DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 121 098 FL 007 581

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TITLE A Selected Bibliography on Sign Language Studies, CAL-ERIC/CLL Series on Languages and Linguistics, No. 34.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Arlington, Va.
PUB DATE Apr 76
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Annotated Bibliographies; Language Development; *Language Handicaps; Language Research; Linguistic Theory; *Manual Communication; Nonverbal Communication; Psycholinguistics; *Sign Language; Sociolinguistics; Textbooks

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/RM)

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CAL • ERIC/CLL Bibliography: 34

Sign Language Studies

by Margaret Deuchar

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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 uninitated 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, 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 ASL (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, 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 Languages*. The reader's attention is also drawn to the journal *Sign Language Studies*, 1972- (Linstok Press, 9306 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. Croneberg, and D. Casterline (Washington, D.C., Gallaudet College Press, 1965). This is currently out of print, but is to be reprinted by Linstok Press.

1. *Battison, Robbin.* "Phonological Deletion in American Sign Language," 1974, in *Sign Language Studies*, 5, 1-19.

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.

2. *Bellugi, Ursula and Susan Fischer.* "A Comparison of Sign Language and Spoken Language," 1972, in *Cognition*, 1:3, 173-200.

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 about 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.

3. *Bonvillian, J.D. and K.E. Nelson.* "Sign Language Acquisition in a Mute Autistic Boy," 1976, in *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders*, in press.

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.

4. *Brun, Theodore. The International Dictionary of Sign Language.* Wolfe Publishing Ltd. London, 1969.

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 deaf, the author covers signs in folklore and 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 inborn.

5. *Cicourel, A. V. and R.J. Boese.* "The Acquisition of Manual Sign Language and Generative Semantics," 1972, in *Semiotica*, 5:3.

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 ethnocentric, and that a comprehensive theory of meaning in sign language can only be developed outside the oral language framework.

6 Cicourel, A.V. 'Gestural Sign Language and the Study of Nonverbal Communication, 1974. in *Sign Language Studies*, 4, 35-65.

This article points to the dangers of preconceiving 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 translation of a story from English into British Sign Language. The author advocates the development of a formal notational system for sign language which will represent native signers' intuitions rather than the imposed categories of a verbal-auditory system. This would, he feels, make the relation between oral and visual language clearer.

7 *Critchley, Macdonald. The Language of Gesture.* E. Arnold and Co., London, 1939.

This is a broad survey of human visual communication, under which Critchley subsumes gesture as used during speech, deaf sign language, Indian sign language, the signs of secret societies, symbolism in art and literature, and theatrical and rhetorical gestures The book is a rich source of mainly anecdotal 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 of 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 as *Silent Language*, Butterworth, London, 1975.

8. *Fant, L.J. Amesian. An Introduction to American Sign Language.* Joyce Motion Picture Co., Northridge CA, 1972.

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 Siglish, 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.

9. *Frishberg, Nancy.* 'Arbitrariness and Iconicity in American Sign Language," 1975. in *Language*, 51:3.

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 toward 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.

10. *Gardner, B.T. and R.A. Gardner.* "Teaching Sign Language to a Chimpanzee," 1969, in *Science*, 165, 664-672.

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 chimpanzees 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 communicative context, and is interesting in its relatively rare assumption that ASL is a valid and representative human language.

11 *Hayes, Francis. Gestures: A Working Bibliography*, 1957 (Reprinted from *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, XX1, 218-317.)

This is a list of almost 1,000 works on gestures considered from many different points of view. Most of them were published 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, baseball, etc. The authors of the works write from a diversity of professional backgrounds, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication theory, literature and journalism. The style and scope of the works vary.

12. *Klima, Edward S. and Ursula Bellugi.* The Signs of Language in Child and Chimpanzee," 1972, in T. Alloway, L. Krames, and P. Pliner, eds. *Communication and Affect*, Academic Press, Inc., New York, 67-96.

A basic discussion of the nature of language is followed by a brief review of language experiments with chimpanzees, 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 acquisition of spoken language.

13. *Mallery, Garrick.* 'Sign Language among North American Indians,' 1881, in Sebeok, T.A., ed. *APproaches to Semiotics* 14. Mouton, The Hague, 1972.

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 prasents his own theory of signs, including their historical origin, relation to gestures and to deaf-mute sign language, and to ideographic 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 research into the nature and definition of language.

14. *Markowicz, Harry.* Aphasia and Deafness, 1973, in *Sign 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 language in the brain, and suggests that investigation of the ability of the deaf to read ideographic, as compared with phonemic, writing systems might reveal the significance of a phonological component in the brain.

15. *O'Rourke, T.J. A Basic Course in Manual Communication.* National Association of the Deaf, Silver Spring, MD, 1973.

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 syntax would have to 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 Sign*, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1972, 45-87.

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 similarities that can be found in the pattern of sign language acquisition 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 acquisition. 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.

18. *Siger, L.C.* "Gestures, the Language of Signs, and Human Communication." 1968, in *American Annals of the Deaf*, 113, 11-27.

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.

19 *Stokoe, W.C.* "CAL Conference on Sign Languages." 1970, in the *Linguistic Reporter*, 12:2, 5-8.

This begins as a report of the first national conference on sign languages 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.

20. *Stokoe, W.C. Semiotics and Human Sign Languages.* (*Approaches to Semiotics* 21, T.A. Sebeok, ed.) Mouton, The Hague, 1972.

ASL is analyzed and compared to spoken language in a semiotic 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 'cheremic' and 'morphocheric' 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 it, mainly because of 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.

21. *Stokoe, W.C.* "Sign Syntax and Human Language Capacity," 1973, in *The Florida FL Reporter*, 11:1, 2.

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 and 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.

22. *Stuckless, E.R. and J.W. Birch.* "The Influence of Early Manual Communication on the Linguistic Development of Deaf Children." 1966, in *American Annals of the Deaf*, 111, 452-62.

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.

23. *Tervoort, B.T.* "Esoteric Symbolism in the Communication Behavior of Young Deaf Children." 1961, in *American Annals of the Deaf*, 106, 436-79.

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 metaphoric, ironic and idiomatic usage, 'sublinguistic' signing, mimicry, and the relation of signing to speech and fingerspelling.

24. *Woodward, J.C.* "Some Characteristics of Pidgin Sign English." 1973, in *Sign Language Studies, 3, 39-46.*

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.

The material in this publication was prepared pursuant to a contract with the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Prior to publication, the manuscript was submitted to the Center for Applied Linguistics for critical review and determination of professional competence. This publication has met such standards. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of either the Center for Applied Linguistics or the National Institute of Education.

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