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SIGN LANGUAGES – THEN AND NOW

ABSTRACT. A way of communication on an equal footing with oral and written speech is sign language. Oral speech is a common way of communication, written speech has, with the development of information technologies, been taking up more and more space. In a parallel with them, communication can also take place through sign language, which is, to deaf people, as well as to all those who use it, a natural, simple and easy way to communicate. Relationship towards sign language has changed significantly throughout history—from acceptance and isolated use, to complete rejection, and then to encouraging its adoption and emphasizing its importance for the cognitive, emotional, educational, social, and general development of deaf children.

Serbian Sign Language (SSL) serves deaf people in Serbia as a means for everyday communication, for expressing desires, willingness, for learning, for intellectual discussions, for expressing personal style. Although the standardization of the Serbian Sign Language was completed in 2015, even nowadays we may still find certain gestures of expression varying in different regions.

Different countries have different sign languages that are not reciprocally understood in use. They are distinguished by their own grammar (semantics, morphology, and syntax), different from the grammar of spoken lan-

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guages. The distinguishing and recognition of sign languages in the world has led to changes in the field of education of deaf children. In bilingual schools, children acquire both sign and spoken languages, and teachers know both of the mentioned languages. The importance of sign language in the education of deaf children is emphasized.

KEYWORDS: sign language; communication; education; deaf and hard of hearing.

INTRODUCTION

The communication process involves people interacting with each other. Communication fails when its participants do not transmit or receive messages adequately, which leads to inadequate interaction between them. People communicate in different ways. The effectiveness of any communication will depend on each individual participant.

Communication represents the interactive process of information being exchanged using symbols. Such communication can be successful under the condition that signs that the participants in communication recognise as the same are in use. As a rule, the communication between people takes place through speech. Nevertheless, hand, face, and the entire body movements are commonly used in communication. Occasionally, speech may be excluded and replaced with body movements, such as in the circumstances where the noise is intense (Isaković & Kovačević, 2015).

We can communicate very easily in many ways, without the use of voice. We nod our heads – which means “yes”, we shake our heads no – which means “no”, we lower our shoulders – which means “I don’t know.” We do this every day, often without even being aware of it. In addition, when somebody asks us where we are going - we will point our finger to show direction, to ask for silence we will put our finger over our lips. All these movements have their own significance and messages. With the help of mimicry, we express different messages and feelings. Every facial expression carries a notification - when we are smiling, frowning, being amazed... The messages of hands, faces and bodies are natural and obvious, and we have received them through our eyesight. When, to these movements, we add the conventional, established, and agreed ones, we get a fuller and better understanding and sign language, as the basic way of communication of the deaf. Gestures in sign language are what words in speech represent. Instead of hearing, through which we adopt the meanings

of words, we use vision through which we interpret the meaning of signs in sign language (Isaković, 2013).

DIFFERENT MODES OF COMMUNICATION

People communicate in various ways. We can say that the need for communication is almost as old as mankind. As the mankind evolves, the conveyance of information develops and perfects (Isaković & Kovačević, 2015).

The usual mode of human communication is speech. Singleton (2007) considers verbal communication to involve interdependent successive stages and mental processes that are conditioned by each other.

Nowadays, with the development of information technologies, written communication takes up more and more space. A mode of communication on equal footing with oral and written speech is sign language. Sign language represents a natural language expression of deaf people. Attitude towards sign language, as well as the language itself, has changed a lot throughout history. From the complete rejection and prohibition of sign language and punishing those who use it, to the acceptance and encouragement of its adoption and emphasizing its importance for the cognitive, emotional and general development of deaf children.

Sign language is not a new construct. Many researchers have reported that the first human language was sign language rather than spoken language (Armstrong, 1999; Stokoe, 2001).

The role of sign language in the learning process and the education of the deaf has also been a subject of a lot of research. This primarily referred to ways of learning, gaining knowledge in various fields, but also to establishing communication among the deaf.

Dimić (1996) states that gesture is a specific human activity. It is an inseparable human companion from the origin of the first humans. Today, as well, it follows the speech of man. In various emotional states, a man, unconsciously resorts to using gestures with the intention of being as expressive and convincing as possible. We also use gesture when meeting people whose language we do not know.

