PART I. BEGINNING LINGUISTICS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE

KEY TOPIC(S):
- The medium of language.

READING ASSIGNMENT 4
The purpose of this assignment is to get you to reflect upon the notions of language and the medium of language: speech, signing and writing.

GROUP DISCUSSION – Working in groups of four, answer the questions that follow.

TEXT 1

1. Using Cabtree and Power’s (1991) File 3 as a guide, what are some questions you might ask yourself when comparing speech and writing?
2. The authors point out that “To many people, writing somehow seems more correct and more stable, whereas speech can be careless, corrupted (they believe) and susceptible to change” (p. 7). Discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages that must be considered in regarding writing as more correct and more stable than speech.

3. List and explain briefly the reasons for maintaining that speech is primary and writing is secondary, using your own words.
4. The authors describe speech as being a primary medium of language and writing as being a secondary medium. In what ways might this basic assumption of modern linguistics help you understand and demystify the widely held misconception that writing is more perfect than speech?

TEXT 2

5. Say what you think the authors mean by the following sentence: “As a result of this, the view that visual-gestural (signed) languages are not true languages has permeated our society” (p. 399) and to what extent this view is still widespread nowadays.

6. List the main differences between sign and spoken languages in terms of production and reception of language.
7. What are the main differences between language and speech? And between language and signing? And language and writing?

8. List the main differences between a language and a code, using your own words.
9. List some of the main claims suggesting that signed languages are not true languages and the facts showing that these claims are inaccurate:

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<th>Claims (common myths)</th>
<th>Facts</th>
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**TEXT 3**

10. What are your personal experiences and/or observations with sign languages? And with Deaf culture (culture in sign)?
11. Discuss three or four issues from Perlmutter’s article that had an impact on you.

12. What does the author mean by “What has been discovered over the past century is that sign language is language. This is not just a discovery about sign language; it is a discovery about language itself”?

REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

1. What would you say is the overall idea the authors want to explore in these three texts?

2. Comment on what you learned about the medium of language as a result of this fourth reading assignment and describe how this experience has had an impact on your approach to understanding what human language is, what it is used for, and how it works.