

Sign language and communication




Karina Van Aarde

Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages

WHAT IS DEAFNESS?

- Deafness is a sensory deficiency which prevents an individual from receiving the stimulus of sounds in all of its forms or most of its forms.
- Deafness is not the extent to which deaf or hard of hearing persons hear sounds with hearing devices but the ability to distinguish and understand speech.
- It is an invisible disability.
- It isolates a person from socialisation.
- It is a more serious handicap than people realised because it prevents cognitive and speech development, and acquiring of language, even when cochlear implantations or hearing aids are used.
- Has a huge impact on deaf children's and deaf adults' emotions causing stress, crying, anger, aggressiveness, withdrawal from people, feelings of inferiority and frustration.
- Deafness makes it difficult to cultivate friendships with hearing people.



How does deafness differ from other disabilities such as paralysis, blindness, spasticity, intellectual disability, dyslexia, autism and Down syndrome?

■ Communication



All other disabilities have no effect on sounds and communication to such a degree that communication is impaired.

Blind children and adults, the paralysed child in a wheelchair and children and adults with no disability can communicate freely with each other.



Deafness isolates a person from communication as well from the radio, TV and group conversation like meetings, family gatherings, classroom full of hearing children, etc.

- To be deaf is like living in a bottle with the lid always closed for 24 hours a day. Deaf persons cannot communicate freely.



Helen Keller a blind-deaf woman

- ▶ Helen Keller who experienced both blindness and deafness, **described deafness as much worse than blindness.**
- ▶ A letter to Dr. James Kerr Love (1910), published in *Helen Keller in Scotland: a personal record written by herself* (1933) she states:
 - “the problems of deafness are deeper and more complex, if not more important, than those of blindness. **Deafness is a much worse misfortune.** For it means the loss of the most vital stimulus — the sound of the voice that brings language, sets thoughts astir and keeps us in the intellectual company of man. **Blindness cuts us off from things, but deafness cuts us off from people**”.



How can we communicate with Deaf or hard of hearing adults?

By means of:

- Lip-reading and speech alone.
- Lip-reading and speech together with manual clues, gestures, facial expression, body language.
- Reading and writing.
- The combined method.
- Natural Sign Language.



Understand lip-reading

According to R D Savage, L Evans, J F Savage (1981:46) a more appropriate description for lip-reading is “speech-reading”.


The traditional term “lip-reading” is widely known.

A deaf or a hard of hearing person “lip-reads” four things at the same time:

1. Your lip formation.
2. The position of your teeth.
3. The position of your tongue.
4. Your facial expression.



For communication through lip-reading you must:


- open your mouth, form your lips properly and speak slower.
 - not bite on your teeth while speaking.
 - make eye contact and look directly at a deaf or a hard of hearing person when speaking to him. Do not look at somebody else or look away while speaking to a deaf person because he will think that you are talking to somebody else and will switch off lip-reading.
 - do not stand too close causing cross-eye or too far away.
 - keep your sentence short with many pauses in between.
- 



Communication through lip-reading and speech alone are not always understandable

Why? There are different reasons:

- **The main reason** why lip-reading fails is because hearing people speak too fast. This affects all the deaf worldwide. Speaking too fast causes the opening of your mouth to become smaller, your lip formation becomes flatter and the position of your tongue and teeth become invisible, making lip reading virtually impossible.
- Not all the speech sounds are visible on the lips, teeth and tongue.
- Depends on the “lipreadability” of a person. People differ a lot in their manner of speaking and the level of ease or difficulty which they can be lip read by deaf people varies.
- Unfamiliar people. People you see for the first time of your life.
- It also depends on what language you use to speak to a deaf or hard of hearing person. (mother tongue or second language) Non-mother tongue speakers of English and Afrikaans are more difficult to understand. Hardy (1970) said two thirds of the speech sounds of the English language is invisible or indistinguishable.
- People who do not maintain a constant speed when talking to the deaf. Speaking too fast and then slower and then faster again leads to half-half understanding.
- Even when looking at you, misunderstanding can happen.