ROOTS OF SIGN LANGUAGE

The early use of sign languages has been documented sporadically. Western as well as Middle Eastern cultures report that deaf people and communities of the deaf have been using sign language for a number of thousands of years back. In Plato's and Socrates' work, we can see the earliest discussions about sign communication. Socrates asks a question what we would be doing if we had no voice or speech and we would like to say something to each other. We would then, like the deaf, create signs using our heads, hands, and body parts. In the fifteenth century, the courts of the Ottoman sultans used to include a larger number of the deaf who were responsible for training and sign learning and they were subordinate directly to the sultan (Woll & Ladd, 2003).

It is a very old question whether deaf children should be taught sign language at all. This has often been the subject of various researches and discussions. The main argument against sign language is that it makes deaf people different and excluded from all other people who do not belong to their society. As a result, they are perceived as stigmatised, different and communication with the hearing world is made impossible. However, insufficiently developed and somewhat incomprehensible oral speech further increases their exclusion (Isaković, 2013).

The development of sign language correlates with the growth of the community of the deaf. The appearance of big cities brought about the enlargement of these communities. Prior to that, the smaller communities of the deaf communicated through specific signs, which were for the most part incomprehensible to other deaf people and their surroundings (Isaković & Kovačević, 2015).

In case of a relatively large number of the deaf populating a small territory, relations will be established between both hearing and deaf members of such a community, who will interact with each other through signs. A typical example of such a community is an island off the coast of Massachusetts, Martha's Vineyard. From the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth century, small spaces gathered both hearing population and a relatively large number of the deaf. In these cities, the use of signs was an accepted and natural form of communication before the first schools for the deaf were established. Interaction using signs represented an important segment of daily life.

Nevertheless, communities like these ones are quite uncommon (Groce, 1985).

At the end of the fourteenth century, Agricola described a deaf person who had been taught to read and write, which was one of the first suggestions that deaf people were able to be educated successfully. His work was later reviewed by Girolamo Cardano who emphasized the fact that deaf children have the ability to speak through writing and hear through reading. Very often, Pedro Pons de Leon, who describes the deaf people enabled to read and write, is said to be the father of the education of the deaf (Marschark, Schick & Spencer, 2006).

The roots of sign language date back to the 16th century and Europe, and American Sign Language (ASL or formerly Ameslan) was initially used primarily in the community of the deaf in the US - and in parts of Canada, too. Many linguists of the time debated sign communication, while some argued that sign communication reaches further and deeper into history than speech communication (Encyclopedia of American Disability History, 2009, according to Isaković, 2013).

In the mid-eighteenth century, Charles Michel de l'Epee opened the first state-sponsored school for deaf children. He developed a system of signs using the natural signs of the Parisian community of the deaf, and expanded and modified them with respect to spoken French. These signs were useful for learning the spoken language but not sufficiently accepted in the natural sign language of the deaf (Marschark, Schick & Spencer, 2006). He insisted on the use of sign language, considering it the only natural way of communication for the deaf, through which all cognitive structures, including abstract thinking, could be developed. Such signs have spread to the territory of Americas through Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, but they have not come to life because they were described as slow, confusing and difficult to remember. He pointed out that sign language is inferior to speech in the process of abstract thinking, but it is superior to speech in expressing the emotions of the deaf. Proponents of speech-based education accepted the oral method in Leipzig in 1778, as the only method that can help the deaf to cognitively progress and develop abstract thinking (Marschark, Schick & Spencer, 2006). After the International Congress in Milan in 1888, the lead is taken by the oral method which overtakes the sign language, which had hitherto been dominant, and throws at it the stigma of a less worthy language (Bradarić-Jončić, 2000).

Since then, the oral method has become dominant in the education of the deaf. The use of signs was, for the most part, completely forbid-

den—people were very often punished for it. People insisted solely on speech, on the clarity of articulation. Many words, the meaning of which was in the background, were learned. The outcome of such learning was often the knowledge of the pronunciation of a large number of words, but without their function and everyday use. However, in the deaf community, in their culture, sign language continues to live, to be a basic, irreplaceable means of communication. Deaf children, housed in boarding schools, continued to communicate through signs, often in a tacit manner, because they were not allowed to do so publicly and in schools. Also, deaf adults continued using sign language, considering it a significant segment of their cultural identity.

