



PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

LECTURE 11

SIGN LANGUAGE

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INTRODUCTION TO SIGN LANGUAGE

- Sign language is an ad hoc system of communication among those who are deprived of spoken language (deaf ones). It is a mere system a few gestures that signers use to communicate ideas to the others. Signers make use of hands, facial gestures and nodding to convey the desired message to the others.
- A point worth mentioning is that there is only one sign language around the world, however, there may be slight variations area wise. For instance: people in one area use one sign for an object and the same object is signaled by another one. Hence, it is necessary to understand the nature of sign language first.

SIGN LANGUAGE, MYTHS AND REALITY

- The first step in considering the nature of sign language is to eradicate traditional misconception about its structure and function. Popular opinion about the matter are quite plain:
- sign language is not a real language but little more than a system of sophisticated gesturing; signs are simply pictorial representations of external reality ; and because of this there is just one sign language, which can be understood all over the world. It is now clear from results of the first research studies of this subject, dating from the 1960s that all of the prevailing opinions about sign language are wrong.

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- Since modern research focuses the nature of sign language, a clear distinction must be drawn, first of all, between sign language and gesture. To sign is to use the hands in a conscious, 'verbal' manner, to express the same range of meaning as would be achieved by speech (especially grammar).
- By contrast, gesturing is far less systematic and comprehensive; there are in fact, very few hand gestures and these are used in ad hoc way to express a small number of basic notions.
- Everyone can gesture but few have learned to sign. (a similar point can be made about facial expressions and body movements)

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- Some of the hand movements of sign language can be plausibly interpreted by non-signers because they reflect properties of external world (they are iconic); the very vast majority of signs are not.
- It is possible that many signs are iconic when they are first devised, but little information is available about this point in the past, which some have speculated may be as early as the human language.

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- As a result of linguistic change and as a result of independent creation in different parts of the world, no single sign language exist. There are many such as (American, French, Danish.....) and they are not mutually intelligible.
- They use different signs and different rules of sign formation and sentence structure. Even within an area that uses the same spoken language, the difference may be so great as to preclude mutual comprehension– as happens, for example British and American sign language (BSL & ASL).

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- Sign languages have structure of comparable complexity to spoken and written language and perform a similar range of functions. There are rules governing the way signs are formed and how they are sequenced— rules that have to be learned either as children (eg. From deaf parents) or as an adult (eg. Working with deaf).
- There are a large number of signs available within a sign language (around 4000 have been recorded in ASL) and these

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- Are used to convey considerable range of meaning.
- When two fluent signers communicate, they provide impressive evidence of the creative potential of signs, and its social and psychological reality as language.

MODERN DEVELOPMENTS

- Very little information is available about the early history of sign languages. Reference to deaf signings are found in Greek and Roman writings, but there are no details. In recent times the study of signing is dated from the works of French educator, Abbe, Charles Michel de Epee (1712--89) who in 1775 developed a sign language for a school of deaf in Paris. The origin of his system are obscure: several of his signs were the modification of those used by French native deaf population but he also made some of the Spanish manual alphabet,

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- And he may have incorporated some of the signs used by Spanish Benedictine monks. Several foreign educators studied at his school and the influence of this system spread to many parts of the world including Russia, Ireland and America.
- When a sign language becomes widely used, it develops the same kind of dialects and varieties as occur in spoken language.

SIGN LANGUAGE STRUCTURE

- A great deal is now known about the structure of natural signing, following several years of detailed study of American sign language.
- It has become clear that this language has a highly developed structure which needs to be described in its own terms.

THE USE OF SIGN SPACE

- The expressive potential of sign can be appreciated only by looking at signing behavior in some detail. There is, first of all, a three dimensional sign space, vertically, this consists of the distance just below the waist to the top of the head (signs are rarely made above the head, below the waist or towards the back of the head or body), laterally. The space forms a bubble which extends toward in front of signer from extreme right to the extreme left.

