Changes in the performance arts of the deaf since the 1950s
Finnish deaf culture days
1956-2006
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BACKGROUND

- MA in Education at University of Jyväskylä
- Background: BA in Drama Education
  - What is Deaf Performance Art
  - Finnish Deaf Culture Days (1956-)
    - Competitions in poetry, theatre, dance, etc.
  - Results that surprised
    - Poetry – post popular event
    - Terms: visual theatre, poetry with actual sign language, etc.
METHOD

- Qualitative research
- Data-driven content analysis

Materials:
- Finnish Deaf Magazines
- Meeting minutes
- Other documents

Challenges
- Research only in text
- Most of Deaf people not active writers
- Video materials not always available and take too much time
- No interviews
THE FOUNDING OF THE CULTURE DAYS

- Cultural activities before the culture days
  - Deaf clubs’ parties, acting clubs, lecture days
- The first culture days were held in the Helsinki Deaf club in 1956
- Youth work and association campaigns
- Equal competition
- Socializing
COLONIALISM

- Paddy Ladd: oralism=colonialism
- In Finland in the end of the 1800s
- Sign language was forbidden in schools from the end of the 1800s to the 1970s
- Sign language research ceased for decades
- Deaf people’s own history disappeared for decades

Postcolonialism
- Colonialism is part of present day
- Rebuilding of identity
- Post-colonial process
COLONIALISM AND SL COMMUNITY

- Students of the oralist schools adopted the oralist thinking method
  - ”Hearing people know better”
  - People are being assessed based on speech skills
  - Groups divided in two, signing and speaking deaf people
- Speaking deaf people so-called elite
  - ”The right kind of communication”
PERIODS

- The reign of Finnish Language (1956-1969)
- Period of Visualism (1970-1978)
- Period of "Actual" sign language (1979-1996)
- Period of Sign Languagehood (1997-
THE REIGN OF FINNISH LANGUAGE (1956-1969)

SIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNITY
- Oralism reigned for over 60 years
- The generation of signing school gone
- Sign language was not considered as a real language
- Divided in two; actual Deaf people and not actual deaf people

DEAF CULTURE DAYS
- Pronunciation was a popular competition
- Pronunciation was seen as a chance to develop sign language
- Signed speech
- Competitors in A and B series
PERIOD OF VISUALISM (1970-1978)

SIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNITY

- The history of Deaf people to become more known
  - Oralism, ideology of racial oppression
  - Deaf people couldn’t decide on their own
  - Speech skill was the measurement of intelligence
  - Deaf people were not allowed to be Deaf
- Cultural discussion: Sign language culture is valuable, too

DEAF CULTURE DAYS

- Visuality
  - Mime (1969)
  - Visual storytelling (1971)
    - "In the style used by Deaf people, when being assessed, the usage of language and the portion of speech is not important"
  - Visual performances (1978)
  - Visual poetry (1980)
- Developing sign language
PERIOD OF "ACTUAL" SIGN LANGUAGE (1979-1996)

SIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNITY
- Deaf awareness
  - Deafness as a positive quality
  - Deaf people as a linguistic minority
  - Deaf awareness courses
  - Young generation
- Sign language research
  - "Actual sign language"
- Students began to sign in schools

DEAF CULTURE DAYS
- The amount of participants doubled
- The emergence of youth
- New ways of expression, real sign language
- A controversy about the language of performances
  - The performance of the Jämsäjokilaakso Deaf club
PERIOD OF SIGN LANGUAGEHOOD (1997-)

SIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNITY
- Term "native signer" (viittomakielen)
- Sign language as a mother language
  - The definition of identity was not any more dependent on hearing only but also on the language
  - CODAs

DEAF CULTURE DAYS
- The term 'native signer' appeared in connection of culture days
- Discussion about CODAs right to participate
  - Fear
  - CODA’s allowed to participate from 2007
WHY THE CULTURE DAYS GO ON?

- The celebration of Deaf people
- Native signer’s performing arts
- The culture of native signers
REFERENCES

Photos:
- The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas/ Deaf Museum

Research:
- ”Ottaisiko soihdun vai lähtisikö kulkemaan pimeässä.” Recitation as representation of sign language community’s language identity in the 50 year history of Finnish Deaf Culture Days. (Koivisto, M., 2010) (on finnish only)