

UNESCO

Mother Language Day

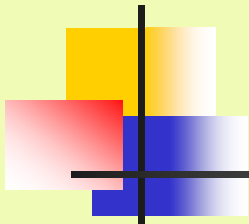


Sign Languages

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LANGUAGES

***VISUAL AND
GESTURAL***

***AUDITIVE
AND ORAL***

SIGNED LANGUAGES

SPOKEN LANGUAGES

**TACTILE
SIGN LANGUAGES**

**TACTILE (PRINTED) FORMS
- BRAILLE**

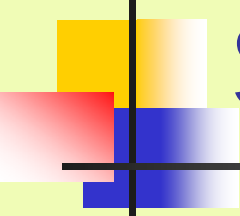
NO WRITTEN FORMS

**VISUAL WRITTEN FORMS
(Latin, Cyrillic,
Arabic, Georgian, Ethiopian,
Thai alphabets,
Chinese, Korean etc.).**



Sign Languages (Newport & Supalla)

- signed languages are visual-gestural languages, while spoken languages are auditory-vocal languages
- forms of sign languages consist of
 - sequences of movements +
 - configurations of the hands and arms, face, and upper torso
- forms of spoken languages consist of
 - sounds produced by sequences of movements + configurations of the mouth and vocal tract.



Sign Language is not

- pantomime
- simple gestural code representing the surrounding spoken language
- international language (almost every country has one or more sign languages)
 - BUT there are universal features in sign languages – helps make it possible for users of different sign languages to understand one another far more quickly than users of unrelated spoken languages can
 - <http://www.let.kun.nl/sign-lang/echo/>

Real, natural and independent languages



- Linguistic work has shown that:
 - natural signed languages show all the structural properties of other human languages
 - they have evolved independently of the spoken languages which surround them
- the visual-gestural-(tactual) (sign) medium is a robust, and therefore biologically normal, alternative
- probably every known group of non-speaking deaf people observed around the world uses some sign language, and even isolated deaf individuals have been observed to develop a sign language to communicate with hearing relatives and friends

Sign Language Users

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graph TD; A([Sign Language Users]) --> B[Native signers]; A --> C[2nd language]; A --> D[Foreign language]; B --> E[Mother tongue]; B --> F[1st language]; G[More or less bilingual or multilingual] --> F;
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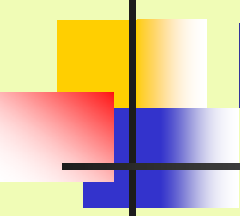
Native signers

Mother tongue 1st language

2nd language

Foreign language

More or less bilingual
or multilingual



Teaching and learning sign language as mother tongue

- General aims:
 - To strengthen identity of a student as a sign language user and a member of a community of sign language users
 - Through learning sign language as mother tongue s/he will develop good bi- and/or multilingual skills and ability to meet cultures of other communities
 - Through good skills in sign language the student can learn spoken languages and develop good communication and academic skills
- Sign language folklore and literature → help to develop cultural identity and acquisition of linguistic skills
- Sign language as mother tongue has same meaning to native signers and other sign language users as spoken languages have to users of them
- To develop personal and cultural identity of the student, expressing thoughts and feelings, to develop metalinguistic and communication skills
- Good self esteem and social skills



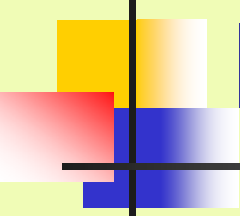
Linguistic oppression

- Deaf children like other minority children are taught through the medium of a dominant language (subtractive teaching)
- It prevents profound literacy and gaining the knowledge and skills that would correspond to their innate capacities and would be needed for socio-economic mobility & democratic participation
- Over 98 % of deaf children in the world never receive education in their most fluent language, Sign Language, the language of their group

95 % of deaf signers born into hearing families

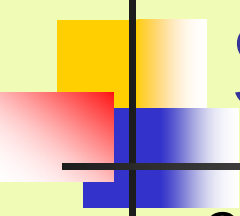


- until recently, hearing parents were often discouraged from learning sign language in the hopes that avoidance of sign language and therapeutic presentation of speech would result in improved spoken language acquisition.
- research does not suggest, however, that the avoidance of sign languages does improve speech abilities; in fact, much evidence suggests that, among the profoundly deaf, better speech, lipreading, and reading abilities are shown by native signers
- in recent years it has therefore begun to be more common practice to encourage hearing parents of deaf children to learn to sign, and to expose deaf children to sign languages from early in life