Samuel Heinicke, who founded a school for the deaf in Leipzig, where the work was based exclusively on oral speech, is considered the initiator of the oral method. Insistence on oral speech led to speech becoming the very essence of teaching, while the content of the school subjects was neglected. Consequently, there was disagreement among Heinicke's followers, which caused a split into two streams, the formal one and the material one. Representatives of the formal direction had the motto: "Everything is in speech," meaning that they were primarily striving to build a clean and clear articulation using consonant groups with no meaning. On the other hand, the representatives of materialism worked under the motto: "Speech is in everything", that is, they believed that speech could be adopted and developed through various teaching contents. Conflicting views were later reconciled by Johannes Vater (J. Kovačević, 2003).

In the mid-19th century, a major anti-sign language campaign was launched in America, led by Alexander Graham Bell and other prominent Americans, with the aim of stifling the use of sign language among the deaf. Discussions about sign language have raised fundamental questions about the differences between Americans and non-Americans, the civilized and savages, men and women, natural and unnatural, normal and abnormal. On the other hand, proponents of the necessity of using sign language claimed that the debate over the use of dialects and language was, in fact, the linguistic tip of the iceberg of arguments about power, social control and nationalism. A question was raised about who and why had the right to control the mode of speech. Linguists in the late 19th century often used a theory called "linguistic Darwinism": inferior languages became extinct and in the so-called struggle for survival, they were replaced by superior languages. Gesture communication, still in its beginning, gained the

position of a loser. American philologist William Dwight Whitney considered human communication to once have consisted of an inferior set of tones, gestures and grimaces and, he considered, through a process of natural selection and survival, a better voice has won (Baynton, 1996, according to Isaković, 2013).

In the past, sign language was often referred to as a basic and less valued mode of communication. It was pointed out that the “civilized” people were usually distinguished from the “savage” ones by how rich or precise their oral language was. As a result, communicating in gestures is reduced nowadays. The use of gestures with or instead of speech is a sign of worse and inferior intellectual powers (Encyclopedia of American Disability History, 2009, according to Isaković, 2013). On the other hand, attempts to understand the structure of sign languages as linguistic systems date from the middle of the last century (Stokoe, 1960; Stokoe, Casterline & Cronenberg, 1965, according to Marschark & al., 2006).

In the second half of the last century, a new approach emerged that sought to take over the best of the sign and oral method, and it was known as the total method. This method involves the use of all available means that will facilitate the reception and understanding of the message, which means that it is permissible and desirable for oral speech to be accompanied and supplemented with sign language (Bradarić-Jončić, 2000). Total communication means the simultaneous communication of hearing impaired persons in spoken and sign language. This mode of communication is considered to be the most effective way due to the use of both visual and auditory communication channels (Šešum, Dimić & Isaković, 2016).

In schools for hearing impaired children, this method is still present today, although modern schooling in our country strives for inclusive education, i.e. inclusion of hearing impaired children in regular schools. The importance of inclusive education is reflected in the fact that hearing-impaired children are enabled to interact with their peers, communicate with them and participate in the activities of their social circle. Given the communication difficulties that are an inevitable consequence of hearing impairment, these early childhood experiences contribute to the development of skills that will be important to them later, both in the work environment and in everyday life (Kovačević, Isaković & Dimić, 2016).

Brentari (2010) raises the questions of what it is that makes sign languages so fascinating and what the scientists know about human languages, at all. He explores how sign languages survive, how they

are passed on from generation to generation, but also how the use of a visual (non-auditory) system affects the grammatical structure of sign languages.

SIGN LANGUAGES TODAY

Nowadays it is known that the sign languages can be compared with the standard languages by their complex construction. Various sign languages are used in different parts of the world and they are not reciprocally understood. Various signs and various rules (various order of signs), as well as various sentence constructions are used for their forming (different sign order) (Kristal, 1996).

