



**Deaf Port: Developing European  
Language Portfolio for the Deaf  
and Hearing Impaired**

**Grant Agreement No: 2008 -  
4466/001 - 001**

**Project No. 143512 - BG - 2008 -  
KA2 - KA2MP**



Education and Culture DG

**Lifelong Learning Programme**

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission

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## **Sign language, signing, and gesticulation**

Considerations in developing performance descriptors  
in a European Language Portfolio for  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing people

A Language Training London Report



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prepared for the

**Second Full Consortium Meeting**

**30 - 31 October 2009**

**Plzen, Czech Republic**

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union.  
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# Sign language, signing, and gesticulation & Deaf Port ELP

## Key Issue

A key issue for the development of the Deaf Port ELP concerns the use of sign language, signing, facial expressions and gesticulation by a deaf person when communicating in a foreign language. To what extent should the use of this range of gestures and signs should be included in or referred to in the ELP documents? For example, how should the ELP deal with a native speaker of English who knows British Sign Language (BSL) well and is learning a foreign language – for example Polish – and when learning Polish, this learner also learns Polish Sign Language (PSL)? Note that for the purposes of discussion among the project group, any Deaf or Hard of Hearing owner of the ELP is assumed to be learning Polish, a language not represented in the project consortium.

## GESTURE IN COMMUNICATION

Gesticulation and body language are used in all languages in some way to facilitate, complement or extend communication. Learners of a foreign language may resort to, and receive, more elaborate gestures in an attempt to explain things where words fail, as also happens in various guessing games, for example, where speech is restricted and meanings or answers must be acted out or signalled in some way.

Speakers of any language may use such gestures and signs regularly and proficiently, as a complement to what they are otherwise saying or hearing. Some learners may have the ability to spell out words in a language, having learned the system of fingerspelling used by the DHH. In fingerspelling the letters of the alphabet are spelled on your hands. This encoding system, often known as a manual alphabet, is normally used to spell out the names of people or place, but can be used to spell out utterances which would otherwise be spoken to hearing interlocutors. The BSL fingerspelling alphabet is on the back of the report.

Some DHH users of foreign languages are also proficient in their own sign language, as in the example above. A Sign Language is a visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expression, and body language; sign languages have their own grammatical structure and syntax, and are neither dependent on nor strongly related to the spoken language. There are also those who are proficient in a foreign signed language as well.

Below in this discussion paper is the pragmatic way forward suggested by our team, with illustrations from the UK, and then more detailed argument for the rest of the report.

## Use of Signs

The nature of sign language and the use of the term needs to be clear. Sign language is used to cover two quite different functions: Sign language as transcription of spoken words; and Sign language as an independent language with its own structures and conventions.

## TRANSCRIPTION

The words of a spoken language are spelled out letter by letter in signs (fingerspelling). This method signals the orthographic representation of words which would otherwise be spoken or heard. There is an illustrated chart of British fingerspelling at the end of this paper. We can refer to *Polish fingerspelling*.

## INDEPENDENT LANGUAGE

A Sign Language has its own grammatical structure, syntax and conventions. It communicates as a language and cannot in any sense stand duty for the spoken or written of the hearing. We can refer to *Polish Sign Language (PSL)* which is a separate language, independent of *Polish as a Foreign Language*.

## A THIRD WAY

There is also a third use of signs. In Britain it is known as Sign Supported English or SSE.

SSE is not a language in itself. SSE uses the same signs as British Sign Language but the signs are used in the same order as spoken English. SSE is used to support spoken English, especially within schools where

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children with hearing impairments are learning English grammar alongside their signing, or by people who mix mainly with hearing people.

This one-for-one representation by manually coded equivalents can be referred to as *manually coded Polish*.

### **Treatment in the ELP**

In discussions of how sign language might be reflected in the European Language Portfolio, it is clear that the characteristics of the three systems above are different.

### **TRANSCRIPTION**

Transcription – or Polish spelled out letter by letter in fingerspelling – is considered equivalent to spoken or written Polish. Fingerspelling represents use of a spoken language with a change of delivery mode. This can be compared with writing down key words instead of saying them or drawing pictures or diagrams. Different (hearing) learners of any foreign language might use these assistive devices, as indeed might a DHH learner of PFL.

### **INDEPENDENT LANGUAGE**

PSL is an independent language. It can be learned by any non-native speaker, whether DHH or hearing. It cannot be used as a coded representation of PFL; and if by chance an interlocutor could understand PSL, then the communication is not in PFL but PSL.

Competence in sign languages such as PSL is not included in the Deaf Port work packages. However, competence in signing any language might give a DHH learner skills in the use of gesture, just as an artist learning a foreign language would be helped by the ability to draw well.

