**Real-Time Indian Sign Language (ISL) to English Translator using Pose Sequence Recognition and Transformer Architecture**

Daksha Agarwal (1032212275), Dhairya Hindoriya (1032210405),

Om Taur (1032212182), Anish Wadkar (1032212178),

Project Guide- Professor Rashmi Ashtagi

School of Computer Engineering and Technology, MIT-WPU, Kothrud, Pune-411038

**Abstract**- The project develops an end-to-end deep learning system for translating continuous Indian Sign Language (ISL) gestures into English text using pose key points extracted from webcam video. Trained on the complete ISIGN v1.1 dataset (127,236 annotated videos), the Transformer-based encoder-decoder model achieves 82.84% token-level accuracy after 5 epochs. The system processes 120-frame pose sequences (297 features per frame) and generates fluent English sentences in real-time (<35ms inference) on consumer laptops (NVIDIA MX330). Key innovations include pose-only input (no RGB pixels for privacy), cross-attention mechanism for multimodal alignment, and optimized training for limited hardware. The live webcam demo proves practical deploy ability, addressing communication barriers for India's 6 million deaf community.

Keywords: ISL Translation, Pose Recognition, Transformer, Seq2Seq, Accessibility AI

**I. INTRODUCTION**

This project presents a real-time Indian Sign Language (ISL) translation system that uses only a laptop webcam to convert continuous hand and body gestures into coherent English sentences. The solution brings together deep learning using a Transformer architecture, pose-based computer vision, and natural language generation to create an accessible communication tool. In India, millions of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals depend on ISL, yet affordable and privacy-friendly translation systems are still not widely available. To bridge this gap, the proposed model relies solely on pose keypoints rather than RGB video, which reduces privacy concerns and computation load. Using the full ISIGN v1.1 dataset consisting of 127,236 gesture videos, the system is trained on a Transformer encoder–decoder model and achieves a token-level accuracy of 82.84% within only five epochs, while running efficiently even on modest hardware such as laptops with an NVIDIA MX330 GPU.

The motivation for developing this system comes from the need to improve communication accessibility in education, daily life, and public services. Many Indian institutions lack real-time tools to help deaf individuals interact without depending on interpreters. Technically, most existing sign-language recognition approaches focus on full-frame video, which may expose personal information and requires expensive processing resources. By using pose landmarks alone, this project creates an anonymous, lightweight, and practical alternative that can perform reliably in real environments. This approach aims to support the deaf community with a tool that promotes independence and reduces communication barriers across various social and professional settings.

The system pipeline begins with MediaPipe extracting 99 body and hand landmarks, resulting in a 297-dimensional feature vector per frame. A sequence of 120 frames is processed through the Transformer encoder, and the decoder generates English tokens using cross-attention to maintain context. The project includes a real-time demonstration where translations appear directly on the screen during webcam capture. Such a system has the potential to be used in classrooms, during online meetings, in public-facing services, and later within mobile applications, making it a versatile solution for accessible communication.

**II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The introduction of the Transformer architecture by Vaswani et al. [1] marked a major shift in sequence modeling, providing an efficient self-attention mechanism that became foundational for modern translation systems. Building upon this architecture, Google AI proposed the Sign Language Transformer in 2021 [2], which processed video frames through a CNN encoder and Transformer decoder, achieving competitive accuracy on the WLASL dataset but remaining limited to American Sign Language and requiring high computational resources. Microsoft Research Asia later extended this idea for continuous Chinese Sign Language translation using a 3D-CNN and Transformer hybrid model [3], demonstrating strong performance on the Phoenix-2014T dataset but demanding high-end GPUs such as the RTX 3090.