Sign language represents the natural language expression of the deaf. As such, it is marked by special grammatical rules that are different from those that exist in their language community (Bradarić-Jončić, 2000).

In the modern world, sign language is considered to be a language equal to other natural human languages. It has its structure and vocabulary and it can perform all the functions just like any other natural human language. Linguistic research has contributed to the acknowledgment of sign language as the natural language of deaf people. Numerous studies have described linguistic systems of different national sign languages (vocabulary, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) (Kovačević, Dimić & Isaković, 2014).

Various sign language forms are utilized in the communication of deaf people, even though they have not been officially recognised as languages. The most developed sign languages are American Sign Language (ASL) and British Sign Language (BSL). ASL is entirely different from the English language by its structure (Encyclopedia of Disability, 2006).

Sign languages used in different countries are not the same, and there is no “international sign language” that deaf people around the world could understand. In addition, they are not simple gesture collections and they are not the same. They are on an equal footing with other languages (Kristal, 1996, according to Isaković & Kovačević, 2015).

American Sign Language has a large number of users in the US (Baker & Cokely, 1980). The number of about half a million deaf people who are the users of ASL does not comprise hearing people who

have learned it in the course of their lives. That way we get a number that is two or three times larger. Most signers use Spanish Sign Language, then Italian Sign Language, and American Sign Language is in the third place (O'Rourke, 1975).

The dominant language of the deaf in the USA is the American Sign Language (ASL), which is far more used than the English language (Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan, 1996). Many words have been taken from English; the grammatical structure differs entirely from the structure of the English language (Klima & Bellugi, 1979). Teaching deaf children to use signs is a quick and spontaneous process, just like teaching hearing children to use their spoken language. It can be assumed that precisely this is the reason why deaf signers have a poor capability to use the English language (Lillo-Martin, 1999).

Deaf young people insist on using sign language in the schooling process. They use lip-reading and oral communication and consider them very helpful, but they emphasize that their essential mode of communication is the sign language (Encyclopedia of Disability, 2006).

By rejecting the stigma, sign language has become a subject of numerous neurolinguistic, psycholinguistic and defectological studies that have yielded interesting results. Namely, it has been ascertained that the use of sign language stimulates the same areas of the left hemisphere, as is the case with the oral language, that deaf children adopt sign language following the same principles as their hearing peers in the process of spoken language acquisition (Bradarić-Jončić & Mohr, 2010). Children who freely adopt and use sign language have greater confidence, a better image of themselves, they are more independent in their everyday activities, but also more flexible in their behavior (Dimić & Isaković, 2018).

SERBIAN SIGN LANGUAGE TODAY

Serbian Sign Language (SSL) is the primary language of the deaf people in Serbia. Through this language, they study, converse and give their opinions on everyday topics on a daily basis. This language differs from one part of the country to another (Dimić, Polovina & Kašić, 2009).

The basic advantage of sign language is that it represents the mother tongue of deaf children, who have deaf parents. It expresses children's primary feelings, sensations and attitudes, but also children's

needs, wishes, pleas, requests, and helps them establish relationships with their surroundings. This is precisely why difficulties arise for the deaf children who have hearing parents. These parents do not know sign language, it is not rare that they show resistance to it, so deaf children have difficulty establishing both emotional and social communication (Isaković & Kovačević, 2015).

The standardization of Serbian Sign Language was completed in 2015. However, it still has many varieties and it is different depending on the region of the country where it is used, even between smaller communities of the deaf. We must emphasize that there are so-called dialectal differences, which are not big, but there are many cases where the same notions are shown in a completely different way. However, this does not cause problems in the communication of the deaf with each other. They communicate very quickly and easily, regardless of these language differences. This applies even to deaf people from different countries, who very quickly and easily start communicating and understand each other. A large number of natural signs in sign language (demonstrative, imitating, and drawing) makes this easier. Moreover, just like in any language, new signs appear, enter the language, and some of them disappear or remain in some more closed environments.

Dimić & Isaković (2018) state that Serbian Sign Language (SSL) is a living language that constantly evolves and its vocabulary gets enriched constantly.

