

# Deaf Support

Level 3 British Sign Language 2017  
Handout resources

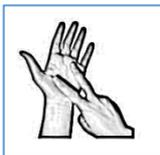


## 2 SIGN GRAMMAR

Grammar is phonology + syntax + semantics  
It is the order of sign.

The vocabulary or dictionary of signs is called the LEXICON

### CONTENTS

		Page
Syntax	 	2
Morphemes		3
Time frame		4
Topic		5
Comment		6
Semantics		14

## Syntax

In English this is word order, in BSL it is sign order. The smallest syntactical unit is a morpheme, for example 'ed' in English shows something happened in the past. You can join it to another word such as join to make joined. In BSL it is a single sign such as 'think, or true.' You can join them together to make 'believe', a compound morpheme.

### MORPHEME



### EXAMPLES

Example: Signs with 1 morpheme



AEROPLANE



RED



BEDROOM

Non-manual morphemes



Puff cheeks

Means 'much'



smile

positive



frown

negative

Compound morphemes



TOOTHACHE

Tooth + hurt + non-manual morphemes



BLOOD

Red + flow + non-manual morphemes

## Time frame (when)



A sentence in BSL often shows the time frame first, followed by the topic and then the comment: e.g.

YESTERDAY BEEN SHOP ME (point to self)

A sentence in English often ends with the time frame e.g. I went shopping yesterday

### Signs for time frame

Begin by stating when something is happening:



TOMORROW



YESTERDAY



NEXT- YEAR



LONG-AGO



RECENTLY



BEFORE



NOW



LAST- WEEK



NEXT- WEEK



LONG-TIME

# Topic



Examples of the main subject you are using.



HE/SHE/IT/YOU



WOMAN



MAN



CAKE



PERSON-COME



LORRY



LIBRARY



KEYS



TEA



COMPUTER



BOOK



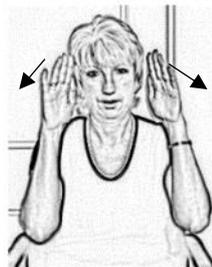
COLLEGE



RAINBOW



CAR



HOLIDAY



MEETING

## Comment

Information about the topic is added at the end of the sign sentence.



### COMPOSING A SENTENCE

1. Begin with a time frame showing when the event is occurring
2. Sign the topic
3. Sign the comment using appropriate non-manual features

Examples:



YESTERDAY DEAF-CLUB WICKED CROWD

Yesterday there were crowds at the Deaf Club



NN (point) FLY WHERE SPAIN

In November I am flying to Spain



TODAY WEATHER AWFUL

Today the weather is awful

## Semantics (meaning)

The meaning conveyed in a sentence can be changed by using non-manual features such as facial expression and head movements.



For example expressing an opinion may involve more non-manual features than handshapes. For example head movements:



You? I doubt it



Not happy about it



Not pleasant

Head nod from side to side whilst signing will change meaning from positive to negative:



Nod head GO  
Are you going?



Shake head GO?  
You're not going are you?



Yes that one



No not that one

Reference: Miles, Dorothy (1988) *British Sign Language A Beginner's Guide* BBC Books. Book and accompany DVD programme 8

## MOOD

MOOD gives meaning to the attitude of the signer: uncertain, possible, definite, and shows statements or commands.

Examples of mood are:



SURE

*Certain*



NOT SURE

*uncertain*



KNOW

*certain*



DON'T KNOW

*uncertain*



Like very much (one hand)

*Definite*



Like very much (two hand)

*Very definite*



Don't like very much

*Statement*

Reference: Sutton-Spence R & Woll B (1999) *The Linguistics of British Sign Language* Cambridge University Press chapter Pp 125 – 126

## Verbs (action signs)

There are 3 main types of verbs: plain, agreement/directional and spatial.



### 1 PLAIN

Plain verbs show little modification and grammatical information. They are modified by speed of repetition and facial expression.



LIKE



LIKE HIM (point)



THINK



THINK-HARD



CYCLE



CYCLE-FAST



RESEARCH



RESEARCH-FOR-AGES

### 2 AGREEMENT/DIRECTIONAL

Agreement verbs contain information about person, number of subject and object.



HELP-ME



HELP-YOU



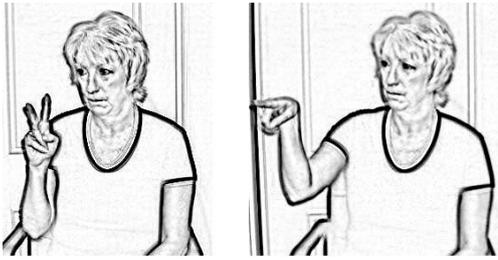
HELP-THEM



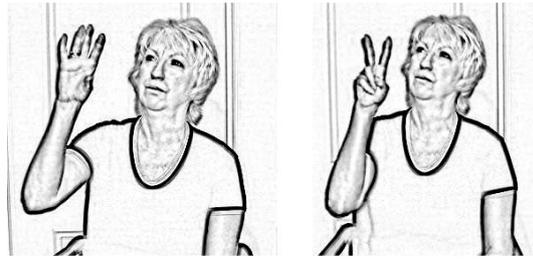
LOOK-AT-YOU



LOOK-AT-ME



LOOK-AT THEM



RAINBOW LOOK-UP



DOG LOOK-DOWN



BOOK GIVE-HIM/HER



GIVE-ME



PAY-ME



PAY-YOU



TELL-ME



TELL-YOU/HIM/HER



TELL-THEM



EMAIL-YOU



EMAIL-ME



### 3 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:

Reference: Sutton-Spence R & Woll B (1999) *The Linguistics of British Sign Language* Cambridge University Press, chapter 8

Additional Illustrations taken from:

Brien, David editor (1992) *Dictionary of British Sign Language/English* Faber & Faber London



TOPIC Clark Denmark  
picture number 823



COMMENT Wendy Daunt  
picture number 347

## Notes on grammar

Sentences have subjects (S), verbs (V) and objects (O).

Grammar means sign order or word order.

In British sign language sign order is usually **TIME- FRAME, TOPIC, COMMENT** but it may vary. For example:

1 YESTERDAY (time frame) WEATHER (topic) AWFUL (comment)

Or

2 WEATHER (topic) AWFUL (comment) WHEN YESTERDAY (time frame)

Note the addition of the rhetorical question WHEN in this sign order

Sometimes there is no order because one sign shows the noun and verb together:  
e.g. WASH-HANDS, OPEN-DOOR.

In English this would usually be:

1 The weather (topic) was awful (comment) yesterday (time frame)

Or

2 Yesterday (time frame) the weather (topic) was awful (comment).

Note the addition of 'was' to show the past tense

It is important not to use word order in BSL grammar (as in Sign Supporting English, SSE) as it can affect the semantics/meaning of the sentence. Translation between BSL and English should not be word for word, sign for sign but segments of meaning changed using their different grammar

These handouts are designed by Sandra Dowe and Linda Squelch and are used by Linda for teaching British Sign Language at level 3 and can be found on the Deaf Support website [www.deafsupport.org.uk](http://www.deafsupport.org.uk) click on 'resources'



Sandra Dowe  
Executive Officer Deaf Support



Linda Squelch  
BSL Adviser Deaf Support