

INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE : DOMINANTLY ACCEPTED COMMUNICATION OPTION BY THE HEARING IMPAIRED IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Hearing Impairment is a loss of hearing/a reduction in the ability to perceive sounds from environment which adversely affects an individual's ability to communicate with others. It ranges from mild to profound. Technically exact description of Hearing Impairment is hard of hearing and deaf. In children hearing problems can affect the ability to communicate which may lead to learn alternate communication such as manual communication which includes Sign Language, Finger Spelling, Cued Speech etc., Children and persons with hearing impairment have wide number of communication options. Sign language is one among them. Sign Languages are complete languages for them like any other language for hearing people. These sign languages are the own right with their own store of sign-words, sign concepts and rules for conveying messages to the other person. Sign languages are different from country to country. Indian sign language is the "native" language used by the Deaf community in India. It is a visual gestural language, unlike spoken languages like Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, English, Marathi, Bengali, Kannada etc. Indian sign language is the widely accepted and preferred form of language used by Deaf people when they communicate with each other in India.

Keyword: - Hearing Impairment, Communication option, Manual Communication and Indian Sign Language.

1. HEARING IMPAIRMENT

Hearing Impairment is a loss of hearing which adversely affects an individual's ability to communicate with others. This is also a reduction in the ability to perceive sounds from environment, may range from slight to complete inability. Technically exact description of Hearing Impairment is someone who is hard of hearing or who has no hearing (deaf). Hearing Impairment is also known as Hearing loss. Hearing loss may occur in one or both ears. Hearing loss comes in many forms. It can range from a mild to profound loss. When any person has mild hearing loss can miss certain high-pitched sounds, such as the women and children's voice. Profound hearing loss means the person cannot hear anything at all; they are unable to detect sound, even at the highest volume possible[3]. In children hearing problems can affect the ability to communicate which may lead to learn alternate communication such as manual communication.

2. COMMUNICATION

Communication is exchange or transfer of thoughts i.e. information, ideas, feelings, opinions, plans etc between two or more persons in many different ways such as by touch, gazing, raised written language, or sign language etc. Some of these are examples of verbal or linguistic communication systems and some are of non-verbal or non-linguistic communication systems. Of these systems hearing community uses verbal/speech and written, and the rest non-hearing community uses non-verbal means of communication i.e. facial expressions, gestures, miming, sketches, etc. In general everyday interactions we use any one of these for exchanging messages. We may not even be aware that we are using ways to communicate. When we try to understand the process of communication in human beings we see that verbal language occupies a very important and large part of it. It is a major way of communication i.e. speech is only one but a primary way or mode of using language. The verbal language being sound based and is highly dependent on the sense of hearing. There are non-verbal means of communication generally used by hearing impaired[6].

In our society vocal-verbal communication is at the core of the process of communication. Verbal language is the cement of the society. Everything in the daily life like thinking, reasoning, explaining, interacting with others, listening to the TV or the radio, or reading for entertainment and joy, or for gaining knowledge or information, planning various activities etc are done by the hearing community through the medium of verbal language. One who has acquires the language system of the speech community can easily and naturally become part of it and is likely to lead a better and meaningful life. Hearing loss creates challenges in this dual process of natural acquisition and effective utilization of verbal language. We can deal this challenge of the natural process of acquisition and effective utilization of a language and to the extent possible, the attainment of motor skills of speech, and thus facilitate verbal communication skills in case of children with hearing impairment. With effective communication is considered as vital to survival in this world by both 'Hearing' and Non-Hearing " communities, these people are acquiring it in a very different way.

The Hearing people predominantly use the aural-oral mode of communication based on the sense of hearing to fulfill their day to day life activities. Later they acquired reading and writing with the help of vision in the schools for the same spoken language and any other language for communication and education purposes. Non-Hearing people (Hearing Impaired population) typically use the visual manual mode of communication usually Sign language. The hearing impaired children either learn from their peers or parents but adults with hearing impairment acquires from their peers. We need to remember that the acquisition and learning sign language is not that simple[8].

3. COMMUNICATION OPTIONS

A communication option or mode or modality or method is the means by which the hearing impaired child and their family receive and express the language. The choice of a communication modality that facilitates language development and allows the hearing impaired child to readily engage in communication interchanges with family and caregivers is a primary issue throughout childhood [2]. There are a variety of communication options available for a child who is hearing impaired, since every child is unique and diverse in their response to these techniques such as Oral Method, Cued Speech Method, Manual Communication Methods (Sign Language, Finger Spelling etc.), Total Communication (TC) Method.

4. SIGN LANGUAGE

Manual methods of communication utilize a hearing impaired child's ability to communicate through visual stimuli such as finger spelling and sign languages. Sign languages of the deaf communities make use of their sense of vision and manual signs for communication. These are complete languages for them like any other language for hearing people. These sign languages are the own right with their own store of sign-words, sign concepts and rules for conveying messages to the other person.