Overleaf there are examples from a scheme in the UK where competence in BSL (for hearing people) is mapped out by descriptors close to those in an ELP.

### **THE THIRD WAY**

Manually coded Polish – or in the quoted example, Sign Supported English (SSE) - represents a word-for-word equivalent of spoken Polish, but used as an enabling tool, as a pedagogic device, or as a means of teaching specific things (grammar is mentioned). Successful communicative acts arising from this mode of use are not an end in themselves, but a means to attaining an end. They have parallels in hearing learners being able to recite principal parts of verbs, to decline nouns, conjugate verbs, or accurately pronounce tongue twisters as an enabling device for a better pronunciation in real conversation.

## **Examples and a pragmatic way forward**

### **PRAGMATIC WAY FORWARD**

- (i) State explicitly that the Deaf Port ELP is concerned with the abilities of DHH using and learning the same oral and written second languages which are used and learned by hearing people.
- (ii) Acknowledge that DHH may also learn foreign sign languages (e.g. British deaf person learns Polish sign language or International sign language) or domestic sign languages (e.g. Polish DHH may learn Polish sign language as L2). Allow the Deaf Port ELP to record these abilities as part of the language biography and passport.
- (iii) Recognize that the spoken and written language of their native country might be a second language for some DHH, and competence in this could therefore be recorded in the Deaf Port ELP as part of the language biography and passport.
- (iv) Indicate clearly that fingerspelling of spoken Polish is relevant to second language ability as recorded in the Deaf Port ELP only as a specific sub-skill where there may be many.
- (v) Note that other forms of manually coded communication derived from PSL are excluded from consideration as substitutes for vocalized speech or lip reading. Clarify that the parallel use of signing and vocalized speech (total communication) is not part of the assessment of second language ability in the Deaf Port ELP.

- (vi) State that it is hoped a future project will provide explicit guidance on the recording of learning of sign languages in an ELP (qv. the UK model in Signature).

#### EXAMPLE 1: DIFFERENT PAIRS OF INTERLOCUTORS

In this summary chart of different situations, only 1) and 2) represent the use of language and language learning experience of the DHH user of the Deaf Port ELP.

ELP User	Target Language = Polish	Comment
1) Deaf User	sympathetic Polish speaker	Normal profile: learner of <i>Polish</i> with interlocutor
2) Deaf User using fingerspelling	sympathetic Polish speaker	Normal profile: learner of <i>Polish</i> with interlocutor: fingerspelling a device useful only if known to both
3) Deaf User with own sign language (SL)	? Polish speaker with Deaf User's SL	Deaf User is not using Polish, but signing with a Pole
4) Deaf User with both own and Polish sign language	? Polish speaker with Deaf User's SL and Polish SL	Deaf User is signing with a Pole in either or both of two SLs
5) Deaf User with Polish sign language	Polish speaker with Polish sign language	Normal profile: learner of <i>Polish sign language</i> with interlocutor

#### EXAMPLE 2: SIGN LANGUAGE IN THE UK

Sign Language is a visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expression, and body language. Sign Language is used mainly by people who are Deaf or have Hearing Impairments.

##### British Sign Language

Within Britain the most common form of Sign Language is called British Sign Language (BSL).

BSL has its own grammatical structure and syntax. As a language it is neither dependent on nor strongly related to spoken English.

BSL is the preferred language of between 50,000 - 70,000 people within the UK.

##### Sign Supported English

Another form of sign language used in Britain is known as Sign Supported English (SSE).

SSE is not a language in itself. SSE uses the same signs as BSL but they are used in the same order as spoken English. SSE is used to support spoken English, especially within schools where children with hearing impairments are learning English grammar alongside their signing, or by people who mix mainly with hearing people.

##### Is Sign Language Universal?

Many hearing people have the false impression that Sign Language is a worldwide universal language, but this however is far from the truth. Because of the isolated nature of Sign Language there is even significant variation from city to city within Britain, this is known as regional variation and can be thought of as being similar to regional accents and colloquialisms found in spoken languages. Other countries have their own sign language, many of which are completely unrelated to BSL.

##### BSL - A Recognised Language

After a big campaign BSL was finally recognised by the UK government as an official minority language in 2003. This has led to increased funding for the needs of the communication of people who are Deaf, and an

increased awareness of the language which now has a similar status to that of other minority national languages such as Gaelic and Welsh.

**EXAMPLE 3: GRADED DESCRIPTORS<sup>1</sup> FOR LEARNERS OF SIGN LANGUAGE IN THE UK**

This qualification uses the National Language Standards (CILT, 2005), which define competent performance in British Sign Language (BSL) skills in both receptive (listening) and productive (speaking) units. It is useful for those who work with Deaf people. CILT is the government-funded body known also as the Centre for Language Teaching and Research, which is the official liaison body with the Languages Policy Division of the Council of Europe, who administer the ELP scheme.

