Language Group Specific Informational Reports

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

Language Group: Sign Language
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SIGN

LANGUAGE

TESL 539
Spring 2010
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Background on Sign Language

- a formal language employing a system of hand gestures for communication (as by the deaf)  
  -Merriam Webster
- Not a universal language, over a hundred versions throughout the world
- Used by the deaf communities
  - They see themselves as people first, deaf second
Considered its own language

- Gestures represent phrases
- American Sign Language (ASL) has no written form
- Use normal tone of voice to communicate with a user of sign language
People who use ASL are straightforward with what they are trying to say. Read body language before words. Oral language is difficult, visual language doesn’t process the same as oral language. When signing, the most important part of what is being said comes first. Use non manuals - Facial Expressions, lip reading, head tilts, shoulder raising, and raised/lowered eyebrows.
Sign Language Around the World

American

Japanese

British

Russian

(Google images)
Sign Language Around the World
Adapting to American Sign Language

- **Asian Learners**
  - Need to learn new version of sign language
    - Two hand sign language to one hand sign language
  - New written language
    - Language order subject-verb-object

- **Middle Eastern Learners**
  - Need to learn new version of sign language
  - New written language
    - Reading from right to left vs. left to right

- **African Learners**
  - Need to learn new version of sign language
  - New written language
    - For example: Wolof has no tenses or gender specific nouns

- **European Learners**
  - Need to learn new version of sign language
    - Two handed sign language to one handed sign language
  - New written language
    - For example: In French there are no noun cases, verbs inflect and adjectives agree with nouns
Difficulties Learning Written English

- Linguistic Issues according to [www.tutorworkshop.org](http://www.tutorworkshop.org)

- Users of sign language:
  - Do not use articles
  - Difficulty conjugating verbs
  - Struggle with comparatives
  - Do not use passive voice in writing
  - Word order errors
  - Verb tense
When signing no specific way of communicating
- Noun comes first then adjective
- Verb then subject
- Subject-verb-subject
Examples of errors

- Incorrect subject verb agreement
  - “My brother like to go...”

- Tense and Aspect
  - “We went to see Senator Biden’s office ... Then we go to see the Vietnam memorial ....”

- Mixing ASL icons with written English
  - “Somehow, I am interesting in ASL and I want to learn it.” (Sign for interested and interesting are the same)
References

Books


McCoy, K.F., Pennington, C.A., Suri, Linda Z. *English error correction: A syntactic user model based on principled “Mal-Rule” scoring*


Internet Sites & Images


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