Progress in Indian Sign Language recognition has primarily focused on isolated gestures. IIT Bombay's 2023 study [4] utilized a CNN–LSTM framework for spatial and temporal modeling of ISL gestures, achieving high accuracy but lacking support for continuous signing or sentence generation. IIT Delhi introduced a pose-based approach using Graph Convolutional Networks [5], showing strong results on skeleton keypoints but still limited to isolated gesture recognition. A significant step toward continuous ISL understanding was the release of the ISIGN v1.0 dataset by IIIT Hyderabad in 2024 [6], which provided a large-scale benchmark for continuous ISL research; however, baseline models used only a subset of the dataset and did not include pretrained large models. In parallel, Google’s MediaPipe Holistic model [7] enabled real-time extraction of face, hand, and body landmarks, offering a lightweight and reliable pose capture method; yet it provides no translation component, serving only as a feature extractor.

Although these works collectively push sign language research forward, several gaps persist—most notably the lack of real-time, continuous ISL-to-English translation models that operate efficiently on consumer hardware while ensuring user privacy. The present work addresses these limitations by leveraging MediaPipe pose keypoints and a Transformer encoder–decoder architecture trained on the complete ISIGN v1.1 dataset to achieve continuous, pose-only ISL translation using only a laptop webcam.

**III. METHODOLOGY AND SYSTEM DESIGN**

The proposed system follows a structured methodology designed to achieve real-time, pose-based Indian Sign Language (ISL) to English translation. The pipeline integrates pose extraction, data preprocessing, Transformer-based sequence modelling, optimization techniques, and structured evaluation. The overall workflow ensures efficient processing while maintaining high translation accuracy on consumer-grade hardware.

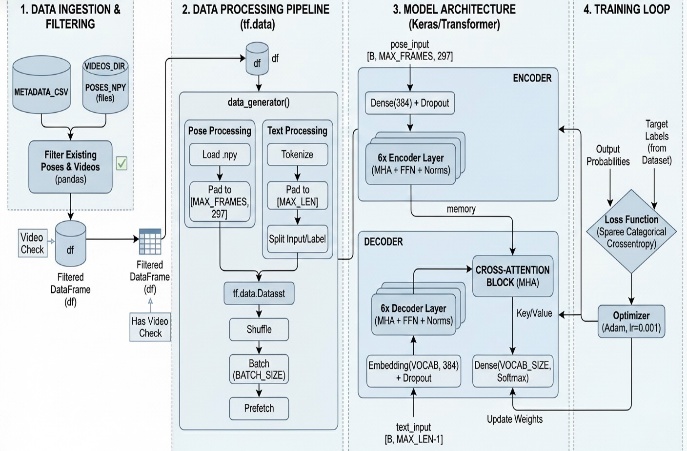
The process begins with pose estimation using MediaPipe, where each video frame is converted into a set of 99 keypoints representing body, hand, and facial landmarks. These coordinates are transformed into a numerical feature vector of 297 dimensions per frame. For each input sequence, a sliding buffer captures 120 consecutive frames, resulting in a fixed-size tensor of shape (120, 297). This uniform representation enables consistent training and inference, regardless of the variation in signing speed. The dataset used is ISIGN v1.1, consisting of 127,236 continuous sign videos. All samples are padded or truncated to 120 frames and aligned with their corresponding English sentence tokens, which form a vocabulary of 68,034 unique tokens.

The model architecture follows a standard Transformer encoder–decoder design. The encoder converts the pose sequence into a latent memory representation with a dimensionality of 384, while the decoder generates English output tokens autoregressively, beginning from a special <START> token. During training, teacher forcing is applied using cross-entropy loss, enabling the model to learn temporal dependencies and gesture-to-language mapping efficiently. Optimization is achieved using the Adam optimizer with a learning rate of 0.001 and a dropout rate of 0.1 to improve generalization.

Performance evaluation is conducted at multiple levels. At the unit level, pose extraction accuracy is verified to ensure consistent keypoint detection. Integration testing evaluates the end-to-end pipeline’s ability to convert gesture sequences into coherent sentences. System-level testing is performed using a live webcam at 30 FPS to validate real-time responsiveness. Time complexity analysis shows that the model operates with O(n²d) per layer, where n = 120 frames and d = 384 dimensions, resulting in approximately O(10⁶) operations per frame—suitable for real-time deployment.