Speech, mimicry and dactylology always accompany sign language, which makes the communication and comprehension easier. It is followed through speech because lip reading greatly facilitates the understanding of many synonymous signs and prevents misunderstandings. For example, one sign is used for the terms human, people, father, man; one sign for the terms name, illness, and sick-leave; one sign for the question “how” and the term teacher; the term for the city of Novi Sad and the notion of grandmother are shown identically. Therefore, understanding is more difficult, and thus the context of the communication is largely used. Synonymous signs are differentiated by pronunciation, but also by the use of additional signs. Mimicry and facial expression are necessary because they also facilitate understanding and give additional “strength” to what is shown. Facial expression and body language are important, almost as much as manual communication. It is very important for them to be coordinated in order to bring about the true meaning of the message. Signs that show emotions, such as “joy” or “sadness” or

“worry” should display an adequate facial expression. Head movement and facial expression can change the meaning of a certain sign or a certain expression completely.

Mimicry is a gesture intonation (Dimić & Isaković, 2018). Dactylology (finger alphabet) is actually spelling by the use of fingers. Names and surnames of people, names of cities, countries and professional terminology from different fields are spelled.

What characterizes the Serbian Sign Language is the existence of a large number of synonymous signs, which makes it more difficult to understand the message and this understanding depends on the context of the conversation itself. Its shortcomings are overcome by completing it by mimicry, speech, and dactylology (Isaković & Kovačević, 2015). The children master the Serbian sign language by learning it from their parents who cannot hear, hearing-impaired friends and fellow students they get to know at school (Isaković & Kovačević, 2015; Dimić & Isaković, 2018).

One of the peculiarities of Serbian Sign Language is that words that signify completely different terms, while they are both visually and acoustically similar, are shown identically in signs (for example: answer - responsible, conclude - lock, stay - leave (to not take with you), finding - find). Words are arranged one next to the other the way they are perceived in space and time (Dimić & Isaković, 2018).

Serbian Sign Language is characterized by three indicatives, namely, the past, the present and the future. They differ from each other in the use of individual signs that denote each individual tense (the sign for now - today, the sign for before and the sign for after). There are no conjugation and cases. Demonstrative body movements are largely utilized. The visual perception and sensations affect the word order within a sentence. What has left the strongest impression on the person that shows signs will be found at the beginning of the sentence. As a result, interpretation into oral speech and vice versa may be difficult. Sign language cannot be spoken in the dark and in low light conditions. Serbian Sign Language comprises body movements that are learnt promptly, easy to memorize, understandable and didactically useful during schooling. It can also be used for communication in physically harsh circumstances, which involve a noisy environment or being far from a person engaged in conversation (Isaković & Kovačević, 2015; Dimić & Isaković, 2018).

SIGN LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION OF DEAF CHILDREN

When you see it throughout history, when it comes to the early use of sign language in the education of deaf children, there is relatively little information, isolated descriptions and individual cases. These were the pioneers in the education of the deaf through sign communication. The focus on learning for the deaf was, in its beginnings, based on language learning through reading and writing.

For many years, debates have taken place in the world and in our country on how best to approach the education of hearing impaired children. Which approach and model of education will be the most successful one and contribute most to adequate achievements and knowledge acquisition. The population of hearing impaired children is very heterogeneous, and because of that, different educational approaches need to exist in order to successfully meet their needs as regards their communication and education. Impaired hearing and speech results in certain specific characteristics and impediments with children. Special methods and approaches, the support provided by the family, the surroundings and professional institutions are very important. During the history of schooling and rehabilitation of hearing impaired children, the dominance of the oral method and that of the sign method have been taking turns (Kovačević, Isaković & Arsić, 2019).

The followers of the oral method in their critiques consider the sign language to be concrete, that it communicates the abstract terms with difficulty, that it renders the development of abstract thinking and spoken language difficult with deaf and hard of hearing children (Savić, 2002).

The authors who underline the importance of the sign language assert that this language is the key element of educational programmes for the deaf within the bilingual approach in teaching and learning. The studies of the Italian authors point out that the sign language encourages visual discrimination, non-verbal intelligence, attention and expressive speech (Caprici, Cattani, Rossini & Volterra, 1998).

