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History and influence of fingerspelling

The history and influence of fingerspelling is a rich one. Today we will embark on a history journey of fingerspelling. We will be exploring who created fingerspelling, where it came from and how it's used.

Starting with Jay's paper "Some people think that Juan Pablo de Bonet invented sign language. In the year 1620, Bonet wrote a book that contained the first known manual alphabet system. This is a great accomplishment, but ... he created the first known manual alphabet *system*, not the first manual alphabet"(Jay). Others however believe "that the deaf people living on Martha's Vineyard invented sign language. Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL) is an early sign language that was used on the island of Martha's Vineyard that is off the coast of Massachusetts. These deaf people were not the first to use sign language (Bonet came before them), but they did have an impact on the schools for the deaf that were soon to come"(Jay). Others say that Abbe Charles Michel de L'Epee due to him establishing "the first free public school for the deaf in Paris in 1771. L'Epee educated the deaf using a standard sign language that he created. So, people obviously thought he invented sign language since this was the first sign language that was used widely"(Jay), however the people that say L'Epee created it fail to notice that "[t]he deaf children had been signing at home (because of lack of other communication), and brought these signs with them. L'Epee learned all of these different home-made signs from the children and created his standard sign

language based off of them. L'Epee's standard sign language eventually became French Sign Language and was widely used in Europe"(Jay). The way American Sign Language came to be is also similar to the way French Sign came "[t]he first American school for the deaf was established in 1817 by Laurent Clerc and Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. They are often credited as the inventors of American Sign Language. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet brought Clerc back to America to start the first American school for the deaf. These home-signs, combined with French Sign Language, became American Sign Language"(Jay). Some people however believe that parts of sign language came even before 1620, some say it came in the medieval times "[i]n England, the medieval monk Venerable Bede devised a number code based on manual signs"(Sumangal). Not only were there signs from Greece but also in Rome "... antiquity there are recorded references to the use of the body and hands to represent the alphabet, presumably as a representational alternative to the use of paper."(Padden, Gunsauls, 10). There was even a monk who taught sign as they made up their own "... manual alphabet, or fingerspelling, is thought by some to have been invented by monks in the 8th Century who had taken a vow of silence and needed another way of communicating. They in turn taught deaf people"(Rose). Schools also got "Deaf adults... first hired as teachers as well as sign language models for Deaf children at school"(DawnSignPress) this then got changed to what it is today "ASL ... use[d] today is a result of 195 years of deaf families and students passing down from one generation to next"(DawnSignPress).Even the status of sign is disagreed upon as both made their own and taught people "Hearing people invented fingerspelling to bring English to deaf people, whereas sign language emerged out of necessity in the community"(Rose).

Sometimes it is also hard to track the history of signs due to there being migrations and home-signs “Sign production can also vary depending on age and native language. For example, sign production of letters may vary in older signers. Slight differences in finger spelling production can be a signal of age. Additionally, signers who learned American Sign Language as a second language vary in production. It is also different as “sign language is very difficult given the variability in size, shape, and position of the fingers or hands”(Ameen, Sunil)

Sign language was helpful for many reasons to start “preschool children has been that they communicate orally...”(Stuckless, Birch, 452) the oral method was taught when the hearing community wanted to get rid of sign language and to get them to fit better into the society. Sign language was helpful for communication when needed for those who took vows of silence or for those that were born deaf so they had a way to communicate more effectively.

As stated above sign language was useful and has a cool but complicated history. Sign language has a history that is complicated and not always fully understood or known. Sign language is not fully understood for all the good helpful reasons that it is used or can be used for.

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