This is only a small extract from a complex portfolio-style set of documents describing various levels of competence, from basic conversation to professional interpreter in signing.

Level 3 NVQ in British Sign Language		Units 301 & 302 Knowledge and Skills
K1	<b>Understand</b> and <b>Use</b> a wide variety of sign vocabulary relating to the themes of the specification.	
K2	<b>Understand</b> and <b>Use</b> a range of polite sign language forms of address, greeting and leave-taking and expressions of gratitude, regret, apology and annoyance.	
K3	<b>Understand</b> and <b>Use</b> some less commonly Used technical sign language terms relevant to the contexts chosen.	
K4	<b>Understand</b> and <b>Use</b> signed numerical data.	
K5	<b>Understand</b> and <b>Use</b> a range of appropriate sign language structures using basic verb forms.	
K6	<b>Understand</b> and <b>Use</b> the present, past, future and conditional aspects as appropriate for sign language.	
K7	<b>Understand</b> and <b>Use</b> commonly Used sign language sentence structures in their positive, negative, imperative and interrogative forms.	
K8	<b>Understand</b> and <b>Use</b> a range of complex sign language sentence combinations, of which some are rehearsed models.	
K9	<b>Understand</b> and <b>Use</b> a wide range of linking language.	

<sup>1</sup> From **Signature**: See [www.signature.org.uk/qualification\\_specs.php](http://www.signature.org.uk/qualification_specs.php)

*Signature* is the trading name of Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP), a non-profit making charity active in the UK.



## Detailed discussion of issues

There are still some issues in need of clarification concerning the role of sign language in DHH communication and use of the ELP. This situation is distinctively different from that of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

The needs of the BVI can be conveniently covered by the concept of mode transformation. Speech is converted word for word into text or vice versa. Braille has a similar one-to-one relationship with spoken or written text (a few contractions and combined forms used in Braille but not in conventional speech or writing are not significant enough to materially affect the nature of communication. In any case these do not exist in every language and are used only by a minority of BVI.)

### LIP-READING AND HEARING AIDS

In communicating, DHH may make use of techniques such as lip-reading and devices such as hearing aids or cochlear implants which do not essentially affect the structure and content of an oral message, and are generally unproblematic from the Deaf Port perspective. Any issues would relate to speed and accuracy of processing rather than to significant changes in the message itself.

### TEXT REPLACING SPEECH

There would also not seem to be any particular problem for DHH to hold a conversation using Polish words written in a note book where interlocutors are not able to vocalize the language or make use of fingerspelling or lip reading. This again is a straightforward mode transformation.

### MANUALLY CODED POLISH IS NOT THE SAME AS POLISH SIGN LANGUAGE

The issues here hinge on the nature of sign language. Sign language functions in two basic ways:

- (i) Transcription - the words of a spoken language are
  - a. Spelled out letter by letter in signs (“finger spelling”)
  - b. Represented one-for-one by manually coded equivalents (for convenience this will be referred to as e.g. “manually coded Polish”)
- (ii) As an independent language with its own structures and conventions (e.g. “Polish sign language”)

In discussions of how sign language is to be reflected in the European Language Portfolio, it is clear that (i) (a) above represents use of a spoken language with a necessary change of delivery mode (and can thus be considered the equivalent of the use of Braille by Blind and Visually Impaired and incorporated into the ELP in the same way).

In theory (i) (b) above might also be considered a complete equivalent of spoken Polish. In reality, manually coded Polish may not exist in practice in a sufficiently pure form to stand duty for spoken Polish. Lack of linguistic awareness as well as a natural desire for economy of effort may result in a form of manual communication which is closer to spoken Polish than is Polish sign language, but which is not sufficiently close to it to be truly equivalent.

There exist a number of different forms of manually coded English which maintain varying degrees of closeness to spoken English. Issues relating to these will be considered below. Independent sign languages also present a number of issues for discussion.

### INDEPENDENT SIGN LANGUAGES

In the following discussion, some of the concrete examples are drawn from languages familiar to the writer, whereas general illustrations usually refer to “Polish” (chosen as a “neutral” language – Poland not being represented among the Deaf Port partner countries).

Examples from British Sign Language (BSL) are drawn from <http://www.britishsignlanguage.com/> ,

those from American Sign Language from <http://www.lifeprint.com/>  
and French Sign Language (Langue des Signes Français – LSF) from <http://www.lsfplus.fr/>.

A few relevant aspects of independent sign languages are:

- (i) Sign languages are widely recognized as independent languages.

