ABSTRACT

This 24-item annotated bibliography is intended to facilitate introduction to the field of sign language studies. It lists selected published works in English in which sign language is viewed from several different aspects, including: theoretical studies (nos. 1, 5, 6, 19, 20 and 21); works relating sign to other visual communication systems (nos. 4, 7 and 13); historical studies (nos. 9 and 18); textbooks of American Sign Language (nos. 8 and 16); psycholinguistic studies including sign acquisition (nos. 2, 3, 10, 12, 14, 17, 22 and 23); and sociolinguistic studies (nos. 15 and 24). Works on topics related or peripheral to sign, such as kinesics and gestural system, where sign is not mentioned, are not included, but are referenced in the bibliographies of the items listed and in Hayes (no. 11). The orientation of the listed works is toward consideration of what criteria a language must satisfy, and whether these are met by sign. The annotations summarize the contents and often include an evaluation of the possible significance of the works. (Author/RH)
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON SIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES

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There has recently been an upsurge of interest in the sign language of the deaf—especially in the variety used in the US—American Sign Language (ASL). Linguistics departments have begun to offer courses in Sign, and some now accept it as fulfilling the FL requirement for the Ph.D. This wider recognition of the existence of sign language has been paralleled by increased theoretical and empirical studies, some of which have been presented as papers at academic conferences. Current issues dealt with in these studies include the implications of sign language for linguistic theory, and the possible impact of findings from linguistics on the role of sign language in deaf education. Unfortunately, much of the material is unpublished and therefore difficult to obtain, especially for the uninstructed would be researcher.

The following bibliography is intended to facilitate introduction to the field of sign language studies. It is a list of selected published works in English in which sign language is viewed from several different aspects. Included are theoretical studies (nos. 1, 5, 6, 9, 19, and 21); works relating Sign to other visual communication systems (nos. 2, 3, and 10); historical studies (nos. 9 and 12); textbooks of ASL (nos. 8 and 16); psycholinguistic studies including Sign acquisition (nos. 2, 5, 10, 11, 14, 17, 22, and 23), and sociolinguistic studies (nos. 15 and 24). Works on topics related to Sign, such as kinesics, gestural system, where Sign is not mentioned, are not included, but are referenced in the bibliographies of the listed works and in Hayes (1957).

The orientation in the listed works tends to be toward consideration of what criteria a language must satisfy, and whether these are met by Sign. The annotations are summaries of the contents of each work, and often include an evaluation of their possible significance.

The best single work to begin reading is probably no. 20, Stokoe’s Semiotics and Human Sign Language. The reader’s attention is also drawn to the journal Sign Language Studies, 1972- (Linstok Press, 9308 Mintwood St, Silver Spring MD 20901). Selected articles from this journal are listed here, but as a whole it is highly recommended. In addition, an important work which is not listed is a Dictionary of American Sign Language by W.C. Stokoe, C. Cronberg, and D. Casterline (Washington, D.C., Gallaudet College Press, 1965). This is currently out of print, but is to be reprinted by Linstok Press.


This article demonstrates that ASL has a level of structure comparable to phonology where morpheme structure conditions and constraints on deletion are found. The morpheme structure conditions are outlined, and possible and impossible types of deletion are examined. The conditions and constraints are shown to be related to the articulatory dynamics of the hands and body. It also shows how artificial sign languages violated some conditions of phonological naturalness, and implications are drawn from this for language planning as related to the deaf.


This report of an experiment comparing rates of production in ASL and speech is valuable as an excellent introduction to the nature of sign language as well as for its empirical findings. After a brief description of production aspects of ASL, it is reported that signs take considerably longer to produce than spoken words, but that the rate of proposition production is equal in ASL and spoken English. Explanation for this result provides further insight into particular properties of ASL. This article is a good demonstration of how sign language and spoken language parallel in function, but diverge in structural properties.


This study raises the possibility that sign language may have therapeutic potential for children with speech disorders. The subject of the study, who failed to acquire any speech by the age of 9, was found to make progress in ASL comparable to that of normal children first learning speech. There was also a marked improvement in his social behavior.


This book is less comprehensive than its title would suggest. However, it is a popular and amusing description of a wide range of signs. Including illustrations, though it is left to the linguist to determine the exact nature of their relation to language. In addition to the signs of the deal, the author covers signs in folklore, superstition, radio and television, sales and auctions, gambling casinos, and general signs. An important contribution of the work is its demonstration that gestural signs are learned, and not instinctive or imborn.


A video-taped study of the signing of a hearing child born to deaf parents is used to demonstrate the difficulty of translating signs into oral language. This article emphasizes that
our traditional oral conception of language is ethnocentri
can be only be developed outside the oral language framework.