When you speak too loud or shout at a deaf or hard of hearing person who do not understand you through lipreading it creates the following scenario:

- Hearing (speak): "What is your address?"
- Deaf (lip read and hear): "Wa i ou adde?" and ask: "Sorry, I don't understand you"
- Hearing speak louder: "What is your address?"
- Deaf (lip read and hear): "Wa i ou adde?" and ask: "Please speak slower"
- Hearing shout: "What is your address"
- Deaf (lip read and hear): "Wa i ou adde?"
- Speech sounds which are lost, remain lost even if you shout at them because there are damaged or no auditory nerves for those specific sounds.
- So shouting is not going to help for better communication.



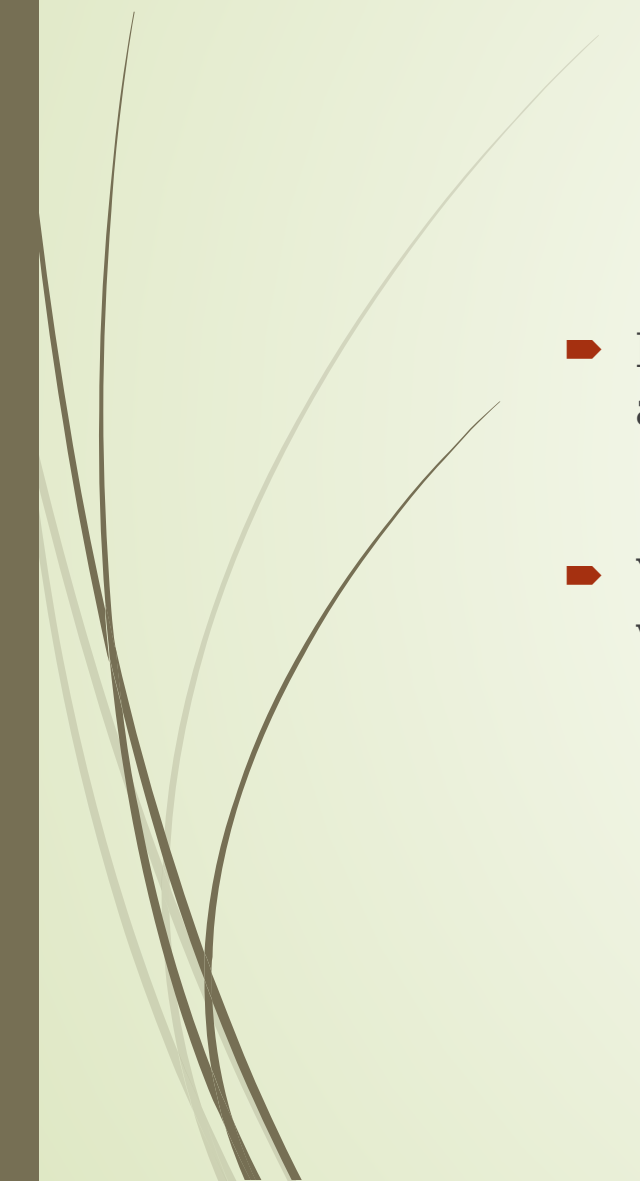
Manual clues, gestures, facial expression, body language

It means to give a deaf or hard of hearing person a clue on what you are talking about if he does not understand you.

- For example:
- My dokter het gesê ek moet Wie het gesê jy moet My dokter Jou dokter of jou dogter? (Give him a clue.)
- I am drying it What did you say? Trying or drying? (Give him a clue.)
- Come here. Sit here. (gestures and signing. Give him a clue)
- I do not like it (gestures, facial expression and body language. Give him a clue)



Reading and writing

- Reading and writing is also an effective way to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing people.
 - You can use a pen and paper to write down what you want to say or you can type on your cellphone if you do not have a pen and paper.
- 



What is the Combined Method?