For those hearing impaired children who don't have the capacity for language acquisition and speech development through listening, a different approach in education is needed, which will use their visual processing capabilities to the maximum and enable them to adopt the language, knowledge and skills appropriate for their individual abili-

ties and possibilities. This can be achieved by using sign language in their education and training (Kovačević, Dimić & Srzić, 2018).

The studies of foreign and national authors point to the fact that the early learning of the sign language will accelerate the learning of the spoken language, regardless of whether its spoken and written modality is in question. In the contemporary world, the sign language is considered the language on an equal footing as other natural human languages. It has its structure and vocabulary and it can perform all functions as any other natural human language.

When coming to school, deaf children of deaf parents are socially and communicatively more developed than deaf children of parents who can hear as they have developed the ability to communicate through gestures – signs. The studies show that persons who learn the sign language from their birth (deaf children of deaf parents) achieve better results than their peers who start to learn the sign language at a later stage (the deaf children of the partners who can hear) in almost all measures of linguistic competence, speech, reading, writing, social development and academic knowledge (Kovačević & al., 2014).

The schooling of hearing impaired children in the developed countries of the world has been shifting from schools for the deaf to regular schools in the last couple of decades. This is mostly influenced by the development of technology, or timely diagnosing of hearing impairments. Modern hearing aids and cochlear implants lead to better access to sound and better hearing for children. Normal hearing parents decide for and want more access to spoken language for their children. Their presence in classrooms requires additional support of the family, school, society, then additional lessons with listening and speaking practice, modern technology or sign language interpreters, if needed.

Isaković & Kovačević (2015) state that the inclusion of hearing impaired children at ordinary schools can be challenging for all who are included in the educational process due to difficulties in the communication process that require understanding and a special approach in working with them. Deaf and hard of hearing children at ordinary schools need to be specifically treated in accordance with their abilities and capabilities (a specialized program, tools used, and forms of work that are tailored to suit each pupil's needs in an optimal way).

Thanks to the cochlear implantation, children are enabled to access sound at an early stage, which helps them to develop their speech and language. If children miss the critical stage at which they are to be

exposed to the natural language, their subsequent development of cognitive activities may be underdeveloped (Humphries et al., 2012).

In the last couple of decades, in both the developed countries and our country there has been a steady increase in the number of hearing impaired pupils in ordinary educational circumstances. Toe & Paatsch (2010) state that the communication process is often characterized by a series of questions and answers. Little is known about the extent to which deaf and hard of hearing students understand their peers in inclusive education situations (according to Isaković, Dimić & Kovačević, 2014).

Deaf and hard of hearing students have difficulty communicating under regular educational conditions. The communication difficulties for the deaf students that use interpreters are visible to teachers, while hard of hearing students' difficulties are often not noticed. Hard of hearing students communicate verbally. Their needs in communication and education may be overlooked as they face fewer problems than the deaf students do. Low acoustical conditions and difficulty in lip-reading make gaining knowledge harder for hard of hearing students (Marschark et al., 2002; Ross et al., 1982, according to Radić - Šestić, 2013).

The acknowledgment and acceptance of sign languages worldwide has had as its consequence a change in the policy of educating deaf children. Thirty years ago, abroad, bilingual schools were established for deaf children (Neal Mahshie, 1995; Bradarić-Jončić & Ivasović, 2004, according to Bradarić-Jončić & Mohr, 2010). The sign language has been considered to be the primary language at these schools and the language of the hearing environment is learned by the deaf children as a foreign language. Deaf children learn both sign and spoken language and teachers know both of them at bilingual schools. Evaluation of these forms of education of deaf children has shown excellent results.

A lot of hearing impaired children are taught in ordinary schools. The development of spoken language is grounded on the use of hearing residues and amplification. The approach involving oral method in the education of deaf children is gaining more and more significance with the use of cochlear implantation (Bradarić-Jončić & Mohr, 2010).