6. Closer, A.V. Gestural Sign Language and the Study of

This article points to the dangers of preconceived gesture
systems as to their structure, categories, and how they are
processed in the brain. With regard to the sign language of
the deaf, the difficulties are demonstrated in a study of the
inclusion of a story from English into British Sign Language.
The author advocates the development of a normal national
system for sign language which will represent naive signers'
intuitions rather than the imposed categories of a verbal-au-
ditory system. This would, he feels, make the relation between
oral and visual language clearer.


This is a broad survey of human visual communication, un-
der which Critchley subsumes gesture as used during speech,
deo sign language, Indian sign language, the signs of deaf
societies, symbolism in art and literature, and theatrical and
rhetorical gestures. The book is a rich source of mainly an-
ecdotal information, and can be appreciated as such. One
may not agree with Critchley's inclusion of all the systems in
what he calls one aspect of language, or with his view of deaf
sign language as natural, instinctive, and universal. Such a
view is nevertheless current as well as historical interest,
as it raises the question of what criteria a natural language
must satisfy. This book has now been expanded and re-issued

8. Fant, L.J. Ameslan. An Introduction to American Sign Lan-

This textbook of ASL is intended to be used in conjunction
with live demonstrations and films prepared by the publisher.
It includes photographic illustrations of signs. The foreword
has a clear definition of sign language, and an explanation of
the distinction between the two systems used in the U.S.
signed English or English, and ASL or Amesian. The focus of
the book is on the syntax of Amesian, for Fant aims to
put signs together the way deaf people do. This emphasis on
syntax makes the book interesting to theoretical linguists as
well as potential practitioners of Sign.


A detailed examination of some of the historical processes
in ASL shows that in general, signs become less iconic and
more arbitrary. This is explained in terms of tendencies to-
ward symmetry, displacement of particular types, assimilation
and fluidity, the limitation of lexical content to the hands, and
morphological preservation. The author suggests that ASL may
be moving toward a linguistically ideal proportion of icons and
symbols.


This is the report of a project investigating the extent to
which a chimpanzee can be taught human language. ASL is
used because of the considerable manual dexterity of chi-
impanzees as contrasted with their ability to vocalize. Though
the project focuses on its chimpanzee user, rather than sign
language as such, it provides an affirmation of the adequacy of
Sign in a communcative context, and is interesting in its
relatively rare assumption that ASL is a valid and representa-
tive human language.

(Reprinted from Southern Folklore Quarterly, XXI, 218-317.)

This is a list of almost 1,000 works on gestures considered
from many different points of view. Most of them were pub-
ished in the first part of this century, but there are also some
from the 18th and 19th centuries. Most are in English, but
some are in German, French, Italian, Dutch, and Icelandic.
The brief annotations for each entry reveal a wide range of
areas where gesture is investigated—religion, rhetoric, drama,
ballet, etc. This is a contrasted write from a diversity of
professional backgrounds, including anthropology, sociol-
ogy, psychology, communication theory, literature and jour-
nalism. The style and scope of the works vary.

12. Klima, Edward S. and Ursula Bellugi. The Signs of Lan-
guage in Child and Chimpianzee, 1972, in T. Alloway, L.
Kremer, and P. Panier, eds., Communication and Affect, Ac-

A basic discussion of the nature of language is followed by
a brief review of language experiments with chimpanzees,
and a consideration of language modes, and a description of the
combination of the three simultaneous parameters in the signs
of ASL. This is well illustrated by photographs and exemplified
with data from memory tests. Observations are reported on
Sign as a first language which show close parallels to the ac-
quition of spoken language.

Indians," 1881, in Sebeok, T.A., ed. Approaches to Semiotics

For modern readers, the greatest value of Mallery's classic
monograph is probably its informative aspect, for extracts
from his dictionary give detailed illustrations and comparative
descriptions of many Indian signs. The author also presents
his own theory of signs, including their historical origin, rela-
tion to gestures and to deaf-mute sign language, and to ide-
ographic writing systems. He is firmly of the opinion that there
is a universal, natural sign language under which all systems
may be subsumed. Whatever the view of the reader, Mallery's
theories and data should stimulate further thought and re-
search into the nature and definition of language.

Language Studies, 3, 61-71.

This article raises more problems than it solves, and that
is its main value. The author shows how more research into
aphasia and deafness might yield significant results for both
fields of investigation. He is particularly interested in the
relation between the representation of visual and auditory lan-
guage in the brain, and suggests that investigation of the abil-
ity of the deaf to read ideographs, as compared with pho-
nemonic, writing systems might reveal the significance of a
phonological component in the brain.