- The Combined Method means speaking, lip-reading and signing at the same time. You can use either speech sounds or whisper. Remember to speak slower and maintain good lip formation whether you use your voice or not.
- It is a visual communication.
- It is a simple signing system where one take signs from a Natural Sign Language to follow the word order of a spoken language.
- It is another variety of signing when Deaf and hard of hearing people wish to express themselves in English or in Afrikaans.
- It is a way in which hearing parents and hearing people usually attempt to sign to the deaf and hard of hearing.
- It is known as signed English or signed Afrikaans.
- It is linked to a spoken language therefore the language of mouthing should coincide and suit with the sign language system used.



There are two varieties of signing

- R D Savage, L Evans, J F Savage (1981:79) states that the existence of two varieties of signing leads to the question whether the community of deaf people may be considered to be diglossic. A study by Ferguson (1959) identified two linguistic function of signing. Natural American Sign Language is the “Low” form used for everyday communication and Manual English as the “High” form, the codified variety used for formal occasion.



In South Africa there are also two varieties of signing

- ▶ South Africa has different Natural Sign Languages within its borders (Wehrmeyer JE. 2013:204), which is also considered as the “Low” form used for everyday communication and signed English or signed Afrikaans as the “High” form, a variety also used for formal occasion.
- ▶ Formal occasions are:
 - ▶ When the Deaf attend churches for the Deaf.
 - ▶ The workplaces and the universities.
 - ▶ When reading from the Bible or from a storybook for another Deaf person.
 - ▶ In schools in the past when speech therapists, nuns and teachers taught Deaf children language and speech.



Short history of Sign Language in South Africa

- The Bible and Education were the main reasons why two varieties of signing originated in South Africa, developed by the Deaf themselves.
- In the past ministers would tell the Deaf that they must not change the words of the Bible because the Lord will punish them if they change something in His Word (Revelation 22:18-19).
- This warning led to that the Deaf used simultaneous signing and speaking in the word order of a written language of the Bible.
- African deaf mixed their different African Sign Languages' concepts with English or Afrikaans Sign Language's concepts and use it in the word order of English or Afrikaans for the "High" form because they were never taught their spoken and written African languages. There were also no books available to read in African languages except the Bible.
- For example - African Deaf add signs to their African Sign Language such like "have", "about", "can" and "from" etc. for signed English and another kind of signs for signed Afrikaans.

Example of the combined method taken from American Sign Language by reading from a Bible
(John 13:34-35)





Example of the combined method in Afrikaans Sign Language

- Soos Ek julle liefgehad het, moet julle mekaar liefhê. Hieraan sal almal weet dat julle My dissipels is, as julle liefde onder mekaar het.

(John 13:34-35)

The Combined method

- At the Milan International Congress held in 1880 educators forbade Sign Language for teaching and communication purposes. They have signed a contract that banned Sign Language worldwide. Deaf teachers worldwide lost their jobs because of this.
- 164 educators at the Milan Congress voted for Oral methods for teaching and communication and only four voted against it. Dr Edward Gallaudet was one of the four who voted against Oral methods and defended the combined method. Deaf teachers were excluded from this Congress.
- The combined method is not a language on its own right but a means of representing a spoken and a written language.
- The combined method is a signing system to support lip reading, to assist in spoken and written language development and prevent a hearing person from speaking too fast as lip-reading always fails when one speaks too fast.
- Savage RD, Evans L, Savage JF (1981.27) state that the official communication at Gallaudet College (University for the Deaf in America) and in many schools which prepared students for higher education was a combination of speech and lip-reading together with signing and One Hand Alphabet.

Combined method is linked to a spoken language.