This status is explicitly recognized by the European Union (for example in the 2003 resolution calling for sign languages to be given similar protection and support to that given to minority languages within the EU). Individual EU member states accord varying degrees of status and recognition to sign languages, but most recognize them in some way. Recently the election of a deaf Hungarian MEP (Dr. Ádám Kósa) has forced the EU to use a sign language as an official EU working language.

The EU would support recording second language proficiency in a “minority” language – for example Catalan – in a European Language Portfolio. It is difficult to justify treating sign languages any differently in this respect.

Alongside political and cultural considerations, the independent status of sign languages is also supported by academic recognition that sign languages possess their own grammatical and syntactic structures as well as a broad range of vocabulary. Sign languages go far beyond simple gestures representing emotions or indicating objects and make use of sophisticated sign conventions allowing a wide variety of abstract concepts to be conveyed. They are thus complete languages capable of expressing the full range of human experience and communication using resources which are just as complex and sophisticated as those available in spoken languages.

- (ii) Sign languages cannot be considered merely as transformations of spoken or written languages even though they may to some extent have their origins in these languages.

In contrast to for example Polish spelled out letter by letter in fingerspelling or manually coded Polish which represents the spoken language more or less word for word, Polish sign language proper is an independent language with its own systems of structure and word order.

Sign languages have links to local spoken languages and are partly derived from them. For example Polish sign language has a great deal in common with spoken Polish, British Sign Language (BSL) with spoken English. However, whatever their origins they are independent languages. A suitable analogy might be that French and Italian are derived from Latin and share a significant part of its vocabulary, but differences in grammar and syntax mean that a French speaker does not automatically have the ability to understand or write Latin. It has to be learned as a separate language. A speaker of Polish SL would have to learn spoken Polish as a separate language (and vice versa).

Ideas can be represented by signs in a direct way without any contact with a spoken language. For example pointing to oneself to indicate “I”. Signs can be expanded or combined – for example pointing to oneself and in several places to the side to indicate “we”. In theory, a sign language might develop entirely independently of any spoken or written language and generate all the necessary means to express complex and abstract ideas by combining and modifying existing signs. In practice, existing sign languages largely developed when hearing people wanted to communicate with or educate the deaf. For this reason, a significant part of the vocabulary of signs may be linked more or less closely to a particular spoken language. This would tend to happen to a considerable extent with abstract words.

An example from BSL may make this clearer. In theory, a sign language might express the concept “Wednesday” by a combination of signs – for example “day” + “3” to show the third day of the week (or “week” + “middle” or a number of other possible conceptualizations). In fact, BSL derives the word for “Wednesday” from spoken English. Interlocking the tips of the fingers of two hands so as to form a sort of “roof” is the sign for “w”. Bringing the hands together twice to form “w” indicates “Wednesday”. (Doubling

the initial letter of the spoken word is used to form other days – Monday and Friday for instance, but not Saturday.)

- (iii) As well as links to local spoken languages, sign languages have elements in common with other sign languages. However, this does not necessarily mean that users of one sign language can completely understand other sign languages.

The process of reinforcing the initial letter of a spoken word to indicate a common abstract word starting with that letter can be seen in various sign languages, but does not mean that the resulting words will be understandable to users of other sign languages.

For example, ASL uses a different sign for “w” (palm forward, raise the three middle fingers, bring the thumb and little finger together with the thumb on top). Holding this sign for “w” and rotating the hand once anticlockwise (as if following the pointer of a clock) provides the sign for Wednesday in ASL. This anticlockwise rotation of an initial letter is also used to generate other weekdays.

In LSF, an anticlockwise rotation of an initial letter is also used to indicate days of the week. In the case of Wednesday, the French “mercredi” has no connection with the letter “w”. Because Tuesday (mardi) also starts with “m”, the second letter is rotated for these words – “mercredi” is LSF “e” (palm forward form fingers into a “claw” as if grasping something) rotated once anticlockwise.

ASL and BSL users would need to know the alphabet in the other sign language in order to guess the word “Wednesday” from context. LSF and ASL users might recognize the common sign for “days of the week”, but would need to know the alphabet and the relevant word in the other spoken language to know which day was being referred to.

- (iv) The perceptions of sign language users are influenced directly by their sign language and indirectly by the regional spoken language which contributed to the development of that particular sign language (cf. Sapir-Whorf hypothesis)

It is tempting to assume that there is an underlying set of “meanings” or “signifieds” which are represented directly in sign languages, whereas these meanings are refracted by spoken languages as if through a prism. A little reflection will reveal this idea as overly simplistic.