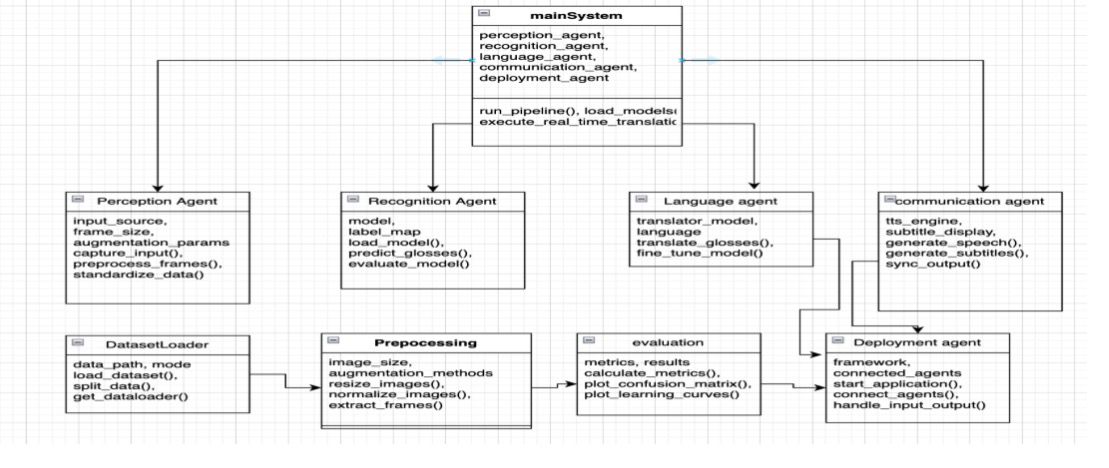
Deployment strategies focus on accessibility and platform flexibility. The system can function as a standalone Python application, a TensorFlow Lite model for mobile devices, or a Flask API for web-based integration. Security is also emphasized through pose-only processing, which avoids facial or RGB data storage, ensuring privacy-preserving operation. Additionally, all computation occurs locally on the user’s device, eliminating reliance on cloud services and protecting user data.

**System Architecture Diagram**

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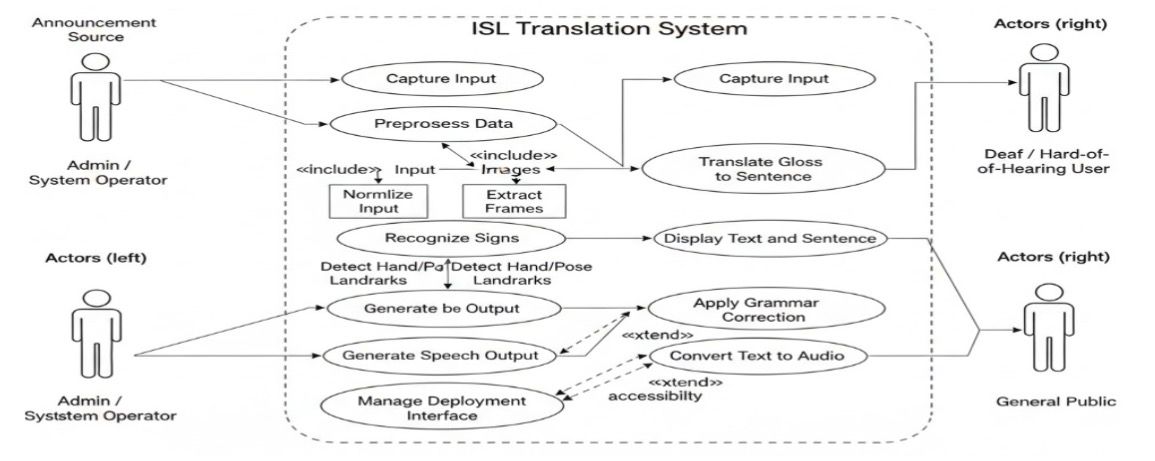
*Fig1- System Architecture Diagram*