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- Within the space there is room to make an indefinitely large number of signs and it is possible to see several organizational principles operating.
- Time relationship can be expressed by dividing the space into natural (present), future forward (future) and future back (past) areas. These areas can be used both for tense form and for time adverbs (now, then, next, last etc.).

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- Several person (pronouns) can be distinguished using different spatial areas.
- You is front centre;
- one third person form is signed to the right and another to the left.
- Questions can be signaled by appropriate accompanying facial expression, such as raised eyebrows and backwards head tilt.
- The use of pause between signs or sign sequences is available to mark grammatical boundaries.
- The whole spatial area can be enlarged or confined to express louder or quieter signing.

TYPES OF SIGN LANGUAGE

- several sign languages may be in regular use within the boundaries of a particular speech community. The most widely used are the concept-based systems that have developed naturally among the deaf communities, and it is these that are most commonly referred to as “sign language” American sign language, British sign language, Danish sign language etc.
- In addition, in recent years educators and linguists have devised several new kinds of signing systems. These are mainly taught to deaf children or adults, but they are also sometimes found being used with other handicapped populations.

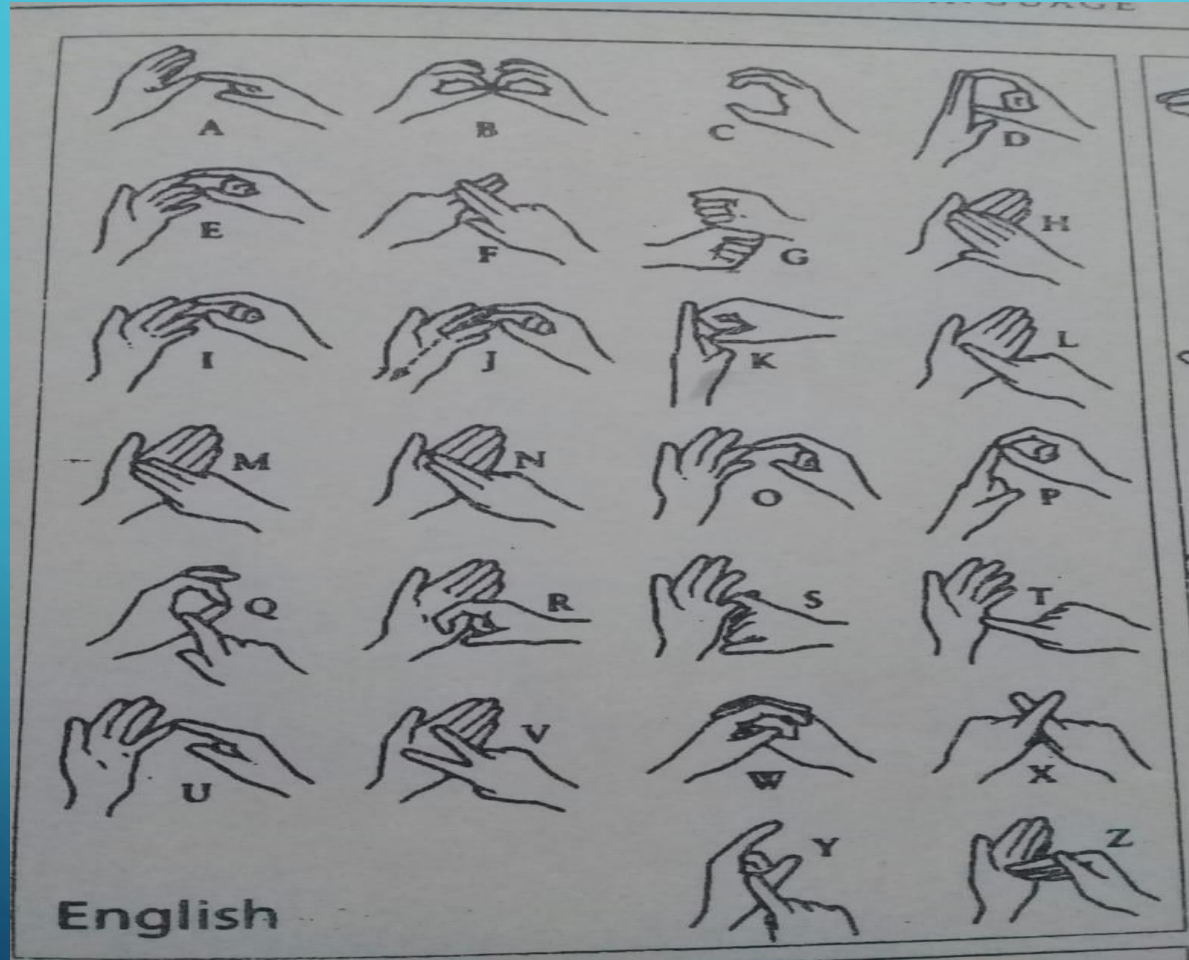
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- the greatest proliferation of new signing system has been within English speech community. Most approaches involve modifications of ASL or BSL, with the aim of bringing the signing closer to spoken English. Several of these systems emerged in the late 1960s in the USA, notably seeing essential English 1966 and its two derivatives, linguistics of visual English 1971 and signing exact English 1972.
- Other systems were devised that closely followed the structure of speech, such as signed English 1969 and manual English 1972 given the urgent need for Progress in the educational domain, and the sincerity and enthusiasm of the creators, all of the systems have been put to valuable use in a range of teaching situations. However, objective techniques for evaluating their strengths and weakness have not so far been devised.