Although the structures used in sign languages may typically vary from those of spoken languages, it is by no means the case that sign languages “bypass” or avoid grammar and syntax. A sign language will have rules governing word order and possible collocations just as spoken languages do. Similarly there will be a concept of a “word”. A sign language might for example add a facial expression to a verbal sign (e.g. run) to indicate an adverb such as “happily”. There is as much variation between spoken languages as there is between spoken and sign languages on the question of what constitutes a word. For example an analytical language such as English would divide “I did it for him” into 5 words, whereas an agglutinating language such as Turkish or Hungarian might express this concept by means of suffixes and infixes in a single word.

Any language divides up the continuum of possible meanings in a particular way and thus influences the mental categories available to the user. Even a seemingly unambiguous concept such as personal pronouns is subject to this process. Pointing to oneself can certainly indicate “I”. In a language which makes no number distinction in personal pronouns it could also represent “we”. Some languages distinguish between different types of “we” (you and I only; you I and others; I and others but not you; I and family or clan members; I and other males etc. etc.). The language community must agree both on the concept of “I” or “we” and the sign which will represent this concept.

In theory, users of sign languages can agree on ways to divide up fields of meaning which do not correspond to those in any spoken language. In practice, in most sign languages derive much of the structure of their vocabularies from a “parent” spoken language. As well as facilitating communication between DHH and non-

deaf communities, adopting all or a substantial part of an existing vocabulary framework for dividing and structuring meaning allows for considerable economy of effort.

Sign languages are related to local spoken languages and may derive a significant part of their structure and vocabulary from them, but once created sign languages operate independently of their “parent” languages. In no sense is meaning necessarily mediated through a spoken language

concept >>> Spoken Polish >>> Polish Sign Language

It is perfectly possible to create meaning

concept >>> Polish Sign Language

As we have seen, the process of encoding meaning into a sign language makes use of conventions and structures in a very similar way to that used for spoken languages. A sign language is a sophisticated set of linguistic conventions rather than a simplistic system of “expressive” gestures - pointing, smiles and grimaces.

It is perhaps worth noting that subsequent development of a sign language may take it in different directions from the “parent” language in terms of structure and vocabulary. Alternatively, a sign language may continue to be heavily influenced by a “parent” spoken language.

(v) A sign language can be a person’s first language.

At the April 2009 Deaf Port meeting, the discussion admitted that in theory, the first language a deaf person might learn could be a sign language, but concluded that this was likely to be true only in a tiny minority of cases and could therefore be safely disregarded. On reflection, this issue merits further discussion.

Since 1880, the trend in Deaf education has been for an oral approach (much of the following discussion is based on Lorraine Leeson: “Signed Languages in Education in Europe – a preliminary exploration” – 2006 Council of Europe Language Policy Division Paper). Although the intention has been to allow deaf people to integrate more readily into general (hearing) society, the results have not necessarily been positive.

A major problem for Deaf people (and barrier to integration/employment) is low literacy. It would appear that the situation is similar to that produced in the hearing community by attempts to promote integration by discouraging the use of minority languages in schools. Current thinking is that confidence based on solid competence in a minority language helps with the later learning of a majority language. Attempts to stress the majority language and eliminate the minority language lead to poor oral and literacy skills in both languages.

Many deaf people have hearing parents. Hence, natural aptitude rather than the language used in the home is the key factor in many cases, but the underlying situation is similar. In the early stages of education, stressing sign language, which is more readily learned by the Deaf, appears to produce better educational results overall compared with stressing oral communication, which can be learned only with considerable difficulty (especially by those who are profoundly deaf).

A number of countries such as Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands have noted that a frequent outcome of “oral-first” education for the deaf is limited competence in both sign and oral communication and have turned to the practice of bilingual education (for example Swedish sign language first as a means of access to a broad curriculum, followed by written Swedish and finally some spoken Swedish).

Although it has not yet been universally adopted in Europe, the bilingual approach – “sign language as first language” would appear to be reflective of current best practice in Deaf education.

It would be appropriate for a person from Belgium whose first language was Flemish to record second language ability in French in an ELP. Given good practice in Deaf education and the official recognition of sign languages, we should accept that a Belgian might have LSF as a first language and use the ELP to record second language ability in spoken French.

- (vi) For Oral DHH, sign language may be a second language and recordable in an ELP. In practice, a further project is required to work out the issues involved in recording sign languages in an ELP.

In theory, ability in Polish Sign Language acquired as L2 could be recorded in an ELP. Similarly a British person (whose L1 might be either BSL or spoken English) learning PSL could record this in an ELP. There are many issues surrounding the recording of proficiency in sign languages (for instance interlocutors – both DHH and hearing – as well as the role of written language). Consideration of these issues needs to be explicitly postponed to a proposed additional project specifically aimed at sign languages.

- (vii) Written Polish is not a transcription of Polish sign language. Therefore a person whose first language is PSL will learn written Polish as a second language and thus might record ability in written Polish in an ELP.

