Family ASL: Bimodal Bilingualism for an Early Start to Equitable Education for Deaf Children

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(images: aslsignbank.haskins.yale.edu)
Disclosures

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LO1: Language Acquisition

Diane Lillo-Martin
Language acquisition *with accessible input*

- Unconscious, automatic process
- Children are sensitive to patterns in the input
- Requires meaningful interactions
  - With parents, siblings, peers
- Does *not* require explicit teaching
- Very similar path for spoken languages and sign languages

(Chen Pichler et al. 2018; Hoff 2014)
When input is difficult to access

Infants miss out on crucial early experiences

- Discovering the patterns contained in natural language expressions
- Linking words to their meanings
- Communicating effectively with their caregivers

(Levine et al. 2016)
Once accessible input is received

- Great progress may be made!
- But effects of delayed access to language continue to be seen
  - In language
  - In cognitive development
  - In school readiness and success

(Carrigan, Shusterman & Coppola submitted; see also Hrastinski & Wilbur 2016; Mayberry & Kluender 2018)
LO2: Advantages of Bimodal Bilingualism

Deborah Chen Pichler
Accessible input in two modalities, signed and spoken

Bimodal Bilingualism

Eventual goal: two natural LANGUAGES
Advantages of bimodal bilingualism

Early sign language supports spoken language development

Spoken English development* by DHH children with CI and early exposure to fluent signing equalled or surpassed that of oral-only deaf children with CI.

*Covered general language skills, vocabulary, syntax, phonological awareness, articulation.

(Davidson et al. 2014)
Sign language input enables the earliest stages of development to begin even before DHH children have access to spoken language. The rate of ASL vocabulary growth for DHH children whose hearing parents exposed them to ASL before 6 months is similar to that of native-signer Deaf children. (Caselli et al. 2021)
Advantages of bimodal bilingualism

Language opportunities: More is more

A bimodal bilingual environment is both a least-restrictive AND language-rich environment, maximizing communication options and empowering the child to choose the language that works best for them in each situation.

(Clark et al. 2020)
LO3: Visual Communication

Elaine Gale
Why Visual Communication Strategies

(Holcomb et al., 2011)
Visual Communication Strategies

Eye Contact

Sign on Book

(Gale, 2020; Schleper, 1997)
How Do Deaf Families Engage in Joint Attention

Sequential Pattern

Time to Explore

Follow Child’s Lead

(Gale & Schick, 2009)
Visual Communication Resources

http://deaf-mentor.skihi.org
https://hopepubl.com/product/deaf-mentor-curriculum/
Thank you! Questions?

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Stuck at beginner level: Hearing parents' challenges in learning ASL word order
Deborah Chen Pichler (Gallaudet Univ.), Elaine Gale (Hunter College), Diane Lillo-Martin (Univ. of Connecticut)

Only a small minority of Deaf and Hard of hearing (DHH) children are born into a home with a language that is accessible to them. Only 95% of DHH children in the US have hearing parents with no previous experience with ASL (Mitchell & Karchmer 2004).

Some hearing parents opt to learn a sign language to provide accessible early language input and an inclusive home environment to their DHH child (Casey et al. 2021). These parents' experiences as sign language learners offer insight on how to improve current resources for families who choose to sign.

Interview Questions
1. What are your goals for learning ASL for yourself? For your deaf child?
2. What motivated you to choose ASL despite pressure against signing with deaf children?
3. What methods are most effective for learning ASL in a family context?
4. What aspects of ASL have been the hardest to learn? The most intuitive to learn?
5. What resources do you still need to support your family's development of ASL?

“Speaking English and signing ASL are completely different when you're using [ASL] properly, so that has been the struggle. I do a lot of...[signing] ASL in spoken word order. So that's how I kind of incorporate ASL into our lives.”
   [mother of two children, 6 and 7 y]

Conclusion: Three recurring themes
- Parents feel their lack of ASL word order knowledge keenly and are uneasy about using English word order with ASL signs.
- Attempts to solicit word order instruction or correction are often unsuccessful, as deaf adults may view word order corrections as discouraging and may modify their own ASL to be more English-like to accommodate beginning signer parents.
- Initial focus on vocabulary is helpful, but parents quickly need more advanced syntactic knowledge, which should be incorporated into family-centered ASL curricula.

Selected References

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  - bimodal bilingualism
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Resources


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