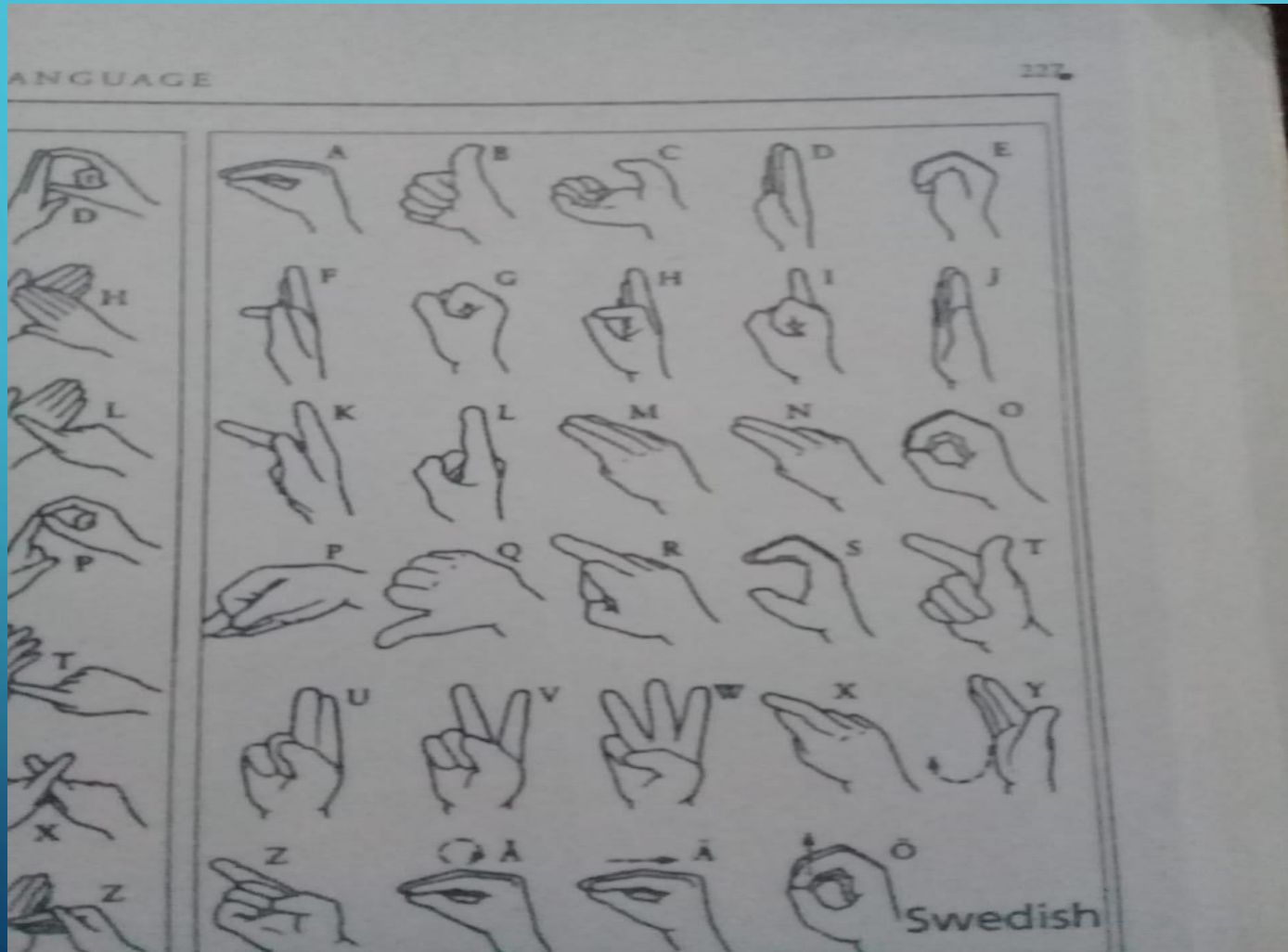
FINGER SPELLING

- Finger spelling is a signing system in which each letter of the ordinary alphabet is given its own sign.
- This system can be applied to any language that has developed an alphabetic writing system.
- Study the signs for different letters in some languages of the world.

