

A false analogy

Blind people have no access to written language (coded in the visual channel)

Give them a tactile version of the writing (Braille)

Deaf people have no access to spoken language (coded in the acoustic channel)

Give them a visual version of the speech (writing)

The 'language problem' of deaf people

- Lacking or insufficient access to acoustic channel
- Visual compensation concerning language often not given or exposition time to such a compensation too low
- Expectations of hearing parents of deaf children (they want a 'normal' = speaking child) diverge from a compensatory practice
- Deafness seen exclusively as a medical problem
- Grave time loss for language learning (missing the phase of special cognitive plasticity) by waiting for medical or non-compensatory (oral only) solution to language perception and learning

Recommendations from a cognitive-communicative standpoint

- Consider conditions for the successful learning of any language:
 - + Offer a fully fledged language (naturally adapted for children via “motherese”) systematically in all communicative situations
 - + Offer a language which is easily accessible and produceable
 - + Allow language to be 'anchored' on everyday (non-verbal) cognitions
 - + Compensate for losses or deficits by using other accessible or working subsystems
- Consequences for deaf people:
 - + Specially adapted bilingual system: sign language - written language - spoken language

- + Allow a sign language community and deaf culture for those deaf who decide on that
- + Provide as many communicative instruments as possible (electronic telecommunication, videophone, interpreter services)
- + Given the actual situation of most deaf (low competence in reading/writing, therefore minimal access to almost all information sources), provide a bilingual model of access to all offers of information society

Challenges for the next years in deaf communication and education

- Technical desiderates:
 - + Better and unified standards for communicative aids
 - + More software for visual communication (and transforming acoustic output into a visual one for commonly used programs)
 - + Implementation of communication and information systems for deaf people
 - + Dealing with a big amount of video files (sign language) for on-line and remote communication and information processing (includes: video file processing and storage, respective databases, sign language recognition and synthesis)
- Educational and scientific issues:
 - + The quality of deaf education has to be elevated to 'normal' standard
 - + Increased participation of the deaf in planning, research, information, and evaluation
 - + Looking at the central group of 'Deaf' as a community which has to get rights similar to (cultural or linguistic) minority groups, but offering the sign language services to all who think that they can profit from them at least partially

Proposals from Klagenfurt (realisable only under massive participation of the European Union of the Deaf and national deaf organisations)

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Founding a European Sign Language Resource Association

Web: <http://www.uni-klu.ac.at/fzgs>

Deaf server: <http://deaf.uni-klu.ac.at>

following the model of ELRA

Should provide standards for sign language documentation, databases, corpuses, instigate research on and development of applied sign language linguistics

Founding a European Deaf University (with stress on virtual university, distance learning etc.) and **systematising / improving deaf education** in the EU

Evaluation of existing deaf educational programs, spreading information on them all over Europe in order to distribute successful models and by that to create a higher level of deaf education in Europe as a whole

Coordination of national activities, providing comprehensive information for all people interested (deaf, parents and teachers of the deaf, interpreters, politicians, etc.)