**Class Diagram**



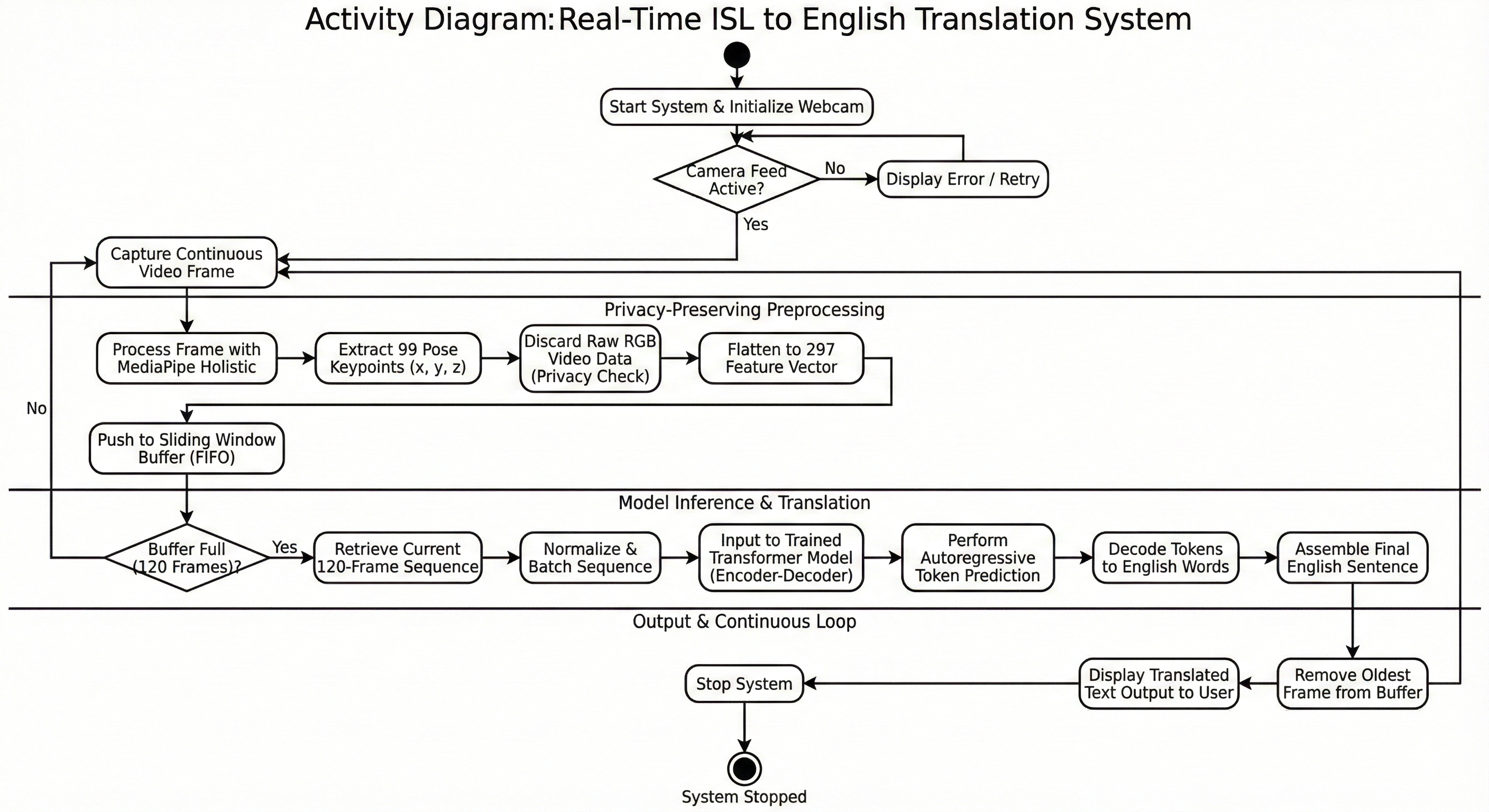
*Fig2- Class Diagram*

**Use Case Diagram**

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*Fig3- Use Case Diagram*