For example:

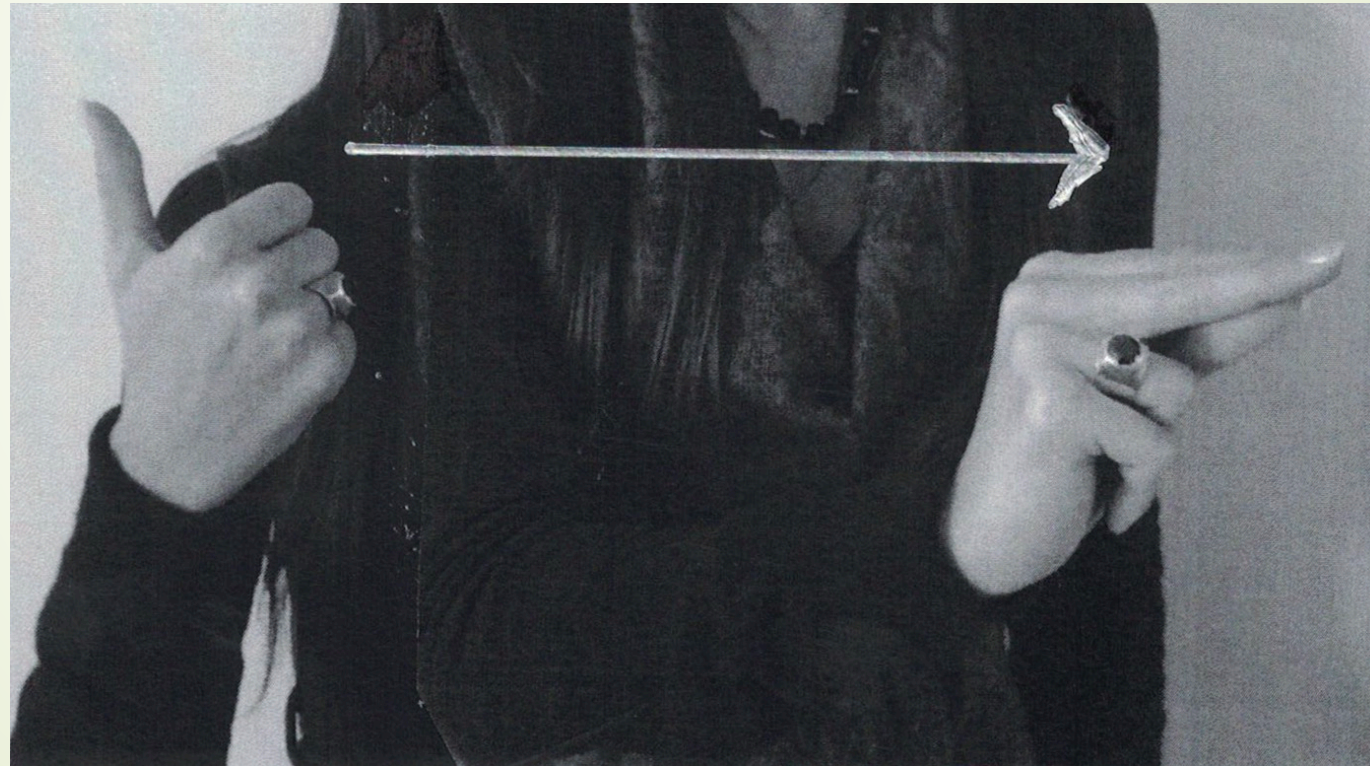
Concepts for the Afrikaans word
“vasbyt”



