

## Role and Benefits of Sign Language in Society

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### DESCRIPTION

Sign language is a visual mode of communication that employs hand signs, facial expressions, and body language to convey meaning. Used primarily by the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities, sign language offers a rich linguistic system that facilitates effective communication. This article explores the various aspects of sign language, including its history, linguistic features, types, benefits, and the role of sign language in facilitating access and accessibility.

### History of sign language

Sign language has deep origins, tracing back thousands of years. Ancient texts suggest that forms of sign communication were used in various cultures, including the Egyptians and Greeks. However, modern sign language development primarily began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**France:** The establishment of the first formal school for the deaf in Paris in 1760 by Charles-Michel de l'Épée marked a significant monument. His methods incorporated signs, laying the foundation for French Sign Language (LSF).

**United States of America:** In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Gallaudet traveled to Europe to learn about Deaf education. He returned to the USA and along with Laurent Clerc, founded the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817. This school combined LSF and local sign systems, leading to the development of American Sign Language (ASL).

### Global sign languages

Sign languages have independently developed worldwide, resulting in unique languages for diverse Deaf communities. For example:

**British Sign Language (BSL):** It has distinct signs and grammatical structures compared to ASL.

**Auslan (Australian Sign Language):** It is influenced by BSL but also has its own unique features.

### Linguistic features of sign language

Sign languages possess their own grammar and syntax, making them fully-fledged languages. Here are some key features:

**Visual-spatial modality:** Sign languages utilize visual-spatial elements, incorporating hand shapes, movements, and facial expressions to convey meaning. This modality allows for the expression of complex ideas and emotions.

**Grammar and syntax:** Each sign language has its own grammatical rules. For example, ASL often follows a topic-comment structure, while BSL employs a subject-verb-object order. These grammatical frameworks are essential for effective communication and meaning.

**Iconicity:** Many signs in sign languages are iconic, meaning that the sign visually represents the concept it denotes. For example, the sign for "tree" often resembles the shape of a tree.

### Benefits of learning sign language

Learning sign language can have numerous advantages, both for individuals and society as a whole:

**Enhanced communication:** For deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, sign language is essential for effective communication. It enables them to express thoughts, emotions, and ideas clearly.

**Cognitive development:** Research shows that learning sign language can enhance cognitive skills, including memory, spatial reasoning, and problem-solving. Bilingualism in sign language and spoken language can create greater overall linguistic proficiency.

**Cultural awareness:** Learning sign language encourages a deeper understanding of Deaf culture and community, promoting respect and appreciation for diverse ways of communicating.

**Social inclusion:** Proficiency in sign language can facilitate better communication between hearing and deaf individuals, promoting inclusion and accessibility in various settings, such as schools, workplaces and social events.

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## Role of sign language in education

Sign language plays a vital role in the education of deaf students.

**Access to education:** Using sign language as a medium of instruction allows deaf students to fully participate in classroom activities. Educators who are fluent in sign language can create an inclusive learning environment.

**Bilingual education:** Many educational programs advocate for a bilingual approach, combining sign language with written or spoken language. This method supports language development and literacy skills for deaf students.

**Social interaction:** Sign language education supports social connections among deaf students, enabling them to engage in peer interactions.

## The future of sign language

The future of sign language looks promising, with increasing recognition of its importance in promoting accessibility and inclusion:

**Technological advancements:** Emerging technologies, such as video conferencing and mobile applications, are enhancing access to sign language resources and education. Online platforms are making it easier to learn sign language and connect with the Deaf community.

**Advocacy and awareness:** Organizations advocating for deaf rights are raising awareness about the importance of sign language in education, healthcare, and public services. Efforts to promote sign language as a second language in schools are gaining traction.

**Cultural preservation:** As interest in deaf culture and sign languages grows, efforts to document and preserve these languages are increasingly important. Linguists and community members are working to ensure that sign languages remain colorful and relevant.

## CONCLUSION

Sign language is not just a tool for communication; it is a rich and bright language that plays a vital role in the lives of deaf individuals and their communities. Understanding and respecting sign language encourages inclusion, accessibility, and cultural awareness. By learning and advocating for sign language, we can break down barriers and create a more equitable society where everyone has the opportunity to communicate and connect. As we move forward, accepting sign language as an essential form of communication will add value to our shared human experience.