Sign language is a visual-gestural language, which for a long time, has been used by deaf population for interpersonal communication. It is language like any other language. It has evolved naturally through the need of human beings to communicate with each other such as hearing to deaf and vice-versa. It is as elaborated and richly structured as any other spoken language. And it is not a shortened and ungrammatical form of spoken language. It

is very useful and essential means of communication for the deaf people and those who deal with them closely for many purposes in their daily life. However, sign languages are quite different from spoken languages in many aspects. In spoken/verbal/written language, words are arranged sequentially as per the grammar rules in the respective language. But in language its features are arranged simultaneously to create sign irrespective of order of the sentence for meaning. A young deaf child of hearing parents does not know either of the languages such as verbal or sign. We take great pleasure in welcoming you to the world of Indian sign language. Before getting started, let us learn what Indian Sign Language is all about.

5. INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Sign language is also a type of language consisting of hand movements, facial expressions and body language to communicate. It is used predominantly by the deaf and people who can hear but cannot speak. But it is also used by some hearing people, most often families and relatives of the deaf, and interpreters who enable the deaf and wider communities to communicate with each other. Sign Language is developed as a language to meet the need of the Deaf to communicate with each other and with others too. Sign Language is a visual language in which the use of the hands, face, head and upper torso is processed by the eyes.

Indian sign language is the “native” language used by the Deaf community in India. It is a visual gestural language, unlike spoken languages like Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, English, Marathi, Bengali, Kannada etc. Spoken languages are auditory-vocal in nature. This means that the grammatical rules of Indian sign language differ from that of spoken languages. That is, the signs in sign language are put together in a different way when compared to English or any other spoken language. Indian sign language is the preferred form of language used by Deaf people when they communicate with each other in India[13].

5.1 Components of Indian Sign Language

Though, Indian sign language differs from region to region, the following six components are generally used in Indian Sign Language are Signs / Gestures, Finger spelling, Facial expression, Body language, Lip reading and Mime. Undoubtedly, each component plays a very important role in Indian Sign Language. Fluency and correctness in each component will determine how good a person communicates in Sign Language. It should be understood clearly that Sign Language is a language in its own right. It also has its own grammar and structure and also certain rules of the language[13].

Signs / Gestures refer to the vocabulary of sign language. Each word uttered in a spoken language would usually have a counterpart in sign language. But, it is also important to note that not all words in the vocabulary of a spoken language has an exact translation in sign language, and vice versa. Gestures, on the other hand, refers to the natural signs like “come”, “go”, etc., which even hearing people tend to use while communicating with others.

The alphabets of the spoken language, when translated into signs, gives what is known as **Finger spelling**. Since sign language does not have exact translation of certain words in spoken language, finger spelling is used to spell out certain words, like nouns and technical terms.

Facial expression is the most important component of sign language. It is often said that “the face is the mirror of the heart”. This is very true while communicating through sign language. Many natural feelings like, happiness, anger, sadness, fear, etc., can be shown through facial expressions. Facial expressions are also used to show the degree of comparison. For example, the difference between “hot” and “very hot” can be easily explained using varying facial expressions, though, the same sign is used in both the cases.

Body language is also crucial in sign language. Appropriate body movements shows the direction in which communication is taking place / message is being conveyed, and appropriate body language shows the mood of the person.

Acting out a situation without using sound or speech is referred to as **Mime**. Since sign language depends on visual form of communication to a large extent, miming becomes a perfect tool to explain or enact a particular situation. A person can use a combination of miming and sign language to become an excellent signer.

All the components discussed above along with **Lip movement** are essential for good signing skills.



Fig -1: Standard Manual Alphabet

5.2 Features of Indian Sign Language

Like spoken words, sign language can also be broken down into specific parts or distinctive features. Sign language experts have found that individual signs have three features: handshapes, location and movement.

Handshapes refers to how the hand is formed.

Location refers to where that handshape is placed with relation to the body.

Movement refers to where and how the handshape moves.

Almost all signs are made in an area around the signer called the **Sign space**.

It is an imaginary rectangle in front of the body - an area extending from the top of the head to the waist and from shoulder to shoulder. This enables the receiver (the person watching the signer) to view the signer's face and hands at the same time. Signs for the words in this dictionary are depicted by line drawings of persons signing. Each line drawing is accompanied by a short narration of how to sign perfectly for the given word.

5.3 Functions of a sign language

Sign Language performs a number of functions based on the purpose of its use among deaf/Deaf. Some of its functions are as under:

Instrumental: The way an deaf individual satisfies the need by signing for something

Regulatory: Controlling another's behaviour

Interactional: Used for maintaining interpersonal relationship

Personal: Where one explains through signs about oneself

Heuristic: To find out about the world in general

Imaginative: Where one explains through signs about one's imagination

Informational: To seek and give varied types of information

6. CONCLUSION

Sign Language is a naturally evolved language like other oral languages. It is used by persons with hearing impairment for day to day life communication. It is considered as a mother tongue of persons with deafness. Like other languages it is also an independent language with complex grammar. It involves naturally evolved visual-manual signs. In India majority of the hearing impaired are using Indian Sign Language as their one of the communication option.

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