Natural vs. devised sign languages (sign systems)

- Natural sign languages have arisen spontaneously through time by unrestricted interactions among people who use them as a primary communication system
 - Finnish, Uruguayan, German, Columbian etc. Sign Languages
- Devised or derivative sign languages: intentionally invented by some particular individuals (e.g., educators of deaf children) to represent spoken language
 - Manually Coded English: 'Signing Exact English', 'Seeing Essential English', and 'Linguistics of Visual English'
 - Used in classrooms, do not spontaneously spread to a wider community or to broader employment in everyday communication



Sign Language research

- Studies
 - of the on-line processing of sign language by fluent adult signers,
 - of the representation of SL in the brain,
 - of the acquisition of SL by native speaking deaf children,
- show many similarities with the principles of processing, neurological organization, and acquisition of spoken languages of the world
- For example, American Sign Language (ASL) is acquired on approximately the same timetable as spoken languages with similar typology.
- Like speakers of auditory-vocal languages, represent ASL in the left hemisphere of the brain

Status of the Deaf

as a group (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2003)

- The Deaf are a linguistic minority according to definitions in international law



Common false arguments

- **Sign Languages**
 - **are connected with disability, not with membership to a group (cultural, ethnic or religious)**
 - **are means of communication within any language**

Sign Languages are minority languages



- Sign languages are complete, independent languages. They are not related to oral languages in the countries where they exist.
- Sign languages are historical languages.
- Most languages in the world (at least 2/3 of oral languages) do not have a writing system or are not used habitually for writing.



Books about sign languages

- *English*

- *Seeing Voices*, by Oliver Sacks, 1989.
- *The signs of language*, by Edward Klima & Ursula Bellugi, 1979.
- *The linguistics of British Sign Language*, by Rachel Sutton-Spence & Bencie Woll, 1999.

- *Dutch*

- *Gebarentaal. De taal van doven in Nederland*, door Liesbeth Koenen, Tony Bloem, Ruud Jansen en Albert van der Ven, 1993.
- Meer dan een gebaar. Rapport van de Commissie Erkenning Nederlandse Gebarentaal.
- 1997. http://212.204.242.26/download/rapport_mdg.PDF.



Websites about sign languages

■ English

- **International Bibliography of Sign Language**, <http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/bibweb/>
- British Deaf Association, <http://www.britishdeafassociation.org.uk/>
- Swedish Deaf Association, http://www.sdrf.se/sdr/index_eng.htm
- Deaf Resource Library, <http://deaflibrary.org>
- **International deaf / sign language links**, http://members.rogers.com/signnet/DI_AG.html
- A good list of links (some with German descriptions),
<http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/Quellen/Quellen.html>
- A large list of links to Deaf-related web sites, <http://www.deafbiz.com/>

■ *Dutch*

- Dovenschap, Dutch Deaf Organization. <http://www.dovenschap.nl>
- Nederlands Gebarent centrum, <http://www.gebarentcentrum.nl>



Web

■ *Swedish*

- Sveriges Dövas Riksförbund, <http://www.sdrf.se/sdr/index.htm>
- Teckenwebben, samlingsplatsen för teckenspråk, <http://www.teckenwebben.se/>
- Svenskt Teckenspråks-lexicon på internet, <http://ling149.ling.su.se/>
- *The ECHO project, March 2004*
- <http://www.let.kun.nl/sign-lang/echo/>

■ *Finnish*

- *Finnish Sign Language Web Dictionary, <http://suvi.net.fi>*
- www.prosign.fi
- *Sign Language Learning Material, Finnish Association of the Deaf, www.viivi.fi*
- *Research Institute of Domestic Languages, www.kotus.fi*



Conclusion

- **The Deaf are a linguistic minority, and Sign languages are minority languages**
- **Through recognition of our languages our human rights will be fulfilled**
 - **receiving education, information and services in our own languages**
 - **equal communication with others in our own languages**



UNESCO Education Position Paper, 2003

- **Education in a multilingual world**

[http://www.unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/
index.html](http://www.unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/index.html)