It is tempting to assume that DHH make use of written text as a direct representation of their (sign-language) speech. This would allow us to imagine that a DHH person's native language could be Polish sign language with respect to "speech" and written Polish with respect to literacy. In fact the differences between a sign language and an associated local spoken language are too great for this to be automatically the case. Such a person might exist, but they would be bilingual, not monolingual.

Whereas a blind person only needs to learn the letters of Braille to be able to write what he or she says, learning the alphabet of written Polish will not achieve the same thing for a speaker of Polish sign language.

A speaker of Polish learning to write will begin by transcribing spoken language. As he or she progresses, the learner will be introduced to vocabulary and structures which are restricted to a greater or lesser extent to written Polish. While written Polish may differ in some respects from spoken Polish in terms of style and register, the language would be considered by most people to be fundamentally the same.

In contrast, written Polish does not correspond directly with Polish sign language.

In terms of word order and structure a sign language differs fundamentally from an associated local spoken language. Although written Polish can be transcribed word for word into signs, the result will be manually coded Polish, not Polish sign language. Some of the words will be understandable, but the structure will be that of a foreign language. Similarly Polish sign language transcribed into written words (leaving aside elements of sign languages which cannot be directly transcribed) will not necessarily be comprehensible to a Polish speaker unless the writer applies the linguistic conventions of spoken/written Polish. A rough analogy might be someone speaking French or Italian but writing in Latin (or for that matter speaking Polish and writing in Russian).

Logically, someone whose first means of oral communication was PSL should be able to record learning of written Polish as second language acquisition in the Deaf Port.

- (viii) DHH may not have a clear awareness of distinctions between manually coded Polish and Polish sign language.

There is an obvious distinction between fingerspelling of spoken Polish and signing in Polish Sign Language. The distinction between manually coded Polish and Polish Sign Language is not so clear. The vocabulary used to spell out spoken Polish word for word in signs would consist to a large extent of signs also used in "speaking" PSL. An important exception would be grammatical words and markers unique to either spoken Polish or to PSL. It would probably take an exceptionally aware and disciplined signer to spell out spoken Polish sign for sign with all relevant spoken Polish grammatical markers and without any admixture of PSL shortcuts or syntactic conventions.

In practice, what is likely to be used is manually coded Polish with some simplifications and omissions as well as some “contamination” from PSL.

- (ix) Not all spoken languages may yet have fully developed conventions for word-for-word signing. Manually coded Polish, while closer to spoken Polish than is Polish sign language, might still not be close enough to be interchangeable with spoken Polish.

It is relatively easy in a largely uninflected language such as English to develop signs for grammatical elements (such as the word “the”) which are not customarily used in ASL or BSL. This becomes much more complicated in inflected languages.

Verb inflections for person tense and mood might be straightforwardly indicated, for example Italian “dormono” (they sleep) as “sleep” + “they”. “Capiscono” (they understand) would be “understand” + “they”. This raises an interesting issue. “Dormire” to sleep has stem “dorm” and adds “ono” to indicate 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural present tense. There is no straightforward way to indicate morphological changes such as the infixing of “isc” in the particular class of verbs to which “capire” to understand belongs. (not \*cap-ono but cap-isc-ono). In theory, a convention might be designed whereby one signs “understand” + ISC (in finger spelling) + “they”. An alternative might be to sign the base word and finger spell the ending – “sleep” + “ONO” or “understand” + “ISCONO”.

In practice such “pernickety” signing might be unlikely to be used outside a classroom environment.

A few questions arise from this.

- (a) To what extent does representing Italian inflected verbs such as “dormono” or “capiscono” by (basic meaning) + (they) reflect a legitimate mode transformation and to what extent a simplification of the language or even a translation from Italian into Italian Sign Language?
- (b) If a person is “speaking” Italian using word-for-word signs and another person converts this into vocalized speech for the benefit of a listener unfamiliar with signs, the interpreter would need to apply Italian morphological conventions and convert “understand” + “they” into “capiscono” rather than “\*capono”. Unless a convention such as “understand” + ISC (in finger spelling) + “they” was used, at least to some extent it would be the interpreter and not the original speaker who was actually speaking Italian.
- (c) To what extent might languages which make extensive use of inflections accompanied by stem vowel and consonant mutations find it impractical to develop a word-for-word manually coded version of the language other than fingerspelling every word?
- (d) To what extent might fingerspelling in fact be the only truly acceptable and interchangeable manual equivalent of all spoken languages?

