September 2008. At the point we visited, roughly sixty people were in attendance and the room they were meeting in was packed wall to wall with people. Services are interpreted into Spanish so that hearing family members or interested hearing visitors can be involved. In 2007, they started three church plants in the Asunción metro area (Luque, Lambaré, y Ypacarai/Limpio). They are concerned with legal and educational issues of the deaf community, as well as deaf people’s spiritual growth (Iglesia Bautista de Sordos 2008). Pastoral and leadership staff at this church began an LSPY Bible translation project in 2008.

5 Conclusion

Our preliminary findings show that deaf people in Paraguay share a unique ethnolinguistic experience as the Deaf Paraguayan Community. They embrace LSPY as their native language, and although it has historical connection to Uruguayan Sign Language, it is now distinct and well developed. There is some LSPY variation throughout Paraguay, especially near the border of Brazil and Argentina, but the community is working to standardize it through current dictionary projects and training of interpreters in the deaf associations. LSPY vitality is high as deaf Paraguayans show pride in their language and cultural community, they use LSPY in central aspects of their life, and it is being incorporated more into the deaf educational system by encouragement of the Paraguayan government. Although there has been some LSPY linguistic research and dictionary production, they want more in-depth research to be done so that LSPY can gain recognition and become an official language of Paraguay.
Appendix A: Sociolinguistic questionnaire methodology

We designed the sociolinguistic questionnaire (SLQ) to be an effective means for sharing information and conversing with various members of the deaf communities during fieldwork. SLQs that had been used previously by Bickford (1988), Showalter (1990), and Parkhurst (2003) served as an inspiration for the SLQs we have used previously in Latin America and the Caribbean over the past two years. The SLQ, used for survey fieldwork in Paraguay, was the result of the successive improvements and modifications our team recommended after each survey experience. The questionnaire information was gathered in an interview setting, including both open and closed questions (open questions build rapport as the participant can share information they feel is important and influence the interview agenda; closed questions limit possible responses to enable quantifiable comparisons and results).

A.1 SLQ instrument

Questions 1 through 11 gathered basic demographics of the deaf community early in fieldwork that could be used with hearing or deaf people. Questions 12 through 19 collected metadata (personal background information) for any person who was providing language data. The final section (questions 20 through 40) probed language use and attitudes specifically among deaf individuals. The SLQ also included a brief description of the research project, opportunity for the participant to indicate consent to be involved in the project, and allowed the participant to indicate what level of access others could have in the future to the language data they provided. See table 4.

Table 4. Sociolinguistic questionnaire form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deaf services and meeting places:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. List associations and organizations serving deaf people in your area, indicating their role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do deaf people attend religious services? If no, explain why not. If yes, please answer the following: What services do they attend? Why do deaf people attend services? What language(s) does the service use? How many deaf people attend these services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do deaf people meet at any other places than you listed above? How often and with what activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Please list the deaf schools in your area. How many years of education do these schools offer students? Please identify the communication philosophy of each school (oral, bilingual, TC, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Are there interpreters available in your area? If so, please answer the following: How many? How are they trained? Where do they work? How many of these would you consider to be skilled interpreters?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Please list any published materials about the sign language in your area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do deaf people in your community interact with deaf people from other places in the Paraguay? If so, please answer the following: Which other communities? Where and why do they meet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Have deaf people here interacted with deaf people from other countries? If so, which countries?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What type of jobs do most deaf people have in the Paraguay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Do most deaf people in your area have a DVD player and/or computer in their house?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Please list the leaders, hearing or deaf, of your local deaf community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant information:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Roughly how old are you now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Do you have any deaf family members? If so, who?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Where do you currently live?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. How many years of education have you completed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Please name the school(s) you have attended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Where do you interact with deaf people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. At what age did you first start signing? Where and instructed by whom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Do you sign, speak, or use both when communicating with other people?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Sociolinguistic questionnaire form (continued)

Language use and attitudes:
20. Where do deaf people learn sign language in your community?
21. When choosing a president in your deaf association/organization, how important are the following? S/he must be deaf (not hearing)? S/he must sign well? S/he must be able to speak? S/he must be able to read and write well? S/he must be well educated?
22. How many deaf people sign in your community? How well do they sign?
23. How many hearing people use sign language in your community? How well do they sign?
24. Do deaf people sign the same with hearing people as they do with each other? If no, how do deaf people sign differently?
25. Do you interact more with deaf or hearing people? Why?
26. Do deaf parents sign with their hearing children?
27. Do hearing parents sign with their deaf children?
28. How do deaf people feel when signing in public?
29. Are hearing people supportive of the deaf community? Explain your answer.
30. Do all deaf people in the Paraguay sign the same? If no, what factors lead to different signing?
31. Do you want everyone in the Paraguay to sign the same? Explain your answer.
32. What is the name of the sign language in your area?
33. Is your sign language like the sign language of any other country? If yes, which one(s)?
34. Do you think that it is better for deaf people to use sign language or spoken language? Explain your answer.
35. How well do you read and write Spanish?
36. If language materials (e.g. Bible) were available in your local sign language, would you use them? If not, why not? If yes or sometimes, when and where?
37. What does your deaf community need most to succeed in life?
38. Country best for deaf people to live in (most services, education, support, etc.).
39. Country’s sign language that is the easiest to understand.
40. Country with the most beautiful sign language.

Additional Notes:

A.2 SLQ procedure and limitations

Questionnaire templates were made with Microsoft Word and included text form-fields for open questions and drop-down or check-box form fields for closed questions such as those with “yes/no” or numeric answers. After explaining the purpose of the questionnaire, obtaining volunteer consent, and identifying the participants desired accessibility of the data, the questionnaire was administered. Participant responses were typed directly into the questionnaire forms on the researcher’s laptop. During analysis, the questionnaire form data were imported into a spreadsheet for easier viewing and analysis of the responses.

One important limitation of the SLQ methodology lies in the sampling method. Our sampling method was based off of whoever was willing and available to talk with us during our brief visit to each location, while focusing on deaf community leaders, whenever possible. The data sources tended to be from participants who were more extroverted, educated, and/or in leadership positions within each community. Consequently, the results may not be a comprehensive representation of micro-cultures with each deaf community and, as mentioned previously, the participants included many more highly-educated deaf people than is representative of the overall Paraguayan deaf community.

References