15. O'Rourke, T.J. A Basic Course in Manual Communication.

The title of this book is self-explanatory. It is included here
as a readily available source of over 700 illustrated signs used
by the American deaf, whether in signed English or ASL. The
signs are grouped into lessons, with corresponding sentences
for practice. However, the signs would be taught by the
teacher, and would vary according to the system being
presented.

17. Schlesinger, H.S. Language Acquisition in Four Deaf
Children, in Schlesinger, H.S. and K. Meadow, Sound and

This is one of the few published studies of the acquisition
of sign language. Three categories of children are studied:
deaf children of deaf parents, deaf children of hearing parents,
and hearing children with a deaf grandmother. The similari-
ties that can be found in the pattern of sign language acquisi-
tion as compared with previously documented cases of spoken
language acquisition are remarkable, and lead the author to
conclude "that the milestones in sign language acquisition
generally parallel the milestones of spoken language acquisi-
tion. In addition, an interesting finding which could have con-
siderable implications for deaf education is that knowledge of sign language does not impede speech acquisition, but actually seems to contribute to it.


The author attempts to place the relation between sign language and other gestural communication in a historical context. He traces the history of systems of counting on the hands and of manual alphabetic systems with interesting illustrations from texts dating as far back as the 10th century. He shows the importance of gesture in antiquity and again in the Renaissance, and distinguishes between rhetorical gestures and symbolic gestures, considering the latter to be the basis for the development of the sign language of the deaf as promoted by De l'Epee in France in the 18th century. Siger sees modern sign language as a highly developed system of conveying information, but he stresses its artistic potential, which it has in common with nonverbal communication.


This begins as a report of the first national conference on sign language held by the Center for Applied Linguistics in December 1969. The account is interesting as a summary of sign language as viewed by several different scholars. The emphasis is on definitional questions. In the second part of his article Stokoe gives an explanation of the various modes of manual communication used in the U.S.


ASL is analyzed and compared to spoken language in a semantic framework. The author strongly counters the view that sign language is primitive, natural or universal, and stresses that its symbolic function is of most importance. He presents his own 'choremic' and 'morphochmeric' analysis, by which he is able to demonstrate that Sign has duality comparable to spoken language. He also discusses the syntax and semantics of Sign, clearly demonstrating that theories of spoken language are not quite adequate to deal with its mainly because characteristics resulting from the visual modality. The book includes some information on current research in sign language, and also reprints of articles by Woodward ("A Transformational Approach to Syntax"), Stokoe ("Sign Language Diglossia"), and Williams ("Bilingual Experiences of a Deaf Child"). This work is to be particularly valued for its contribution to the validation of Sign as a natural language.


This is a fascinating excursion into the realm of possibilities of the ways that the human language capacity may be expressed in the syntax of sign language. After an explanation of the varieties of Sign used in the deaf community, and their relation to one another end to English, the author gives an account of a taped performance of a prose poem in sign language. This is the basis for an exploration of the syntax of Sign, showing that it is by no means restricted. In addition to better known characteristics of ASL, he describes how signs are modified individually in an analogic way to represent space, time, and motion.


It is shown from tests on two matched groups of deaf adolescents, that those who had communicated manually from infancy were superior in reading, speechreading, and writing. The authors conclude that early manual communication has a positive effect on 'language skills' (i.e. English). They do not, however, consider its validity as a linguistic system in its own right. They avoid embroiling themselves in the oral/manual controversy in deaf education by advocating greater use of manual communication only at preschool age.


From his study of Dutch and American deaf children, the author traces the developmental process by which 'natural' or motivated signs become formalized and free of motivation, so that they can be used independently of a given situation. He is primarily concerned with the 'minimal free unit of usage' and its symbolic nature. He also discusses metaphorical, ironic and idiomatic usage, sublinguistic signing, mimicry, and the relation of signing to speech and finger spelling.


This is probably one of the first attempts to apply the concept of pidgin to a visual-manual mode. The author suggests that Pidgin Sign English (PSE) may be an intermediate variety between ASL and standard English, and he demonstrates that it has characteristics in common with both these languages as well as with other pidgins. Its sociological features are discussed, and it is suggested that like ASL, PSE could be described within the framework of variation theory.


3. A Selected Bibliography on Language Teaching and Learning. Sophia A. Behrens and Kathleen McLane. ED 100 189.


16. Listening Comprehension in the Foreign Language Classroom. Terence Quinn and James Wheeler. ED 104 176.


30. Children's Categorization of Speech Sounds in English. Charles Read.


33. ERIC Documents on Foreign Language Teaching and Linguistics: List Number 14. Peter A. Eddy and Kathleen McLane.

34. A Selected Bibliography on Sign Language Studies. Margaret Deuchar.