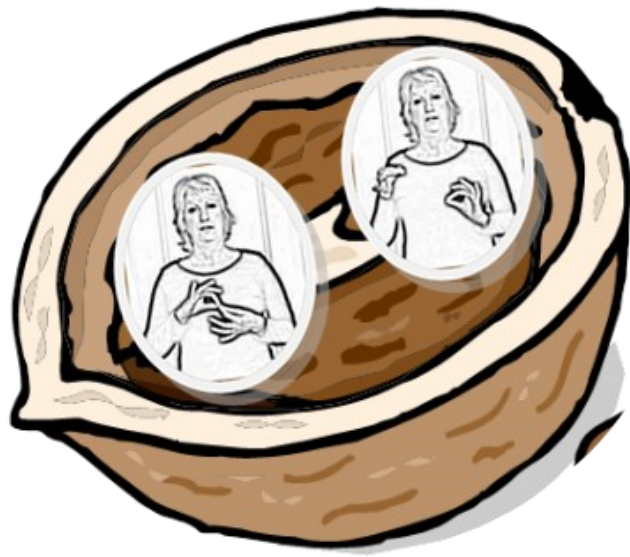


BSL SIGN LINGUISTICS
IN A NUTSHELL



Compiled by
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Illustrations by
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using regional signs from
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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.

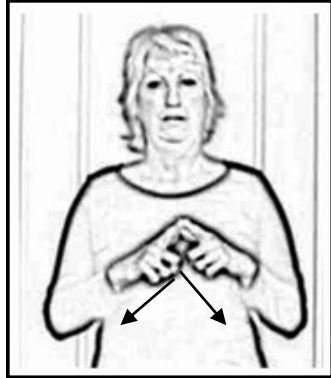
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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.

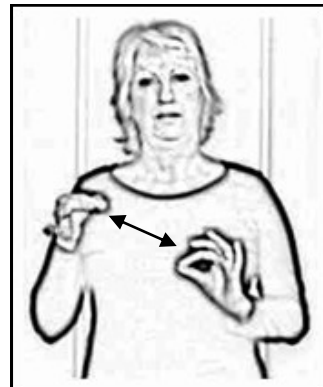
Thanks to colleagues and ex-pupils, including the
late Simon Douglas, who have patiently helped me
use BSL as a second language.

Sandra Dowe 2013

LANGUAGE
(Think and Communicate)



LINGUISTICS
(Study and research)



GRAMMAR



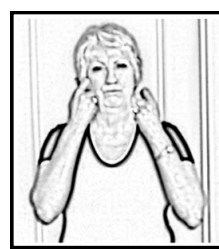
= PHONOLOGY + SYNTAX + SEMANTICS
(Sign patterns) (sign order) (meaning)



PHONOLOGY



HANDSHAPE + PLACEMENT + MOVEMENT



+ DIRECTION + ORIENTATION +NMF

NMF=Non-manual features

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

SYNTAX = SIGN ORDER



Timeframe
(when)

Topic
(what)

Comment
(action/description)

Example:



YESTERDAY



WEATHER



AWFUL

SEMANTICS (meaning)



ICONIC/ VISUAL SIGNS



BOOK

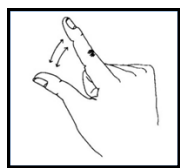


HOUSE



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;;
David Brien editor (1992) *Dictionary of British Sign Language/English*
Faber & Faber London pp 76-78

POSITIVE—YES
Head nod



YES -THAT-ONE

Yes signs



SURE



KNOW

NEGATIVE—NO
Head shake



NOT-THAT-ONE

No signs



NOT SURE

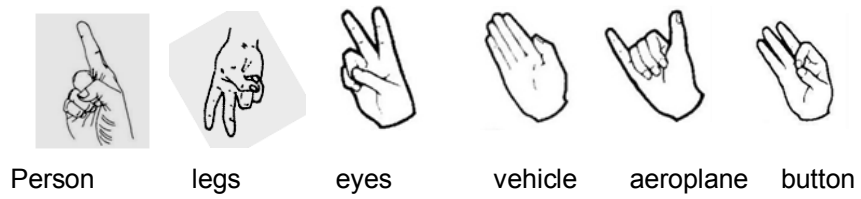


DON'T-KNOW

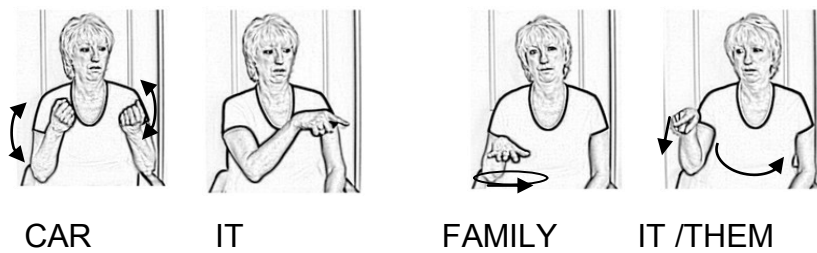
HANDSHAPES/POINTING

PROFORMS/CLASSIFIERS

Examples:



POINTING TO REFER TO PEOPLE AND THINGS



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:
Rachel Sutton-Spence and Bencie Woll (1998) *The Linguistics of British Sign Language* Cambridge University press chapter 8

ASPECT (When)

Timing internal slowly quickly



WAIT-FOR-A-LONG-TIME



OFTEN



FLOWER GROW



REMIND 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')



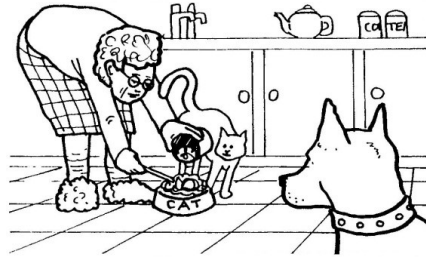
VERY-FUNNY!
(mouth 'vee' smile)



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.

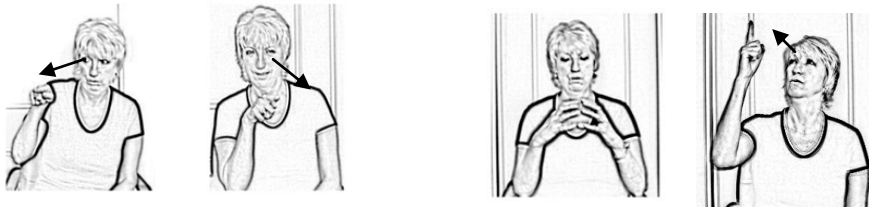
EYE GAZE

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



Reference: Sutton-Spence R & Woll B (1999) *The Linguistics of British Sign Language* Cambridge University Press chapter 5 pp 95-96

MANUAL ALPHABET

Used in BSL to fingerspell names and key words



A B C D E F G



H I J K L M N



O P Q R S T U



V W X Y Z

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
A Beginner's Guide* BBC Books.
Book and accompanying Video

David Brien editor (1992) *Dictionary of British Sign
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

Frances Elton and Linda Squelch (2008) *London &
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