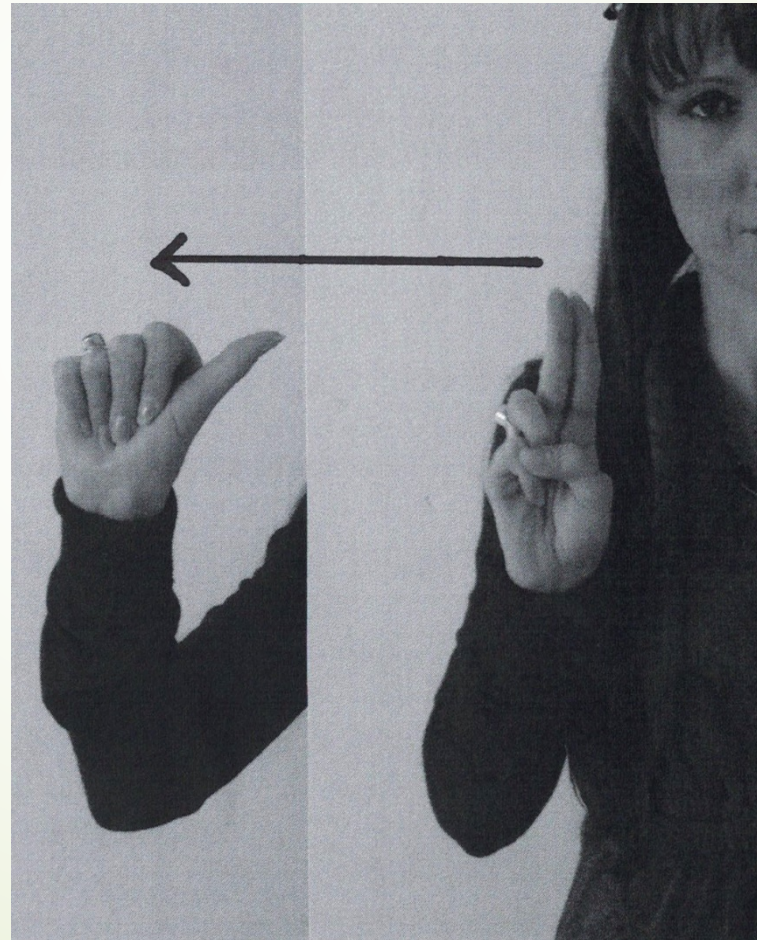
A concept for the English word
“hang on”



Afrikaans concept for ses-en-twintig
Move hand from right to left
Left handers – move hand from left to right

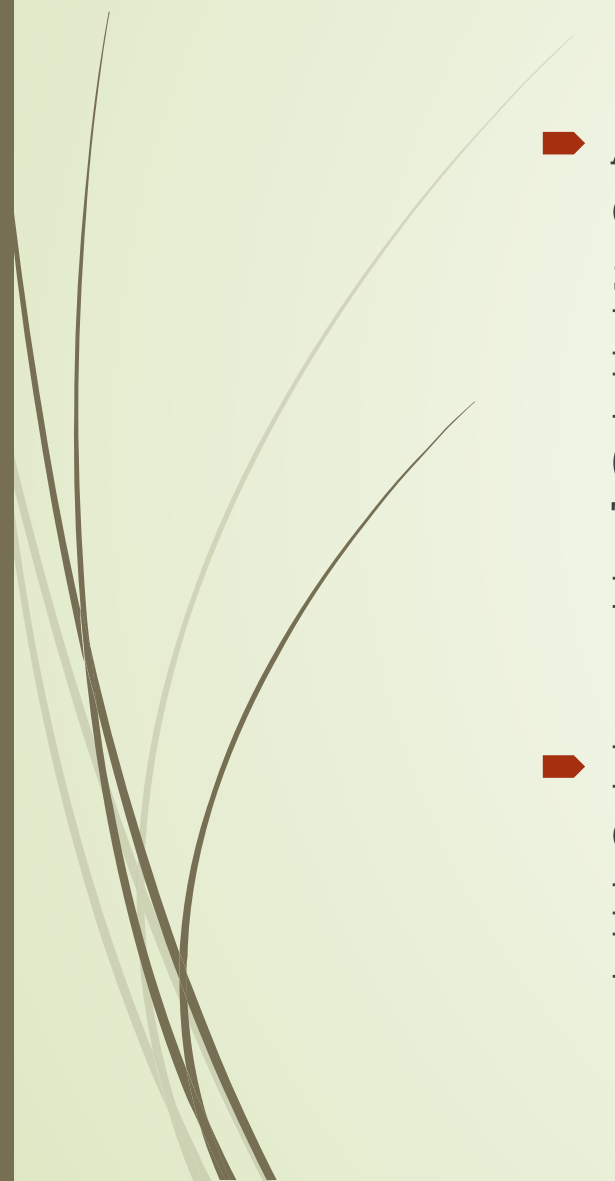




English concept for twenty-six
Move hand from left to right
Left handers – move hand from right to left





What is a Natural Sign Language?

