To Fingerspell or Not to Fingerspell?

Heidi M. MacGlaughlin
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Question to Ponder:

Is fingerspelling English?

No.

But it allows an ASL user to represent the
written form of the spoken language
in the environment.

Also it is not borrowed words from English.

Another question to ponder

Are the handshapes that resemble the
letters of the written alphabet “letters” in
ASL?

No.

They are signs, free morphemes in ASL.
They have form, meaning, and a referent.

A misleading characterization…

“that fingerspelled words are
conventionally regarded as a means
of representing English words for
which there are no equivalent signs”

What is Fingerspelling?

•Not the Rochester Method

•Fingerspelled items (cheremes) as whole
units or “gestalts”
  – Movement envelope (Akamatsu, 1982)

Lexicalization

• When separate cheremes begin to act like
a single morpheme, like a sign

• Becomes a sign in the language

• No longer a fingerspelled word made up of
individual cheremes
Development of Fingerspelling

Stage One ↔ Stage Two ↔ Stage Three

Baker (2010); Hile (2009); Mayberry & Waters (1991); Padden (2006)

Development of Fingerspelling

Fingerspelling Acquisition

The timing of acquisition of fingerspelling varies among young deaf children

Cracking the Code

How does this apply to deaf children? Could they “crack the code” of the English language?

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Phonological/Phonemic Awareness: Alternate Gateways

- Morphological decoding
  - Clark, Gilbert, & Anderson (2011)

- Orthographic knowledge, syntactic awareness, and metacognitive skills
  - Miller & Clark (2011)
Phonological/Phonemic Awareness: Not the Only Route

- Visual-orthographic strategy
  - Stone, Kartheiser, Hauser, Petitto, & Allen (2015)
  - McQuarrie & Parrila (2009)

- Higher-order metacognitive skills in decoding words (e.g., fingerspelling)
  - Izzo (2002)

Phonological/Phonemic Awareness: Not Necessary

- Mayberry et al (2011)
  - Meta-analysis

  - Critical responses to an article

A Bridge Between ASL and English?

What could be the direct link to the orthographical system of English print towards literacy development for young deaf learners?

Relationship Exists

- Fingerspelling and printed text for deaf children
  - Looking at fingerspelled words and writing down words
  - Recognizing fingerspelled words and writing them down in print (p. 185)
Fast Mapping

- Cognitive process
- Vocabulary size increases
- Two-way process for literacy development
  - Fingerspelling to print
  - Print to fingerspelling

Baker (2010); Haptonstall-Nykaza & Schick (2007); Hile (2009); Hirsh-Pasek (1987)

YouTube - ASL ABC with 2-Year and 7-Month Old Child

Implications for Parents and Educators

Important to Know

- Fingerspelling is both:
  - early sign language development
  - later English literacy development

- The latter fingerspelling development requires conscious teaching and is probably tied to reading ability

Important to Remember

- With younger children, fingerspelling is a developmental task
- Parents and educators should not delay using fingerspelling
  - fingerspelling should be a part of a child’s early preschool language

Explicit Instruction

- Take advantage to teach explicitly
  - As a bridge
  - Mapping
- Foster language development, not phonological skills (phonemic awareness and phonological decoding skills)
  - Utilize visual strategies

Freel et al (2011); Miller & Clark (2011)
Intertwined and Interrelated

• Fingerspelling skills are related to:
  • ASL competence
  • English reading ability
  • Convergence for deaf and hard of hearing children
  • Literacy development

ASL Skills and English Reading Ability

• Early acquisition of ASL is strongly correlated with better reading skills
  • Freel et al (2011)
  • Hrastinski & Wilbur (2016)
  • Mounty, Pucci, & Harmon (2014)
  • And many more…

Take-Away Thoughts…

How does ASL help a child learn “advanced” words when one sign represents many different words (e.g., silly, absurd, ridiculous) or when it appears that there is not a unique sign for words like “obvious,” “tenuous,” etc?

Heidi MacGlaughlin
hmacglaughli@lamar.edu

References

References