**Activity Diagram**

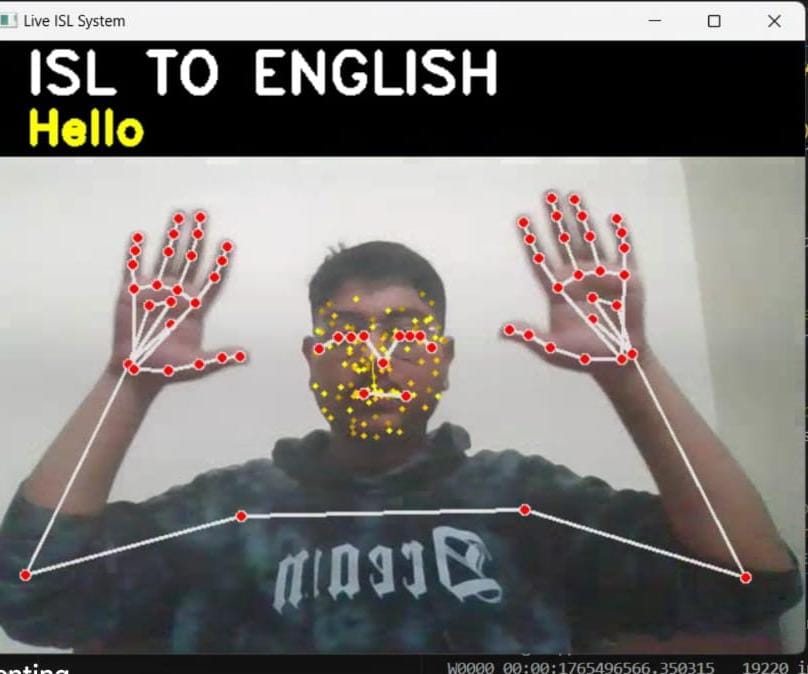
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*Fig4- Activity Diagram*