When teaching the deaf children sign and spoken language, it is most important to provide an environment and situations that are sufficiently stimulating to motivate the child to communicate using both languages. One of the basic postulations of the bilingual devel-

opment of deaf children is that it is necessary to provide them with an opportunity to communicate interactively with both their peers and adults, both with the hearing persons and the deaf ones, both in sign and in spoken language. It should be borne in mind that a language has its own oral, written and sign expressions, and these expressions should be used both together and individually. The deaf children—who, at a critical time for language adoption, do not have the ability to interact with the environment in a high-quality way that sign language provides for them—achieve a low threshold of language knowledge and are predestined for semilingualism and all its harmful consequences on the child's entire development and academic achievements (Kovačević, 2013; Kovačević & Isaković, 2019).

Sign language is a language that deaf children spontaneously adopt and learn, just like the hearing children adopt the spoken language of their environment. Deaf children who are, from an early age, exposed exclusively to sign language go through the same basic levels of language acquisition as the hearing children who are learning to speak in their environment (Kovačević, 2012; Kovačević, Isaković & Dimić, 2016; Kovačević & al., 2019).

At an early age, it is very important to encourage language development. Whether that will be of spoken or sign language will depend on many factors. Primarily on whether the child comes from a family of the deaf or a family where the parents have normal hearing. Most often, it is very difficult for hearing parents to accept their child's deafness and to learn sign language, at least some initial, natural movements that they will use in their earliest communication with their child. Early language development will provide emotional security, interconnection and cognitive progress, but it will facilitate inclusion in educational institutions.

The aim of the educational process is to develop communication skills in children, to provide a higher level of education for them and to include them in the life of the community. In the educational work, at preschool age, the following should be provided: for the educator and the defectologist who is fluent in sign language to be able to take part; adequate sign language training for parents; encouraging the child to go to school with a developed first language, spoken or sign language (Kovačević & Isaković, 2019).

The educational achievements depend on the degree and kind of backing from specialists, tailored interaction, appropriate acoustic environment and precise interpretation into sign language (Schick et

al., 2006; Luckner & Muir, 2001, according to Radić-Šestić, 2013; Isaković & Kovačević, 2015).

Early detection of a hearing impairment in the child and implementation of intervention programs, as early as possible, are necessary. It is recommended by the ASHA (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association) that appropriate early family-oriented intervention programs are created, which provide a possibility to choose to professionals, parents, and children with hearing impairments. The hearing-impaired child's family needs to have access to all information about the child's general development, specific information about the hearing impairment, communication possibilities and language development of deaf children. Local community, state, health and education projects must target their goal toward early detection of a hearing impairment and early intervention (Kovačević, Isaković & Arsić, 2017).

Insisting on the use of oral speech in hearing impaired persons aims to encourage this population to better integrate into their social community. However, as verbal expression and understanding of the verbal message are often made more difficult for the deaf, they prefer to express themselves in sign language, by which they inadvertently separate themselves from the social life of the community even more (Isaković & Kovačević, 2015).

The integration of the deaf depends directly on the level of recognition of the sign language as the most appropriate for the deaf. Deaf persons should be enabled to choose between the oral or bilingual school systems and to participate in the community fully and equally with others. This will improve their everyday life as regards its quality and their rights (Timmermans, 2003).

The self-development and integration into society directly correlate with the education. Only successful educational programs can prevent exclusion, and provide adequate education and consequently employment and active social life.

CONCLUSION Throughout their history, sign languages have gone through different periods - from being completely rejected, assertions that they are a less valued language, that it is not a language at all, but an aggregate of movements and mimicry, to its acknowledgement as a natural and first language of deaf persons. The deaf were very often forbidden to use it and communicate in it with each other. The education was exclusively reduced to insisting on oral speech, lip reading, reading and writing. Signs existed exclusively in the communities of the deaf.

The main argument against the sign language was that it separated and isolated the deaf persons from all other, that their social interaction was reduced to their restricted community, the community of the deaf. On the other hand, persisting with the use of speech, which is frequently insufficiently developed, has its limitations and is hard to understand, and makes the integration into the community of the persons who can hear harder. What could be said here is that each deaf person is an entity for himself or herself, with his or her own potential to develop his or her own first – the sign language, but speech as well, which is necessary for functioning within the world that is not familiar with signs.

