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Dedication

For all Deaf Teachers of BSL and those who help everyone learn to sign. Also to my Deaf grandparents, Herbert and Eva Thorndike, who would have helped me learn BSL as a first language if they had been allowed to use it with hearing members of their family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Thanks go to BSL experts from Deaf families who are helping to educate everyone to understand sign linguistics including Clark Denmark, Frances Elton and Linda Squelch.

Thanks to colleagues and ex-pupils, including the late Simon Douglas, who have patiently helped me use BSL as a second language.

Sandra Dowe 2013
LANGUAGE
(Think and Communicate)

LINGUISTICS
(Study and research)
GRAMMAR

= PHONOLOGY + SYNTAX + SEMANTICS
(Sign patterns) (sign order) (meaning)
PHONOLOGY

HANDSHAPE + PLACEMENT + MOVEMENT

+ DIRECTION + ORIENTATION + NMF

NMF=Non-manual features
Manual = hands  Non-manual= not hands, face and body

3
SYNTAX
= SIGN ORDER

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Example:
SEMANTICS
(meaning)

ICONIC/ VISUAL SIGNS

BOOK

HOUSE

FOOTBALL

ARBITRARY (not look like) SIGNS

ELEVEN

TODAY

ALWAYS

For more examples see: Cath Smith (1992) Signs in Sight, A Step into the Deaf World
Human Horizon Series Souvenir Press London Pp 43—47
MORPHOLOGY & MORPHEMES

MORPHEME = smallest part of word or sign with meaning

Example: Signs with 1 morpheme

AEROPLANE
RED
BEDROOM

Non-manual morphemes

Puff cheeks
Means 'much'

smile
positive

frown
negative

Further examples can be found in:
Faber & Faber London pp 76-78

6
POSITIVE—YES
Head nod

NEGATIVE—NO
Head shake

YES –THAT-ONE
Yes signs

NOT-THAT-ONE
No signs

SURE

NOT SURE

KNOW

DON’T-KNOW
HANDSHAPES/POINTING

PROFORMS/CLASSIFIERS

Examples:

- Person
- legs
- eyes
- vehicle
- aeroplane
- button

PERSON COME  WALK  CAR -OVERTAKE  PLANE -TAKE OFF

POINTING TO REFER TO PEOPLE AND THINGS

- CAR
- IT
- FAMILY
- IT /THEM
TIME

**Time Line A:** Backwards over shoulder for past or front of hand forward for past. Frontwards for future

LONG-TIME-AGO    RECENTLY    FUTURE

**Time Line B:** Along the arm

LAST-WEEK        NEXT-WEEK        LONG-TIME

**Time Line C:** In front of the body

CONTINUE        NOW        FOREVER

**Time Line D:**

GROW-UP
VERBS

There are 3 types of verbs:

plain, agreement/directional, spatial

Plain

Plain verbs stay in one place; can add meaning; repeat quickly or slowly and add facial expression

LIKE
RESEARCH
THINK

CYCLE
CYCLE-FAST
VERBS

Agreement/directional

Agreement verbs show direction of action and where the people are.

LOOK-AT-YOU  LOOK-AT-ME  TELL-THEM

PAY-ME  PAY-YOU

EMAIL-YOU  EMAIL-ME
VERBS

Spatial

Spatial verbs can give information about the path, speed and location of action.

CARRY-BAG  CAR TURN-LEFT  WASH-FACE

Further examples can be found in:
ASPECT (When)
Timing internal slowly quickly

WAIT-FOR-A-LONG-TIME

FLOWER GROW

REMINDE repeat fast or slow
MANNER (How)

THINK
THINK-HARD

HUNGRY
VERY-HUNGRY
NOT-HUNGRY

WAIT-FOR-A-LONG-TIME
VERY-BUSY
LIKE
MOOD (Attitude)

SURPRISE

DOUBT

VERY - TIRED
(mouth 'gentle blow')

DELIGHTED
(mouth slightly open smile)

NOT-BOTHERED
(mouth 'gentle blow')

VERY-FUNNY!
(mouth 'vee' smile)

NOT-VERY-FUNNY!
(mouth 'vee' frown)
ROLE SHIFT
(Body movement)

Signer becomes cat; bends as lady feeding cat; cat eats from bowl.

Signer becomes dog looks at food.
EYE GAZE

Look up for sun, rainbow; down to floor

Look at people/things in space for he/she, you, ball in air

Look at conversational partner or character

Look to the:
side for past; look ahead or down for the present; look up for the future

MANUAL ALPHABET
Used in BSL to fingerspell names and key words

Please note that some letters e.g. C D H T may change according to preceding letter.

When fingerspelling vowels the fingers of the non-dominant hand should move towards the index finger of the dominant hand.
USEFUL RESOURCES

Dorothy Miles (1988) British Sign Language
Book and accompanying Video

Language/English Faber & Faber London

Cath Smith (1992) Signs in Sight, A Step in to the
Deaf World, Human Horizon Series
Souvenir Press London
(Middlesbrough Signs)

Rachel Sutton-Spence and Bencie Woll (1998)
The Linguistics of British Sign Language
Cambridge University Press,
Book and accompanying DVD

South East Regional Signs SBC Press
Book and accompanying DVD

http://bslqed.com/5.11_Phonology_in_BSL-i-237.html
BSL SIGN LINGUISTICS IN A NUTSHELL

To view this booklet visit
www.deafsupport.org.uk