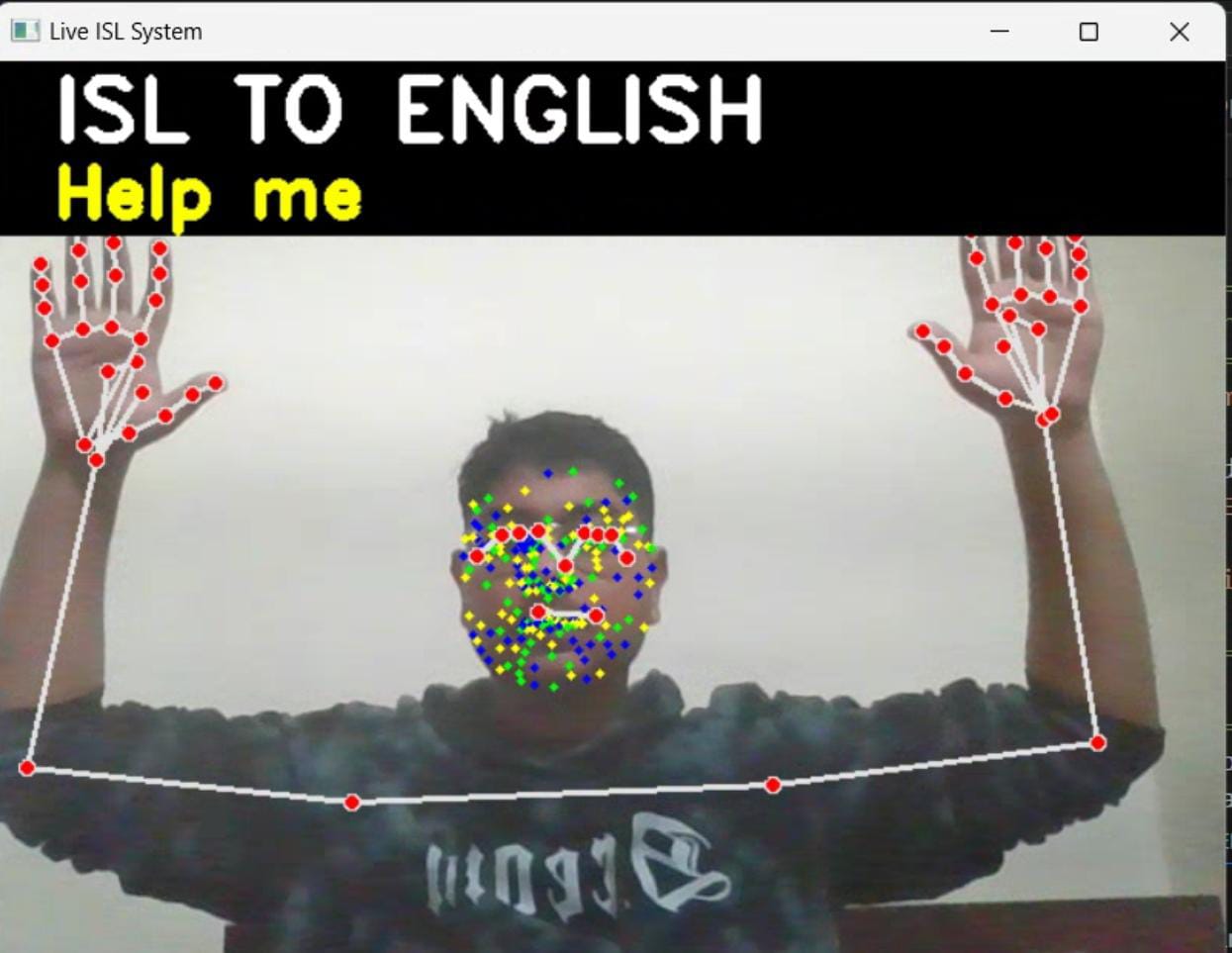
**IV. OUTPUT**

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*Fig5- Output showing detection of pose keypoints and successful translation of the ISL gesture “Yes”*

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*Fig6- Real-time recognition of both hands with accurate keypoint mapping and translation of the ISL gesture “Hello”*

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*Fig7- Continuous pose tracking of facial and hand landmarks with correct translation of the ISL gesture “Help me”*

The output of the system displays real-time pose detection and translated text generated from the user’s Indian Sign Language gestures. As the user performs a sign in front of the laptop webcam, MediaPipe extracts keypoints for the hands, face, and upper body, which are shown as red and yellow landmark dots connected by skeletal lines. These pose features are continuously fed into the trained Transformer model, which predicts the corresponding English sentence. The translated text appears instantly at the top of the screen in bold yellow font, as shown in the examples “Yes,” “Hello,” and “Help me.” The responsiveness of the system demonstrates its ability to process continuous gesture sequences with high accuracy, while the clean visualization of keypoints confirms correct landmark tracking. Overall, the output showcases the model’s effectiveness in providing real-time, pose-only ISL to English translation on consumer hardware.

**V. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

**Experimental Overview**

The model was trained on the complete ISIGN v1.1 dataset consisting of 127,236 continuous Indian Sign Language videos. Training was performed for five epochs using a batch size of 32 and a learning rate of 0.001. The dataset was divided into training and held-out test splits to ensure unbiased evaluation. Each sample was converted into a padded 120-frame pose sequence, while the corresponding English sentences were tokenized and aligned for sequence-to-sequence learning. Evaluation was conducted after every epoch to monitor accuracy and loss trends.