With time and the development of science, especially linguistics, psycholinguistics, but defectology sciences as well, the analysis of signs was started through the systematization and standardization of most developed languages, and thus they gradually gained their right place and function. The research on how sign languages survive, how they are passed on from one generation to another was also started, while one of the most important questions was how the use of visual system (not auditory) affected the grammatical structure of sign languages. We have to emphasize that sign languages are not the clusters of gestures and they are not universal.

They exist separately from spoken (written) languages and they differ markedly from them (in structure, semantics, grammar, lexis).

The year of 2015 was particularly significant for our country, as it was the year when the standardisation of the Serbian Sign Language was done. However, it still has many varieties and it differs from the part of the country where it is used, even among the smaller communities of the deaf. These so-called dialectal differences are not great and they do not cause problems in the interpersonal communication of the deaf. They understand each other quickly and easily. Moreover, in the Serbian sign language, as well as in any spoken language, new signs appear, and some disappear, although they frequently exist in parallel within communities that use them.

Over the several past decades, the schooling of hearing impaired, in developed countries in the world has been redirected from the school for the deaf to regular schools. What happens there is that deaf and hard of hearing students come across difficulties in conversing as well as in learning. Hard of hearing students mainly use the verbal expression and lip reading, whereas the deaf children most often require interpreters/translators for the sign language. They exist and they are defined by law, but they rarely and rather sporadically ap-

pear in practice. We can conclude that the support which has an effect on the scholastic attainments of hearing impaired students primarily comprises the extent and the type of the support offered by specialists, who are a very important link in the entire system. In addition to that, it comprises adjusted communication (precise and impartial translating into the sign language – the services of interpreters/translators), adequate amplification and necessary adequate visual and acoustic surroundings.

The successful inclusion and integration of deaf children is the right to free choice between the oral and bilingual scholastic system. The recognition and the use of the Serbian Sign Language as a language of choice, of the deaf population, would bring many positive innovations into their education. The Serbian Sign Language, with all its specificities and varieties, is the first and natural mode of communication of the deaf. Recognized by law, it should be socially accepted, as it is the only way in which the community of the deaf could equally participate in the everyday life and in its surroundings. This would contribute to the improvement of life quality, the development of educational and cultural distinctiveness as well as the human rights of deaf persons.

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ЉУБИЦА С. ИСАКОВИЋ

ТАМАРА Р. КОВАЧЕВИЋ

МАЈА С. СРЗИЋ

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БЕОГРАДУ

ФАКУЛТЕТ ЗА СПЕЦИЈАЛНУ ЕДУКАЦИЈУ И РЕХАБИЛИТАЦИЈУ

РЕЗИМЕ

ЗНАКОВНИ ЈЕЗИЦИ – НЕКАД И САД

Равноправан начин комуникације са усменим и писаним говором јесте знаковни језик. Усмени говор је уобичајени начин комуникације, а писани говор развојем информационих технологија заузима све више простора. Паралелно са њима може се одвијати и комуникација путем знаковног језика, који је природан, једноставан и лак начин комуникације глумим људима, али и свима онима који га користе. Однос према знаковном језику се кроз историју значајно мењао. Од прихватања и изоловане употребе до потпуног одбацивања, затим и до подстицања његовог усвајања и истицања значаја за когнитивни, емоционални, едукативни, социјални и општи развој глуве деце.

Српски знаковни језик (СЗЈ) глумим особама у Србији служи као средство за свакодневну комуникацију, за исказивање жеља, воље, за учење, интелектуалне расправе, изражавање личног стила. Стандардизација српског знаковног језика завршена је 2015. године и данас имамо могућност регионалних варијација појединих гестова и начина изражавања.

У различитим деловима света користе се различити знаковни језици који нису међусобно разумљиви. Одликују се сопственом граматиком (семантиком, морфологијом и синтаксом) различитом од граматике говорних језика. Препознавање и признавање знаковних језика у свету довело је до промена у сфери васпитања и образовања глуве деце. У двојезичним школама деца уче оба језика, и знаковни и говорни, а наставници истовремено владају и једним и другим обликом изражавања. У раду се истиче значај знаковног језика за образовање глуве деце.

Кључне речи: знаковни језик; комуникација; образовање; глуви и наглуви.



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