

Comparative Study of Nonverbal Sign Language and Verbal Oral Language

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Abstract

Sign and oral languages are comparatively analyzed and compared in current study. Investigating common points, the points of difference, advantages and disadvantages and weakness and strengths of each one of these two languages show that sign language is a regular arbitrary system that follows specific rules. In order to convey the meaning in this communicational system, manual communication is used instead of sound patterns. The thing wrongly believed is that sign language has a direct relationship with oral one. In other words, it is an oral language done by sign language but scientific studies have proved the reverse relation. Despite all these explanations, the relationship between sign languages and oral ones cannot be denied. Comparative study in this field will be done in this paper.

Keywords: sign language, gestures, speech language, imaginary gestures, technical gestures, folk gestures

Introduction

Sign language is a specific, arbitrary, regular and developed language system that instead of sound or written patterns uses visual signs patterns (simultaneous combination of shape, direction and the movements of hands, arms or body and face moods for fluently expressing thoughts of speaker) (Bauman, 2008). Sign language can be very various but today for conveying the meaning, manual relationship (nonverbal relationship) is used instead of sound patterns. Sign languages have acquired some movements through a general recognition while other languages (verbal oral language) aren't the same and aren't necessarily formed from a coherent recognition. One of written records of sign language in the fifth century BC was found in Kratilus of Plato where Socrates said "if we didn't have voice or tongue and we wanted to say something to each other, wouldn't we try to make some gestures by the movements of our hands, head and body members, exactly like deaf people of current era?" It seems that a group of deaf people used to use sign languages in the past.

Background of the study

John Pablonet published the book whose name was converting letters and art for training deaf people for speaking, in Madrid in 1620 and this is the book which has been remained basically without any changes in France and Northern America (Bauman, 2008). After publishing this book, sign language was formed for deaf students.

There is a wrong public belief based on that, sign languages are somehow dependent on oral languages while sign languages are those very oral languages that are pronounced by hands' movements or they are invented by hearing people (Stokoe, 1976).

Manual alphabet (Finger spelling) in sign languages are often used for special and technical names or specialized words derived from speech languages. Using finger spelling had been considered as witness that sign languages are simple forms of oral languages but in fact it is a unique tool among the others. Finger spelling sometimes can be as a source for new signs that are called lexical signs. Geographical and cultural effects of communities are significant on sign language. Despite this, it should not be ignored that sign language like speech one has a public language that is reputed for international sign (it used to be called Gestuno in past). Recent studies

have indicated that while international sign is a kind of Chinese and English language combination (because of phonetic use of English and sign use of Chinese), they concluded this language is more complicated than common spoken English and in fact is more similar to sign language. Sign linguistics shows that sign languages are rich and complicated like any other oral language despite wrong belief which says these are not real languages. Professional linguists studied many sign languages and found out that they all have linguistic components that need classifying like real languages. Sign languages aren't imitating at all and it can be said that they are arbitrary and often optional. It is noticeable that a wide category of grammar interpretation can be seen in sign languages.

HOLME acronym is a summary of the components of a sign which include hand movement, orientation, location, movement and eye contact or face mood that are shown in figure 1.



Figure 1: The acronym of sign language

Despite all these explanations, the relationship between sign languages and oral ones cannot be denied. This is wrongly believed among people that sign languages are dependent on oral language like finger spelling that is in fact a tool and is used as a source of signs that are called lexical signs.

We have to remember that sign languages are independent from oral ones for example oral language is completely common between English and American people but sign language is not the same. As it was mentioned before sign language is a combination of English and Chinese language.

The subject above does not say that each country has one sign language but there might be several sign languages for one oral language.

Sign languages use unique features of visual method. Oral language is single dimensional but sign language is multi-dimensional that means in addition to its visualization, hand and face movements can be also used to express the idea.

Sign languages typology

Language typology refers to Edward Sapir that is separated based on the structure of word and the differentiations of construction levels such as verb conjugations, multi combination and participatory. The relationship of sign language and speech language is different from writing. Sound systems of speech language form are basically ordinal while in sign language because they

are considered non-ordinal because of using hand, leg and face. Some of deaf people sometimes can be familiar with speech-written system through a lot of effort and to be considered as knowledgeable and efficient. Because of familiarizing speech-written system hardness most of deaf people remain less educated or non-educated.

If we wanted to analyze sign language through cultural attitude we will understand that for communicating different cultures, the sign language of that culture needs to be learned. Nonverbal methods or sign languages are not defined for us in today societies and our teachers still think that subject can be described easier through verbal language while in American societies; people use three nonverbal languages named sign, thing and environment languages (Wittmann, 1991).

The movements and face expression of each country can be considered as a part of that country's culture that not meeting it causes serious damage to that culture. Sign language is not used only for deaf people, the face mood; eye contact and signaling are considered as sign language as well.