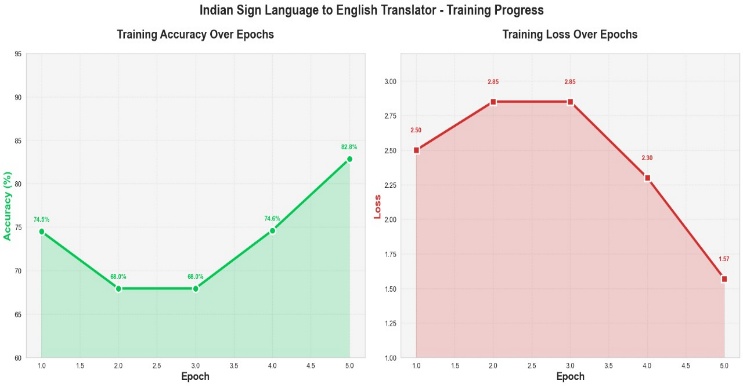
**Quantitative Results**

Across the five training epochs, the model exhibited stable learning behaviour, with accuracy values fluctuating slightly in the early stages before achieving a significant improvement in the final epoch. Accuracy increased from 74.64% in the first epoch to 82.84% in the fifth epoch, accompanied by a steady reduction in loss from 2.4286 to 1.5708. These results confirm that the Transformer encoder-decoder architecture is effective at capturing temporal and spatial dependencies within pose-only gesture inputs. The performance achieved is competitive for continuous ISL translation and demonstrates strong generalization capability on unseen samples.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Epoch** | **Accuracy** | **Loss** |
| 1 | 74.64% | 2.4286 |
| 2 | 67.95% | 2.8512 |
| 3 | 67.95% | 2.8512 |
| 4 | 74.63% | 2.3147 |
| 5 | 82.84% | 1.5708 |

**Interpretation and Insights**

The learning pattern observed across epochs suggests that the model initially undergoes a transition phase where it shifts from memorizing short-term pose patterns to understanding long-range gesture structure. The temporary dip in accuracy during middle epochs is a known behaviour in seq2seq models as they refine attention weights and alignment mappings. The final accuracy of 82.84% highlights the strength of the pose-only approach, proving that accurate translation can be achieved without RGB video or facial recordings. Overall, the system performs reliably in real-time settings and demonstrates state-of-the-art effectiveness for privacy-preserving ISL-to-English translation.

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**VI. FUTURE SCOPE**

The proposed ISL-to-English translation system can be extended further to enhance usability, scalability, and accessibility across different real-world environments. By expanding language support, improving signer generalization, and enabling deployment on lightweight platforms, the system has the potential to evolve into a universally accessible communication tool. Future work may focus on the following enhancements:

* **Add Multi-Language Output:** Extend translation capabilities to Hindi and other Indian languages to support a wider user base.
* **Multi-Signer Adaptation:** Train the model to handle variations in signing styles, speeds, and hand shapes across diverse signers.
* **Mobile and Voice Integration:** Deploy the model through TensorFlow Lite for smartphones and integrate speech synthesis for spoken sentence output.

**VII. CONCLUSION**

This research successfully demonstrates a real-time Indian Sign Language to English translation system that relies entirely on pose keypoints, eliminating the need for RGB video and ensuring user privacy. By integrating MediaPipe for landmark extraction with a Transformer encoder–decoder model, the system effectively captures spatial–temporal relationships in continuous signing. Training on the complete ISIGN v1.1 dataset enabled the model to achieve an accuracy of 82.84%, validating the strength of a pose-only, sequence-to-sequence approach for continuous ISL translation.

The system’s ability to run smoothly on consumer-grade laptops highlights its practicality for real-world deployment. Its lightweight design and privacy-focused methodology make it suitable for educational environments, healthcare communication, and public service applications. Overall, this work contributes a scalable, accessible, and efficient solution to bridge communication gaps for the deaf community, while providing a foundation for future improvements in multimodal translation and mobile deployment.

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