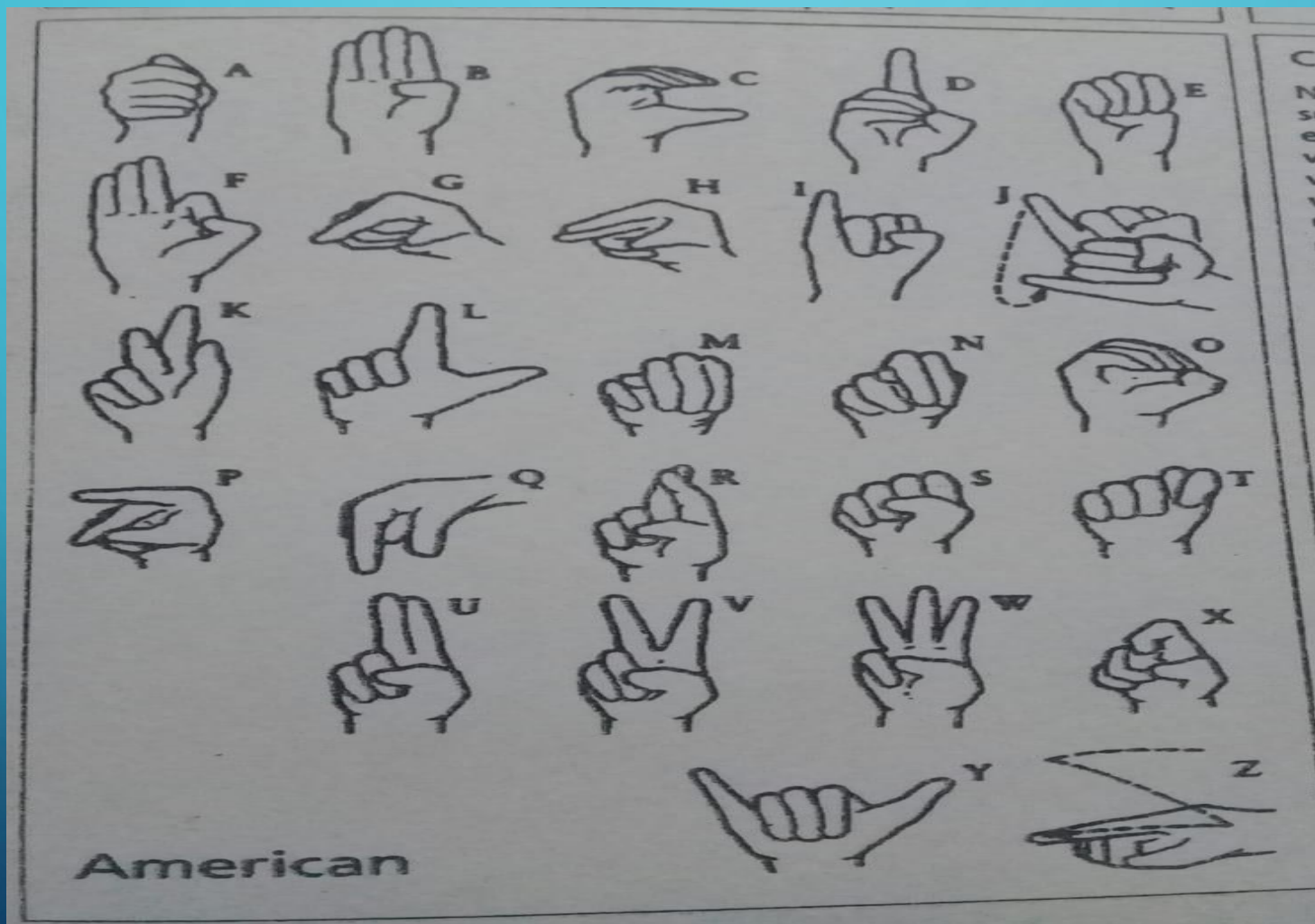
ENGLISH SIGN SPELLINGS



SWEDISH SIGN SPELLINGS



AMERICAN SIGN SPELLINGS



COMPARISON OF SIGN LANGUAGE AND SPOKEN LANGUAGE

- There are different spoken/common languages in the world.
- Language has its own vocabulary.
- Language has dialects and accents
- There only single sign in the world.
- Sign language has no vocabulary rather few signs.
- It has no dialect or accent but same everywhere.

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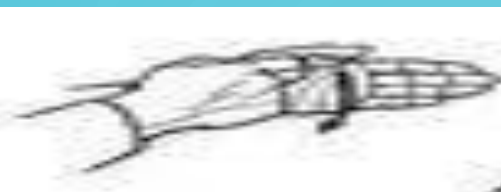
- It has speakers.
 - It can be listen.
 - It is a formal system of communication.
 - It can be heard from distance.
 - It can be heard and if speaker is not visible.
- It has no speaker rather signers.
 - It cant be listen.
 - It is an ad hoc system of communication.
 - It cant be heard from distance.
 - Visibility of signer is must.

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- It has Idiolects, dialects and sociolects.
- It changes with the passage of time.
- New word are added in it.
- It is unique for all.
- It is constant.
- No new sign is added.



Hi.



What



is



your



name?



My



name



is



M i k e.



Glad



to

GLAD, HAPPY, JOY: Move the flat hands in forward circles as fingers touch the chest alternately or in unison. One hand can be used.
HEL HELLO: Place the right / hand at the forehead and move it to the right. Or fingerspell H-L.
IS: Place right / hand at the

TO: Touch the left vertical index fingertip with the right index fingertip.
WHAT: Move the tip of the right index finger across the left flat palm.
YOUR, YOURS, HIS, HER, THEIR: Push the right flat palm forward toward the person being spoken to. If it

move it to the right.



"Hello"



"Goodbye"



"Please"



"You're Welcome"



"Yes"



"Sorry"

**Simple
Conversation
"sign language"**



"No"



"Thanks"