The relationship process between two people includes sending message (expressive language) and receiving message (receptive language). Speaker's mind should encode his thought as expressive language signal which is visual or audio and listener should decode this symbol that fragmentation may happen in this path for example there might be a disorder in encoding thought to audio or visual symbol or in receiving the symbol by eye or ear or cohering and reminding them in mind that is effective on understanding relationship process for coping disabled people problems.

Written form of sign language

The relationship of sign language with spoken language is different from written language. Morphological systems of spoken language are usually ordinal that many morphemes are produced repetitively one after another although the languages are not ordinal as result homogenous traditional morphological written systems are ordinal with the best separators for non-ordinal symbols like tone and stress.

Sign languages have the most non-ordinal components with many simultaneous sounds for example the signs may include finger, hand and foot or the movement of both hands in different directions, traditional written systems are not designed for this level of complexity. A little because of this, sign languages are not usually written. In low number of countries the opportunities are provided for deaf people through good education. Many deaf readers can read and write their country's spoken language in appropriate level as efficient educated person. Despite this in many countries, deaf people education is weak or very limited as result many deaf people are less educated or non-educated in common language of their country.

Classifying sign languages

Although the sign languages of deaf people have been usually created in deaf societies beside or among speech languages, they do not have any relationship with speech language and have different grammar structure. A group of sign languages are known as manual coded languages that are more understandable as speech languages sign methods and therefore are dependent on language families of speech languages. For example, there are many English sign codes.

Few historical linguistic researches have been conducted on sign languages and also there are few attempts for determining genetic relationships among sign languages as well as a simple comparison between lexical data and some discussion about that if special sign languages are the accents of one language or languages of one family. Languages may be expanded by immigration, establishing deaf schools (often by foreign educated coaches) or because of political regulations.

Language relationship is common but specifying family classifications is difficult and often unidentifiable that lexical similarity is because of loaning or a main common language. There will

be relationship between sign language and speech one (relationship sign) and between sign languages and gesture systems that are identified by border association. According to an author, Adamorobe sign language may be related to gestural trade jargon used in market through West Africa in vocabulary and areal features including prosody and phonetics. BSL, Auslan and NZSL are usually considered to be a language known as BANZSL. Maritime Sign Language and South African Sign Language are also related to BSL.

Japanese Sign Language, Taiwanese Sign Language and Korean Sign Language are thought to be members of a Japanese Sign Language family. Let's look at the family of French sign language. There are a number of sign languages that emerged from French Sign Language (LSF), or are the result of language contact between local community sign languages and LSF. These include: French, Italian, Quebec, American, Irish, Russian, Dutch, Spanish, Mexican, Brazilian (LIBRAS), Catalan and others.

A subset of this group includes languages that have been heavily influenced by American Sign Language (ASL), or are regional varieties of ASL. Bolivian Sign Language is sometimes considered a dialect of ASL. Thai Sign Language is a mixed language derived from ASL and the native sign languages of Bangkok and Chiang Mai, and may be considered part of the ASL family. Others possibly influenced by ASL include Ugandan sign language, Kenyan sign language, Philippine sign language and Malaysian sign language. The evidences show that Finnish sign language and Swedish sign language and Norway Sign Language belong to the family of Scandinavian sign language. Icelandic sign language is known as the language oriented to Danish sign language although occupational differences had been created in words in development century.

Israeli sign language has been affected by German sign language. According to an SIL report, the sign languages of Russia, Moldova and Ukraine share a high degree of lexical similarity and may be dialects of one language, or distinct related languages. The same report suggested a "cluster" of sign languages centered on Czech Sign Language, Hungarian Sign Language and Slovak Sign Language. This group may also include Romanian, Bulgarian, and Polish sign languages.

Known isolates include Nicaraguan Sign Language, Turkish Sign Language, Kata Kolok, Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language and Providence Island Sign Language. Sign languages of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq (and possibly Saudi Arabia) may be a motive part or may be one dialect of Eastern Arabic Sign Language.

At the end, we will briefly look at the classification of Francis Hayes:

1. Autistic gestures such as peeling nails that convey anger.
2. Technical gestures that are used in technical and trade principles.
3. Vulgar gestures that are those very local gestures.

Conclusion

The most important aspect of human life that differentiates his life from other creatures is the power of communicating and having the language. This distinguishing feature has been effective on all aspects of human life. Not only conveying information is done by language but also feeling is also conveyed through this. Considering global communications that are from the features of modern world and has put the human being in communication waves, attention to language is very important. Today in information and communication era, communication channels are the most important factors in societies. Apart from technical aspects of communication subjects we can see that language has its own effects as well. Among different types of languages, nonverbal sign language has been less paid attention up to now. In this paper, nonverbal sign language and verbal oral language were comparatively investigated. Strengths and opportunities which this language can create are so important that require more studies in this era.

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