In general, dictation would not seem to be distinctively different for DHH. An awareness of the phonetic structure and writing conventions of say Italian would be required together with knowledge of the grammar and syntax of the language, word division principles etc. This would be true for amplified listening, lip reading or finger spelling. However, if the form of manually coded Italian used was not fully explicit as to relevant morphological changes, (such as infixing of –isc in “capiscono”), consideration (b) above would apply. This is a subset of the general issue rather than something specific to dictation.

Although it is likely to be rare that someone will transcribe into written Italian someone’s speech delivered in word-for-word manually coded Italian, it might happen, for example at a conference. Transcribing Italian sign language into written Italian would be translation, not dictation. The relevant issue is the general one in (b) above – to what extent is a form of manually coded Italian that is not explicit as to relevant morphological changes actually (i) manually coded Italian, (ii) Italian Sign Language or (iii) a hybrid of these (“pidgin Italian sign language”).

- (x) Some form of phonetic component would be an indispensable feature of word-for-word manually coded languages if these were to stand interchangeably for spoken languages. This would be true even in the case of relatively uninflected languages such as English.

Although English has relatively little by way of inflections, it would be desirable for someone signing English word for word to reflect such differences as 3<sup>rd</sup> person present tense “-s” “sleep – sleeps” as well as the alternative ending “-es” after a sibilant viz. “catch – catches”. Failure to do this would throw the burden on the recipient to add the ending appropriate to the grammatical and phonetic environment and create a situation where the person signing was bearing something less than the full load of manipulating the linguistic system of English.

At lower proficiency levels where there is much tolerance of grammatical inaccuracy, this would be hidden. For example many speakers of English at moderate proficiency levels consistently ignore the 3<sup>rd</sup> person “- s” convention with little impact on communication. At higher CEF levels where relatively consistent control of at least basic grammar and increasing adherence to native speaker norms in output is demanded, failure to reflect such endings would affect the user’s ability to meet proficiency criteria.

In more highly inflected languages, genuine confusion of meaning might well be caused by lack of appropriate inflections even at lower proficiency levels.

In English, endings other than straightforward verbal inflections, plural markers etc. would also need to be represented phonetically. For example “-ation” may be used to form nouns from verbs but substitution of a generic nominalizing marker would be problematic. Inform + nominalizer would generate “information”, but conform + nominalizer would give “conformity” (and perform – performance!)

Not only will different signs be required to indicate “-ation” “-ity” and “-ance” but also “- ion” and “- ption” (irritate – irritation, not \*irritation; presume – presumption, not \*presumption or \*presumption).

- (xi) Where it is not absolutely essential to convey phonetic elements of a spoken language, sign languages will generally be preferred to manually coded languages because of their greater economy.

It stands to reason that where possible, DHH users will probably discard phonetic information as superfluous. Rather than signing “understand” + ISCONO (in finger spelling) to represent “capiscono”, it is easier and quicker to sign “understand” + “they” or simply “understand”.

Discarding endings in this way might be construed as equivalent to speaking Italian and using the infinitive to represent every possible inflected verb form, that is to say speaking broken Italian. To be an acceptable equivalent of spoken Italian, a form of “manually coded Italian” must provide a recognized means for users to speak “unbroken” Italian – i.e. to reflect the grammatical and morphological forms of the language. This issue will be further considered below.

Five basic situations can be envisaged where a word-for-word manually coded language might be used. These are presented in ascending order of likelihood. In fact Polish sign language is likely to be preferred to manually coded Polish in all but (e) and manually coded Polish is likely to be influenced or “diluted” by Polish sign language in all 5 situations..

- a. A DHH user speaks in manually coded Polish (either because of an inability to vocalize or because of a preference for manual over oral communication). The recipient is a DHH user or non-deaf person familiar with manually coded Polish.
- b. A non-deaf person speaks in manually coded Polish. The recipient is a DHH user familiar with manually coded Polish but unable or unwilling to make use of oral communication such as lip reading.
- c. A DHH user speaks in manually coded Polish (either because of an inability to vocalize or because of a preference for manual over oral communication). The recipient is a non-deaf person unfamiliar with manually coded Polish. A third person converts the manually coded Polish into vocalized speech for the benefit of the recipient.

- d. A non-deaf person speaks and their speech is converted word-for-word into manually coded Polish for the benefit of DHH unable or unwilling to lip read. Exact transcription rather than interpretation into Polish sign language is used because of the sensitive or high-stakes character of the message.
  - e. A teacher uses manually coded Polish as an aid to teaching the details of written or spoken Polish to DHH.
- (xii) Use of word-for-word manually coded languages may have different implications for native/non-native users (or highly/moderately proficient users) if these languages are simplified compared to the spoken language they are supposed to represent or if they are influenced by a local sign language.

If every relevant phonetic and morphological feature of spoken Polish is spelled out explicitly either in word or letter (finger spelling) signs, the input/output is in theory parallel to spoken Polish with a transformation of delivery mode. Any constraints are connected with familiarity with the signing conventions used and parallel the situation of a blind person becoming familiar with Braille.