- 
- A Natural Sign Language is a visual method of communication. It is a silent communication with no speech sounds and is connected to few words of a spoken language. It is more bound to objects, persons and their looks, the environment, actions, type of mountains, flora (plants and flowers), clothes and anything that is visual. The written alphabet of a written language is also part of it.
 - Natural Sign Language is a language on its own right, full of richness and complexity and a detailed language with its own syntax and vocabulary and is used when Deaf and hard of hearing people communicate with one another.

- 
- 
- Natural Sign Language does not only consist of concepts alone but also of facial expression, which includes few pronounced words which is called mouthing. It also has mouth movements, mouth gestures, the deaf people's words (like "bam", "wif", "pit" etc.), facial expression such as blowing out breath, exhaling or inhaling, puffed-cheeks or sucked-in cheeks, stretching or pulling of mouth, opened, closed or pressed lips, stretching or narrowing of eyes, pulling of nose, lifting of eyebrows or frowning, body language, head and body movement, demonstration, the speed and manner of signing (which means softer signing, more aggressive signing, slower or faster signing or movements of arms, hands or fingers, sudden change in hand orientation such as twisting, turning, bending and pointing). All these movements form part of the grammar and vocabulary of a Natural Sign Language as well as its sentence structure (syntax).



Why did Natural Sign Language which people seldom see, become visible?

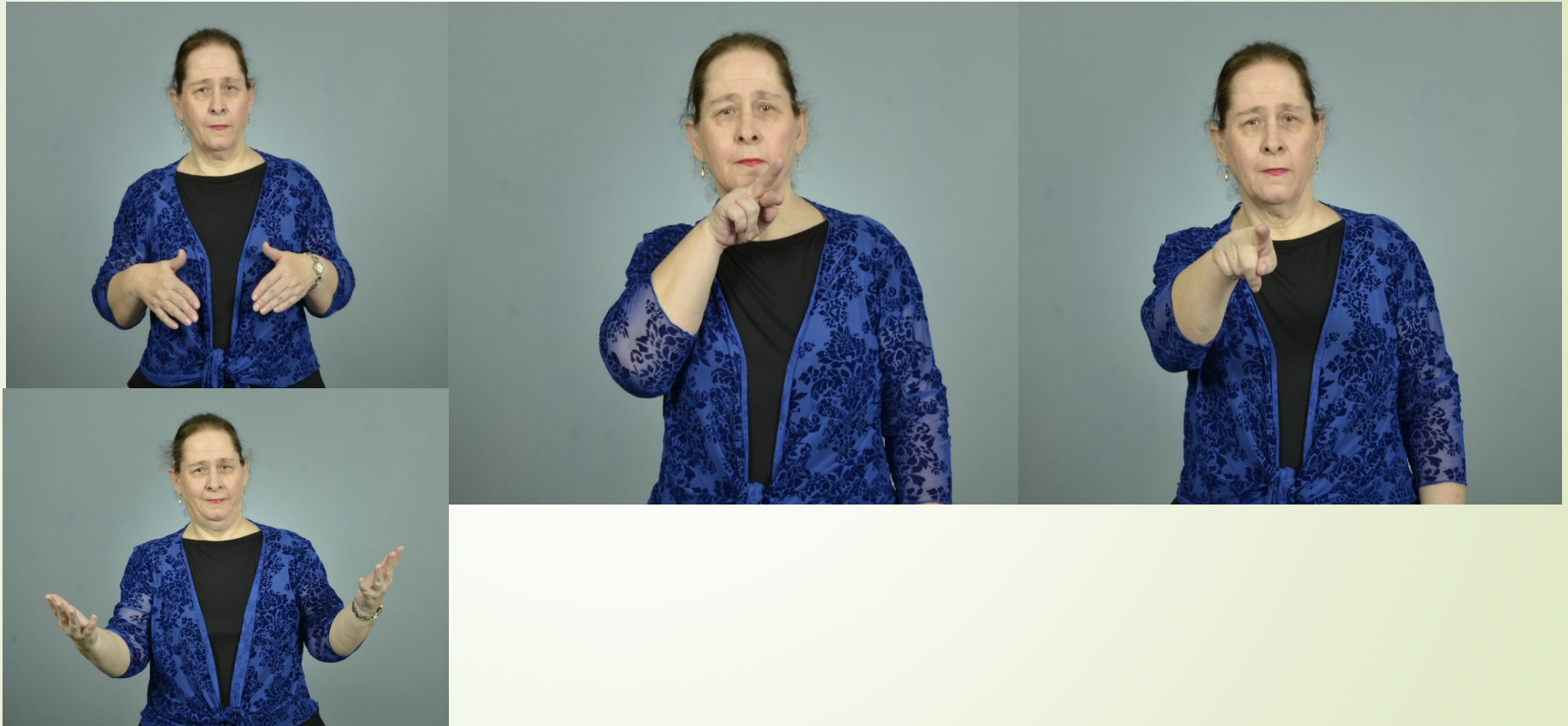
- ▶ After the Milan policy was signed, deaf people all over the world went underground with their Sign Languages and signed behind walls and out of sight.
- ▶ Sign Languages all over the world came out into the open because the Milan policy was finally revoked at the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf and hard of hearing, held in Vancouver, Canada in 2010, with an apology to the deaf worldwide for banning Sign Language.

