

Each country or region has its own sign language, with its own vocabulary and grammar. Deaf people from different countries cannot easily understand each other's sign language. If a hearing person learns sign language in one country, the person cannot easily understand a sign language from another country, but has to learn the other sign language separately. Even within one country, sign language often varies from region to region.

Indian Sign Language

Understanding Indian Sign Language

Notes

Indian Sign Language as a Complete Language

Some countries have more than one sign language used within their territory. In India, we have Indian Sign Language in most parts of the country, but American sign Language is also being used in Bangalore, and Alipur Sign Language being used in a village with many deaf people in Karnataka. Also, some sign languages are used in more than one country. For example, American Sign Language is used not only in the USA but also in a large part of Canada.

Some people believe that “Sign language is dependent on spoken language; it is a representation of the spoken language on the hands.”

This is wrong!

Each sign language in each country or region has its own structure. This structure differs significantly from the structure of the spoken language used in the same country. Sign language is not dependent on spoken language in any way. Indian Sign Language (ISL) is not at all similar to Hindi, to English, or to any other spoken language in India. It has its own structure and is not a hand representation of any spoken language.

We do use fingerspelling in ISL but only to quote words from the written language on occasion. Fingerspelling is only a small part of sign language, and it does not mean that ISL is based on another spoken or written language. ISL has its own identity, that is, independent from any other language in India.

Some people believe that “Sign language has been invented by hearing people to help deaf people.”

This is wrong!

Sign languages have evolved naturally in all places where deaf people have been gathered. Nobody has invented them for deaf people. Deaf people themselves have created sign languages. (We do not know much about the history of Indian Sign Language because there was no video recording when it started, but we do know that it is the invention of deaf people themselves.)

Indian Sign Language as a Complete Language

Some people believe that “Indian Sign Language is not as good as other sign languages.”

This is wrong!

No sign language is superior to another as deaf people can communicate and express themselves in any sign language. Many people, including deaf people, believe that Western sign languages, specially American Sign Language, have more or better grammar and are more developed than Indian Sign Language. This is not correct.

❓ As Indian Sign Language expands to new professional contexts, its professional vocabulary also grows. The same process has happened in other sign languages. It is an automatic and natural process, and it does not mean that any sign language is better than another.