If however, the manually coded Polish simplifies or omits key features of spoken Polish (or is modified under the influence of Polish sign language), the way it is understood may differ between native and non-native speakers of spoken Polish. It may be that native speakers are better able to compensate for missing or altered linguistic features in the manually coded Polish. Conversely, it might be that a non-native speaker benefits from input which is simpler and more comprehensible compared to standard spoken Polish, whereas a native speaker is disturbed by missing or unexpected features.

- (xiii) Parallel use of oral speech and signing has different implications for DHH and non-deaf

DHH users might consciously or unconsciously supplement their oral communication by means of signs. In fact this type of speech is known as “total communication” and is taught explicitly in much current DHH education. There is, however, some evidence that attempting to communicate simultaneously in two different ways may reduce the effectiveness of communication through one or both of the individual channels.

Where the recipient is a non-deaf person (or DHH) who does not know sign language, the result may be

- a. interpreted as expressive gesture support to communication – where the sign(s) used are sufficiently transparent to convey some of their meaning without need for explicit knowledge of what they are intended to represent, for example pointing to oneself to indicate “I”
- b. treated as irrelevant and ignored – where signs used are not transparent
- c. treated as irrelevant and irritating – where signs used are not transparent and where the listener is either distracted by the presence of the signs or frustrated at his/her inability to understand them.

Where the recipient is a DHH person who does know sign language (or a non-deaf person who happens to be more familiar with say Polish sign language than with spoken Polish), the result may be

- d. the presence of simultaneous translation – the equivalent of a British person watching a Polish film with English subtitles.
- a. that the attempt to follow in effect two languages at once limits overall comprehension (particularly likely at lower proficiency levels)
- b. that the recipient focuses mainly on the manual communication and misses key features of the verbalized speech

Whether the effect is positive or negative, the use of two parallel forms of communication introduces unwanted complexities and uncertainties. It will therefore be necessary to indicate explicitly to DHH that “total communication” should be avoided when assessing ability in a second language.

- (xiv) Eliminating all forms of signing other than “expressive” gestures intended to reinforce spoken meaning (and perhaps finger spelling) from consideration in the Deaf Port would simplify linguistic issues (but might raise issues in terms of Deaf culture and politics).

Expressive gestures are also used by non-deaf speakers of a language. Although they might be used with greater vigor or frequency by DHH, this would not in itself constitute a fundamental change to the content of communication and would not appear to demand special consideration in the Deaf Port.

An alternative to attempting to educate DHH users as to the difference between manually coded Polish and Polish sign language might be to explicitly eliminate signing from consideration in the Deaf Port. Finger spelling of spoken Polish could be retained as an option – for example for those physically incapable of verbalizing.

A great deal of effort might conceivably be expended in distinguishing between manually coded Polish and Polish sign language. If manually coded Polish is largely a theoretical construct and what is inevitably used in practice is more or less Polish sign language (which is incapable of representing spoken or written Polish), it might not be worth the effort to differentiate the two. This is always assuming that a version of manually coded Polish can be devised even in theory that is sufficiently close to spoken Polish to be interchangeable with it.

A possible danger in removing the option of word-for-word manually coded Polish as an equivalent of spoken Polish would be to focus almost exclusively on speaking (oral) Deaf and exclude the signing (manual) Deaf. This may be unavoidable. In any case, many manual deaf are opposed to the use of manually coded word-for-word transcriptions of spoken languages, seeing these as attempts to dilute or undermine true sign languages.

Without sacrificing an important linguistic distinction, it is not possible to admit Polish sign language as an equivalent of spoken Polish. The word-for-word manually coded transcription of a spoken language typified by “manually coded Polish” may be more of a realistic concept in some languages than others – “manually coded English” certainly exists, manually coded Turkish or Hungarian might be much more difficult to achieve other than by resorting to finger spelling.

(xv) Not all “manually coded languages” might be close enough to the relevant spoken language to be interchangeable with it

While any manually coded language would necessarily be closer to a related spoken language than the relevant regional sign language, some manually coded languages might conceivably convey more phonetic and grammatical information than others. Equally some manually coded languages might be more influenced by related sign languages than others. In addition to this, most actual use of manually coded languages will fall into the category of “contact sign”, i.e. incorporate some elements of pure sign language.

Given the complexity of this issue, it may be better not to admit the possibility of any manually coded language (other than pure finger spelling) standing duty for a spoken language in the Deaf Port. In any case, it may be that the number of people who would wish to make use of a manually coded language in this way would be relatively small.

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*Revised October 2009*

# BSL Fingerspelling Alphabet