Combined method is:

How

are

you



Natural Sign Language is:

Movement of head to the front indicates the word “you”



Example of a concept of South African Sign Language for the name - **TSHIVENDA**

move hand to another hand

➤ Start here



isiZULU



isiXhosa



XITSONGA

start at the pulse and move hand three times backwards
from your pulse to your elbow



isiNdebele

move hand downwards four times



NORTHERN SESOTHO SOUTHERN SESOTHO

move hand to your cheek - Sesotho

➤ Start -Northern



➤ Start -Southern



SETSWANA



ENGLISH

pull fingers away from neck



AFRIKAANS


move some fingers up and down



INDIAN


vibrates finger





Penny Sanderson (2014:177) states that it is asked by
linguistlist 4 February 1999:


<https://linguistlist.org/issues/indices/Feb1999.html>)





Should children with cochlear implants be deprived of
Sign Language input because that would discourage
them from using their hearing abilities? Why or why
not?"



➤ My answer is:

- 
- No, Sign Language will not discourage children with cochlear implants to use their hearing abilities. If it is the case, then it means that the hearing children of deaf parents, who usually learn Sign Language at a young age, will also be discouraged to use their hearing abilities. Sign Language has no influence on hearing children's hearing abilities therefore it will be the same with children who have cochlear implants.
 - If Sign Language discourages children with cochlear implants to use their hearing abilities, then it means they still remain somehow deaf after receiving cochlear implants.

- 
- 
- Cochlear implantation or hearing aids do not restore normal hearing.
 - All hearing-impaired children and adults with hearing devices need lip-reading and Sign Language and it must not be kept away from them.

Thank you



ANY QUESTIONS?

References:

- https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Helen_Keller
- *Multilingualism: The Role of Languages in South Africa, Study Guide LIN150-2* (2014). Pretoria. University of South Africa.
- *Psychology and Communication in Deaf children*. Grune & Stratton Australia (2nd ed.1981). A Subsidiary of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.
- *The Deaf child in the public schools* (2nd ed.1978). The Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc. (1st ed. 1974).
- <https://linguistlist.org/issues/indices/Feb1999.html>
- Wehrmeyer JE. 2013. *A Critical investigation of Deaf comprehension of signed TV News interpretation*. Pretoria. University of South Africa.
- <https://www.121captions.com/2017/03/17/communicating-deaf-people-lipspeakers/>