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## Sign Language, an Artistic Form of Communication

*Hemant Gawande*

*Educational Consultant, Anadi Educational Services, Bhopal*

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### Abstract

Sign language is a visual language expressed through physical movements instead of spoken words. The language relies on visible cues from hands, eyes, facial expressions, and movements to communicate. Although sign language is used primarily by people who are deaf or hard of hearing, it is also used by many hearing people. As with any spoken language, sign language has grammar and structure rules, and it has evolved over time.

**Keywords- Sign Language, Deaf, Communication, Language, ASL.**

Sign language refers to any means of communication through bodily movements, especially of the hands and arms, used when spoken communication is impossible or not desirable. The practice is probably older than speech. Sign language may be as coarsely expressed as mere grimaces, shrugs, or pointings; or it may employ a delicately nuanced combination of coded manual signals reinforced by facial expression and perhaps augmented by words spelled out in a manual alphabet. Wherever vocal communication is impossible, as between speakers of mutually unintelligible languages or when one or more would-be communicators is deaf, sign language can be used to bridge the gap.

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### Historical Background

Much like the English language, tracing the invention of sign language to a particular point in history is impossible. Throughout history, various forms of sign language have evolved, often incorporating elements of others. While we might be unable to trace back to the very start of sign language, two things are for certain: this form of communication has a rich and fascinating history and it's transformed the lives of many deaf people.

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### Origin of Informal Sign Language

The act of communicating with our hands has always preceded formal language. When we're babies and children, we point and grab to communicate what we want. We'll shake our heads and turn away to signal when we don't want something. In other words, we all use a version of sign language to communicate before we know how to speak.

Mankind was the same way. Before we developed speech the form of interaction was via hand and facial gestures. As the deaf were often persecuted, sign language didn't develop from this point until the 1500s when Pedro de Leon, a Benedictine monk, created a form of sign language so he could communicate during his vow of silence. In 1620, Juan Pablo Bonet developed this by writing a sign dictionary and alphabet.

While Bonet was developing his sign language, a small commune in Martha's Vineyard also came up with their own sign language. Due to the dominant and recessive deaf genes carried by the people in this commune, this language was maintained for many years.

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### Formal Sign Language

While there were previous attempts at creating a standard sign language, the first real progress happened with Charles Michel De L'Epee, a French Priest. He was the first to create a free public school for the deaf in Paris. He laboriously translated the entire French alphabet into a sign language dictionary that included symbolic gestures, concepts and ideas instead of just letters.

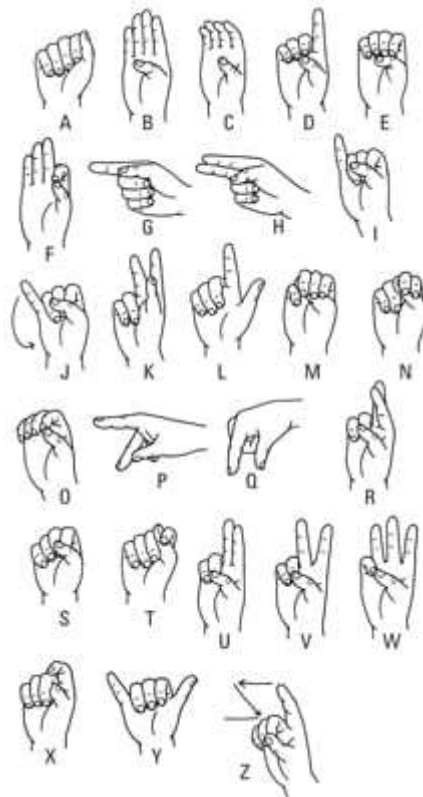
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### The American Adaptation

In the 1800s, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet developed American Sign Language (ASL). Inspired by a desire to help his neighbour's deaf daughter, Gallaudet went to Europe to meet with Laurent Clerc, a deaf instructor of sign language. Together they founded the first American school for the deaf and established a sign language unique to the USA. It was inspired by the French Sign Language, signs from Martha's Vineyard and might have been inspired by the signing system of the Great Plains Native Americans.

Since the development of the French Sign Language and ASL, this language has developed across the globe. For example, the England BSL and Australian Auslan. This demonstrates the rich and diverse world of sign language, a method of communication perhaps as varied as vocal communication.

## ASL for Beginners



ASL beginners usually start with learning the alphabet. The 26 letters of the English alphabet can be conveyed through signs in ASL, and words can be spelled out through sequences of signs. This is called “fingerspelling.” Want to give it a try? Figuring out how to fingerspell your own name is a great place to start!

Below, you can find a handy sign language chart that shows how to sign the ASL alphabet. You can always use these letters when you don’t know how to sign an entire word. If you need to spell a word that has the same letters back to back, make a slight bounce or sliding motion between the repeated letters.

***Now that we’ve explored the alphabet, we can move on to words and phrases!***

### Sign Language for Beginners: Common Expressions

It’s not always practical to spell out words for everyday interactions. That’s where these expressions come in handy! You can use common expressions to meet people, show your appreciation, and communicate with friends.



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## Conclusion

Most people would not automatically think of Sign Language when they hear the word “art”. American Sign Language is an amazing form of communication, which incorporates different forms of art within the art itself. Sign language incorporates facial expressions, space, and movement. This art form allows Deaf people to communicate with others. Some people in the education system do not think sign language is a positive form of art because it separates the Deaf from the hearing. Others are trying to figure out methods to “fix” the Deaf so they can be more like the majority of people. Instead of adapting to the Deaf and learning their language, many want them to learn how to speak. Sign language is an important art and form of communication that is often overlooked. Sign Language may not be as poetic as French, or as widely used as Spanish, but it is an important form of communication that helps connect those who are Deaf to the hearing world.

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